

# An exploratory study on rural destination quality and behavioral intentions amid the covid-19 pandemic

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**Gulić, Ana; Pranić, Ljudevit**

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FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT  
OPATJA, HRVATSKA CROATIA



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Veleučilište u Virovitici

## 5. međunarodni kongres o ruralnom turizmu

### *5<sup>th</sup> International Rural Tourism Congress*



## **RURALNI TURIZAM: KVALITETA, ODRŽIVOST, UKLJUČIVOST** *RURAL TOURISM: QUALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSIVENESS*

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<https://www.vuv.hr>

Hrvatska udruga za turizam i ruralni razvoj  
"Klub članova selo"  
Kaptol 29, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska  
Tel.: +385 (0)1 233 7741  
Mob.: +385 (0)98 213 976  
[kongres@klubselo.hr](mailto:kongres@klubselo.hr)  
[info@klubselo.hr](mailto:info@klubselo.hr)  
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## FOREWORD

Rural tourism provides a developmental perspective for the rural areas that produces positive economic, but also social effects. New business opportunities, the revitalisation of traditional industries, whose products find a market in tourism, the interconnection of value chains, and the revitalisation of agriculture promote demographic changes, and help keep the population in rural areas. Rural tourism is closely linked with agriculture, with family farms playing a particularly important role as the “guardians” of the rural space. Rural tourism provides them with a market for their products that has a multiple significance.

In the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global decline in demand in tourism, rural tourism proved remarkably resilient. The change in awareness, preferences and motives, increased concerns about health and safety, and the focus on outdoor experiences, open spaces and uncrowded destinations and/or spots are indicative of potentials for even better valorisation of the rural space in tourism going forward. A more complete valuation, reconstruction and protection of tourism potentials, and the development of an integral tourism product, are associated with the implementation of a programme that seeks to revitalise the rural space through a rural tourist destination development and branding programme.

Rural tourism is an important factor in the reactivation of natural and cultural resources and in the sustainable development of rural spaces, helping safeguard the local identity, tradition and customs, protect the environment, strengthen the autochthonous, traditional and organic agricultural production, and develop rural areas in line with the principles of sustainable development, and can therefore be justly dubbed the future of global tourism. The presentations and discussions at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Rural Tourism Congress focused in particular on the distinctive features of rural tourism in Croatia, especially underlined in the presentations comprising the “Practice Speaks” session, where fourteen (14) successful practice examples were presented. The conclusion was that rural areas are a new opportunity for Croatian tourism, giving the rising interest in undiscovered, authentic tourist destinations that offer contact with nature, an escape from the busy everyday life, and an authentic local tourism experience. This collection of 42 scientific papers and 19 specialist papers by authors from Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Greece is the result of the presentations and constructive discussions held at the Congress.

On behalf of the organisers, partners and sponsors, we would like to thank all authors, speakers and participants at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Rural Tourism Congress for their interest and their contribution to raising awareness in the scientific and professional community of rural tourism as a still underutilised, but highly promising specific form of tourism that can help make rural areas more attractive and more competitive.

At the end of this preface, we would like to take a moment to honour our recently departed Honorary Chair of the Programming Committee of the Congress, Eduard Kušen, PhD, to whom we extend our special thanks.

Organisers

## PREDGOVOR

Ruralni turizam predstavlja razvojnu perspektivu za ruralne krajeve kojim se uz ekonomske postignuća i pozitivni društveni efekti. Nove poduzetničke mogućnosti, revitalizacija tradicionalnih djelatnosti čiji proizvodi nalaze svoje tržište u turizmu, povezivanje lanaca vrijednosti uz revitalizaciju poljoprivrede, doprinose demografskim promjenama i zadržavanju lokalnog stanovništva. Ruralni turizam jako je povezan s poljoprivredom u čemu se posebno ističe značaj obiteljskih poljoprivrednih gospodarstava koja su najbolji „čuvari“ ruralnog prostora, a ruralni turizam je višestruko značajno tržište za njihove proizvode.

U okolnostima pandemije COVID 19 ruralni turizam se pokazao izuzetno otpornim u uvjetima globalnog pada turističke potražnje. Promjena svijesti, preferencija i motiva kao i povećane brige o zdravlju, sigurnosti, boravka u prirodi, otvorenim prostorima i nenapućenim destinacijama i/ili objektima ukazuju kako upravo ruralni prostor ima mogućnost u narednom razdoblju doživjeti još bolju turističku valorizaciju. Potpunije vrednovanje, obnova i zaštita turističkih potencijala te stvaranje integralnoga turističkog proizvoda vezani su uz realizaciju programa revitalizacije ruralnog prostora programom razvitka i brendiranja turističke ruralne destinacije.

Ruralni turizam značajan je čimbenik reaktivacije prirodnih i kulturnih resursa i održivog razvoja ruralnih prostora koji pomaže očuvanju lokalnog identiteta, tradicije i običaja, štiti okoliš, jača autohtonu, tradicijsku i ekološku proizvodnju poljoprivrednih proizvoda, pomaže razvoju ruralnih krajeva po načelima održivog razvoja te ga stoga s pravom možemo nazvati budućnošću svjetskog turizma.

Izlaganja i rasprave u okviru 5. Međunarodnog kongresa ruralnog turizma posebno su se fokusirale na posebnosti ruralnog turizma Hrvatske što je posebno naglašeno u prezentacijama u okviru sesije „Praksa govori“ kroz koju je predstavljeno četrnaest (14) uspješnih primjera iz prakse. Zaključeno je da ruralni krajevi predstavljaju novu mogućnost hrvatskog turizma, budući da raste zanimanje za neotkrivene i autentične turističke destinacije koje nude doticaj s prirodom, odmak od užurbane svakodnevice i autentičan lokalni turistički doživljaj. Kao rezultat izlaganja i konstruktivnih rasprava nastao je i ovaj Zbornik koji sadrži 42 znanstvena i 19 stručnih radova autora iz Hrvatske te Slovenije, Rumunjske, Ukrajine, Bosne i Hercegovine, Crne Gore, Srbije i Grčke.

U ime organizatora, partnera i pokrovitelja zahvaljujemo se svim autorima, izlagačima i sudionicima 5. Međunarodnog kongresa o ruralnom turizmu na interesu i doprinosu jačanju znanstvene i stručne svijesti o ruralnom turizmu kao jednom od još uvijek nedovoljno iskorištenih ali izuzetno perspektivnih specifičnih oblika turizma koji može doprinijeti većoj atraktivnosti i konkurentnosti ruralnih prostora.

Na kraju ovoga predgovora, uz posebnu zahvalu prisjećamo se u međuvremenu preminulog počasnog predsjednika Programskog odbora Kongresa dr.sc. Eduarda Kušena.

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# ROLE OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN TOURISM CRISIS MANAGEMENT – INSIGHT FROM CROATIA

**Danijela Križman Pavlović**  
**Enco Crnobori**

## **Abstract**

The present article covers the significance of crisis management in the activities of modern destination management organizations. After analysing the results of previous research and providing recommendations for future research directions in the field of tourism crisis management, the authors have developed a theoretical model that explains the role of DMOs in tourism crisis management. The model shows the link between the concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and resilience. As a popular and fast-growing summer destination in the European Mediterranean, Croatia is significantly exposed to a complex set of heterogeneous risks that may severely affect its tourism and the overall economy. Given that, the authors conducted research to gain insight into whether the current activities of DMOs in Croatia include crisis management. The results showed that DMOs incorporate crisis management in their business activities insufficiently.

**Keywords:** destination, DMOs, crisis management, resilience, Croatia

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism represents a multidimensional phenomenon with an ongoing and highly dynamic development (Statista 2021, 7). It has a significant impact on almost all aspects of life and work. Most often, the effects of tourism are divided into economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

Today, tourism is considered one of the largest global industries. In 2019, the sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP (USD 9.2 trillion), 10.6% of all jobs (334 million), and was responsible for creating 1 in 4 of all new jobs worldwide. Moreover, international visitor spending amounted to USD 1.7 trillion in 2019 (6.8% of total exports, 27.4% of global services exports) (WTTC 2021). The tourism industry represents the most important income and foreign exchange source for many national economies. Among the G20 countries, the Top 10 by the contribution of tourism to GDP in 2019 were as follows: Mexico (15.0%), Spain (14.1%), Italy (13.1%), China (11.6%), Turkey (11.0%), Australia (10.7%), United Kingdom (10.1%), Germany (9.8%), Saudi Arabia (9.8%), and Argentina (9.4%) (WTTC 2021).

Although all relevant international organizations (UNWTO, WTTC, World Bank, etc.) and experts (for example Scott and Gössling 2015) forecast the growth and development of tourism in the future, the fact that tourism, for a variety of reasons, is highly susceptible and vulnerable to negative events, such as terrorist attacks, health crises, and natural disasters, should not be overlooked (Cavlek 2006; Glaesser 2006; Ritchie and Campiranon 2015). Moreover, the frequency and fury of negative events flourished so much over the past decade that the crisis has become a way of life for tourism destinations around the world (Pennington-Gray 2018). Therefore, tourism destinations



need to recognize and understand tourism crises to respond to these events more effectively.

By applying the supply-demand notion to tourism, Berbekova, Uysal, and Assaf (2021) concluded that crises of any type cause a disruption of the existing reality for both sides of the tourism system – the supply side (destination management organizations, various stakeholders, residents) and the demand side (tourists and potential visitors). This research focuses on the impact that crises have on the supply side of the tourism system. More precisely, we question the role modern destination management organizations (DMOs) play in tourism crisis management.

If crises are not monitored, averted, or managed, destinations can experience disastrous effects (Varghese and Paul 2014). In theory, DMOs serve as the most appropriate organizational structures for the effective management of tourism destinations. Although present across many countries, DMOs are still a relatively new phenomenon in many parts of the world, where the rationale for their establishment, roles, structures, governance, and funding remains unclear (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, and Wanhill 2018). Croatia is “a popular and fast-growing summer destination in the European Mediterranean” (Mikulić, Miloš Sprčić, Holiček, and Prebežac 2018, 36). Tourism in Croatia is highly international, and the Croatian economy heavily depends on it. In 2019 foreign tourists realized 88.7% of all arrivals and 92.2% of all nights (own calculation, CSB 2020). At the same time, tourism activity generated 24.3% of Croatia’s GDP (Statista 2021). Based on the performed risk assessment, Mikulić et al. (2018, 38) established that “Croatia is exposed to a complex set of heterogeneous risks that may severely affect both Croatia's tourism and overall economy on a season to season basis.” Therefore, Croatia necessarily needs to adopt “a proactive risk management approach at the national level, which should be embodied in the national tourism development strategy” (Mikulić, Miloš, Sprčić, Holiček, and Prebežac 2018, 38). Although DMOs (named Tourist Boards) in Croatia were established about thirty years ago (Croatian National Tourist Board was founded in 1992), the question is whether their current activities include crisis management. To answer this question, we conducted empirical research, and the results we present in this paper.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Tourism crisis – definition, origin, motive, nature, type, scale, duration, and impact**

A crisis is “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as publics, services or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization” (Fearn-Banks 2016, 19). It is “an undesired, extraordinary, often unexpected and timely limited process with ambivalent development possibilities” (Glaesser 2006). Pauchant and Mitroff (1992, 15) define a crisis as a “disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core.” Crises is an “unpredictable event that threatens

important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, which can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative comments' (Coombs 2019, 3). Mair et al. (2016) simplified the definition of a crisis as a low probability, high consequence event.

Tourism crises are not an unknown phenomenon. The media continuously report on negative events such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, political instability, an outbreak of war, economic recession, biosecurity, disease threats, and other events that threaten the tourism system (Cró and Martins 2017).

The UNWTO (WTO 2003, 1) defines a tourism crisis as "any unexpected event that affects travelers' confidence in a destination and interferes with the ability to continue operating normally." In their study, Berbekova, Uysal, and Assaf (2021) describe tourism crises as "negative events of various origins and scope that may disrupt normal operations of tourism destinations and/or organizations. Tourism crises "can threaten the normal operation and conduct of tourism-related businesses; damage a tourism destination's overall reputation for safety, attractiveness, and comfort by negatively affecting visitors' perceptions of that destination; and, in turn, cause a downturn in the local travel and tourism economy and interrupt the continuity of business operations for the local travel and tourism industry by the reduction in tourist arrivals and expenditures" (Sönmez et al. 1994, 22).

An understanding of the nature, type, scale, and impact of crises is essential for "constructing crisis scenarios, thereby streamlining possible actions and outcomes" (Björck 2016, 26), developing corresponding management strategies (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019), and keeping crises under control (Gundel 2005, 106). In other words, by understanding crises as phenomena, "more effective strategies can be developed to stop or reduce the severity of their impacts on business and society, despite their complexity" (Ritchie 2004, 671). Yet tourism research tends to ignore the nature and type of crises (Ritchie and Jiang 2019).

A tourism crisis can occur in a destination, its competitors, or the visitor generator markets. The motive or the main reason behind the crisis can be socio-cultural, technological, environmental, economic, or political (Aktas and Gunlu 2005).

According to their nature, crises classify as natural and human-induced. Natural crises are attributable to natural disasters or other unpredictable, natural events, while human-induced crises are catastrophic events caused by human beings. Human-induced crisis creates a significantly higher loss of image and loss of faith than natural catastrophes (Glaesser 2006; Gundel 2005; Martens et al. 2016).

The UNWTO (2011) places tourism crises into five categories: (1) Environmental (geological and extreme weather events and human-induced situations such as climate change and deforestation), (2) Societal and political (riots, crime waves, terrorist acts, human rights abuses, coups, violently contested elections), (3) Health-related (disease epidemics affecting humans or animals), (4) Technological (transportation accidents and IT system failures), (5) Economic (major currency fluctuations and financial crises). After reviewing 302 articles related to tourism crises from 1991 to 2020, Duan, Xie, and

Morrison (2022) classified tourism crises into the following types: (1) Natural disasters – floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, slope land disasters, climate changes, bushfires, typhoons/hurricanes, (2) Security crises – crimes, wars, terrorist attacks, political instability, regional conflicts, social unrest, refugee crises, (3) Economic and financial crises, (4) Health safety crises – disease outbreaks, epidemics, contagious diseases, foodborne diseases, food safety, (5) Environmental safety crises – air quality crises release of hazardous substances, nuclear accidents, oil spills, (6) Accidents and calamities – traffic accidents, operational accidents, and (7) Public opinion crises. Similarly, Berbekova et al. (2021) divided crises into ten categories: natural disasters, environmental catastrophes, wars, political instabilities, crimes, terrorist attacks, plane and cruise crashes, health-related crises, refugee crises, and economic crises.

Crises are “periods of intense uncertainty characterized by unpredictability and loss of control over key functions of systems” (Moreira 2007, 52). The duration of the crisis reveals whether it is a one-time, repetitive, or ongoing problem (Aktas and Gunlu 2005). Relevant tourism literature (e.g. Aktas and Gunlu 2005; Henderson 2007; Tiernan et al. 2007) confirms that not all types of crisis lead to the same consequences and may differ from one another in terms of the scale (local, regional, national, international), and extent of damage caused (from minimal to maximum). Many disruptive events are limited to a relatively small geographic area within a country, but market concern about the safety of travel and negative image may apply to the whole country rather than be limited to the specific area affected (COMCEC 2017). International crises, for instance, have greater potential to disrupt the industry across the world. In contrast, a negative event on a local scale “could be toned down reasonably easily through sufficient policies before the affected destination returns to operate on pre-crisis visitor figures and tourism income levels (Aktas and Gunlu 2005, 444). Furthermore, the same crisis may pose different degrees of severity across different destinations (Henderson 2007).

Generally, a crisis affecting tourism manifests as “an event or set of circumstances that compromise or damage a tourism business’s market potential and reputation or an entire region” (PATA 2011, 4). Any significant crisis will affect the tourism sector’s ability to operate normally, either because of damage to infrastructure and facilities or because the destination will be perceived as unsafe (COMCEC 2017). Tourism crises affect destinations on three levels: macro, meso, and micro (Duan et al. 2022). Macro-level refers to the impact of tourism crises on the macro-development environment of destinations, including the natural (destruction of ecosystems and the release of harmful substances), economic (income reduction or wealth loss, rising unemployment, economic slowdowns or recessions, declines in GDP or its growth rate, and decreases in investment or financing), and social environments (terrorist attacks, wars, political instability, regional conflicts, and social unrest). The Meso level reflects the impact of crises on tourism and its operations, including the tourism environment, industry, image, markets, and losses. Micro-level refers to the impacts of tourism crises on individuals, such as tourists, community residents, and tour operators. In the event of a crisis, tourists face various options: “they either cancel or postpone the trip, visit an alternative destination instead or travel to the destination regardless” (Farmaki 2021, 2). Specific events may affect individual businesses, such as accidents involving tourists in the public

realm (e.g., traffic accidents, mugging, drowning) and accidents or events within an individual enterprise (e.g., fires, injuries, food poisoning).

The degree of tourism crisis impacts can be enhanced or weakened by synergistic factors, and these can be divided into positive, negative, and interactive factors. Duan et al. (2022) explain that positive synergy factors include tourist-related factors such as familiarity with destinations, past travel experiences, information search, and adaptability to the environment. Negative synergy factors encompass official travel warnings or advisories, economic dependence on tourism, tourists with limited geographical knowledge, tourists' prior crisis experiences, and globalization. Interactive synergy factors comprise both positive and negative impacts and are personal characteristics of tourists, media coverage, tourism destinations, tourism product characteristics, and tour operators.

The surveys of tourism businesses indicate that individual businesses can take several years to recover from crises (COMCEC 2017). Appropriate remedial actions, including infrastructure repair, security improvements, and reassuring communications, can shorten the duration of a tourism crisis's effects. Recovery is likely to take longer when the country's context remains perceived as dangerous.

## **2.2. Crisis management and its importance for the tourism system**

In general, crisis management can be described as “measures of all types switch to allow a business to cope with a suddenly occurring danger or risk situation in order to return as quickly as possible to normal business routine” (Scherler 1996 in Martens et al. 2016, 91). It refers to the actions and communications that organizations systematically undertake to reduce the likelihood of a crisis, mitigate crisis impact, and reestablish order after a crisis (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short and Coombs 2017). Crisis management consists of the “strategies, processes, and measures planned and put into force to prevent and cope with a crisis” (WTO 2011, 22).

Usually, crisis management is understood as an institution or as a function. A crisis management institution is an organization or action group within the organization responsible for developing a strategy for potential crisis management. In a tourism destination, all stakeholders are responsible for crisis management in order to reduce the negative effects of a crisis. As a function, crisis management describes the actual implementation of an action plan as well as the adaption of existing tasks and business processes in the case of an acute crisis (Glaesser 2006). In our research, crisis management is considered as a function of destination management organizations.

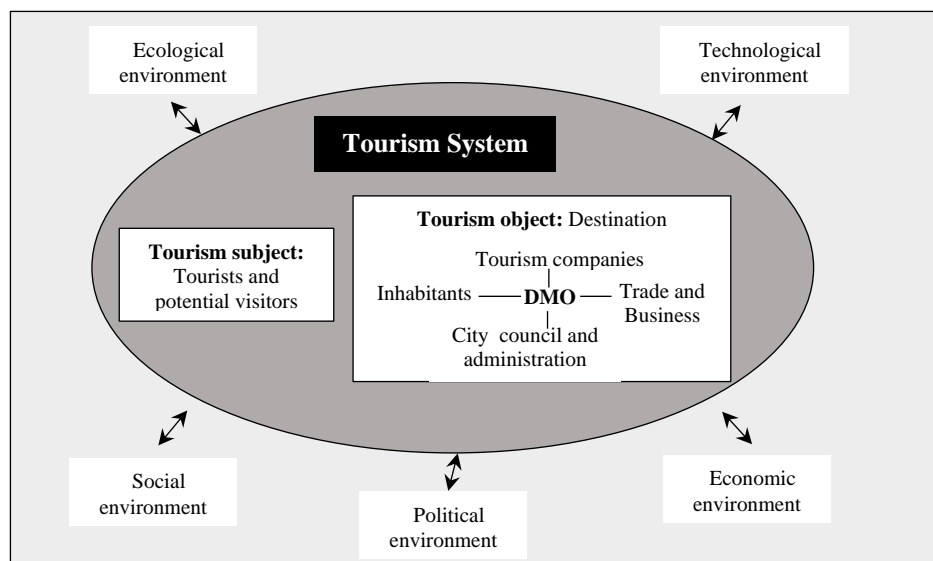
From the temporal aspect, we distinguish between active and reactive crisis management. While active crisis management is focused on potential crises, reactive crisis management concentrates on already occurring, latent, or acute crises. Active crisis management can have a greater effect on emerging crises than on immediate crises because the negative impacts are not so dominant yet, research on potential measures can be conducted, and actors have the time to implement such measures (Ritchie 2004). A reactive approach is likely to decrease the trust and credibility of crisis management

institutions since they give up their role as leading information providers (Glaesser, 2006).

The scope of crisis management includes crisis prevention, crisis preparedness, crisis response, and crisis revision (Hoise and Smith 2004). In the crisis prevention phase, it is important to detect warning signs. Forming crisis management teams, formulating crisis preparedness plans, and training spokespersons are usually tasks of the crisis preparedness phase. The organizational response is usually under the spotlight (Wut et al. 2021). The mechanism by which we learn from a crisis is the main topic of the crisis revision phase (Crandall et al. 2014).

The tourism industry is one of the most economically important industries worldwide but also one of the most susceptible to crises. This is because the tourism system function as an open system that relies greatly upon and is impacted by many external factors such as the political situation, discretionary income, and the environment (Pforr 2009). The success of the tourism industry depends on its ability to offer tourists a perceived safe and pleasant place to visit (Breda and Costa 2006). When taking place, crises can divert tourism flows away from a particular destination and neighboring regions or countries (Cavlek 2006) and thus affect the whole tourism system (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. **The tourism system**



Source: Adapted from Glaesser, D. (2006): Crisis Management in the Tourism Industry, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, p. 24.

Since it can help to reduce the negative impacts and improve recovery, tourism crisis management is vital for both sides of the tourism system – the supply side (destination management organizations, various stakeholders, residents) and the demand side (tourists and potential visitors). Tourism crisis management is practiced at the destination

level by destination management organizations, public sector agencies and communities, larger enterprises, and individual businesses. This research considers tourism crisis management practiced by destination management organizations.

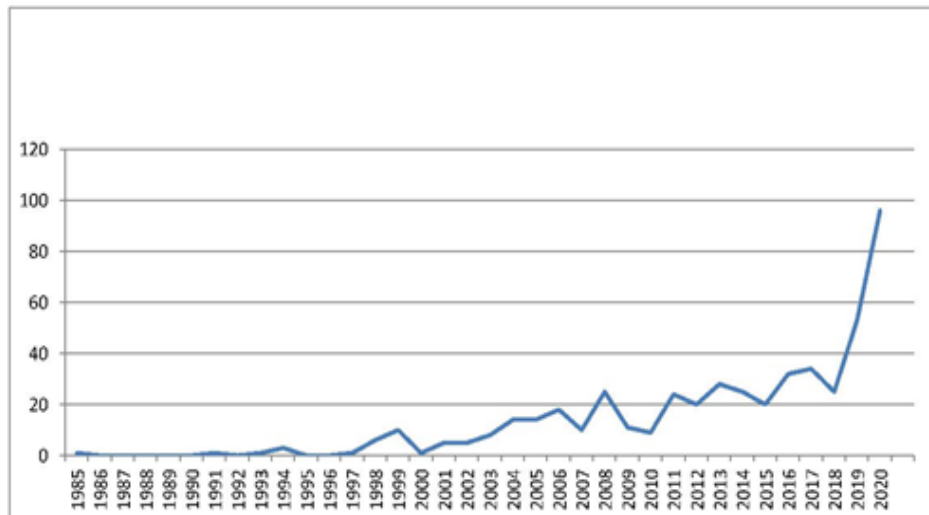
Globally, we are faced with more crises than ever before (Pennington-Gray 2018). Often, in a 24 hours cycle, global destinations are affected by two or three crises at the same time. Therefore, it no longer makes sense to ask whether the crisis will happen but when it will happen. Since crises have become a way of life for many tourism destinations around the world, tourism crisis management has gained importance.

Destinations should monitor, avert or control crises if they don't want to experience disastrous effects (Varghese and Paul 2014) and the severity of the impact will permeate an industry (Ritchie 2004) that is a key contributor to socio-economic progress and infrastructural development worldwide (Purwomarwanto and Ramachandran 2015; UNWTO 2015). Relevant international organizations, such as UNWTO (earlier WTO), WTTC, WEF, APEC, ASEAN, IATA, PATA, COMCEC, etc., have been historically well aware of the fact that the overall tourism system suffers from high sensitivity to different types of crises (e.g., in 1989 Executive Council of WTO decided to increase the activities of the organization in the safety and security area). As early as the 1990s, they started publishing several handbooks to help tourism destinations cope with crises (e.g. WTO 1996). In addition, in 2006, the UNWTO established the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN), and in 2009 a website (sostouring.com) as an enhancement of the TERN concept. The basic concept of TERN was to utilize and mobilize the resources of all major international tourism-related organizations affiliated with TERN to monitor the extent and development of a crisis event, communicate to stakeholders and the media, and establish policies to assist destination regions and authorities affected by crisis events in managing and recovering from the crisis. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that tourism destinations “are still underprepared for crises, with less than 50% of the industry engaging in yearly updates to their tourism crisis management plan” (Pennington-Gray 2018, 136).

### **2.3. Previous research and recommended future directions in the field of tourism crisis management**

Although the scholarly literature on tourism crisis management has grown significantly over the past two decades (Graph 1.), “the use of theory is still scarce” (Pennington-Gray 2018). The majority of past studies on tourism crisis management “have made valuable contributions to the sector in terms of ‘lessons learned’, offering contextualization, analysis, and synthesis of factors that influenced the development of the crisis and the organizational or destination response. Very few, however, provide information on how tourism organizations attempt to manage risk proactively and how they manage a crisis reactively” (Paraskevasa and Quek 2019, 419).

**Graph 1. Studies related to crisis management in the tourism and hospitality literature, 1985. – 2020.**



Source: Wut, T. M., Xu, J. and Wong, S.-M. (2021): "Crisis management research (1985–2020) in the hospitality and tourism industry: A review and research agenda", *Tourism Management*, 85, p. 4.

To understand how crisis management practices have been adopted in the tourism industry, Wut et al. (2021) reviewed 512 articles spanning 36 years, between 1985 and 2020. As a result, their paper proposed a three-layer TCM (theory-context-method) framework for further research of crisis management in tourism and hospitality, including ten research areas: the theories of crisis prevention and preparedness, risk communication, crisis management education and training, risk assessment, and crisis events in the contexts of COVID-19, data privacy in hospitality and tourism, political related crisis events, digital media, and alternative analytical methods and approaches. Another recently published paper (Ritchie and Jiang 2019) provided a platform for future research directions and methodological approaches to the study of tourism crisis management. Based on a narrative review of 142 papers published between 1960 and 2018, the authors identified and considered three main research gaps in the literature: (1) a lack of conceptual and theoretical foundations, (2) a lack of empirical testing of models/theory, and (3) unbalanced research theme coverage.

Pennington-Gray (2018) expressed her vision of possible advancements in the area of tourism crisis management by meeting the following needs: the need for understanding a new type of crisis, the need for a less linear approach, the need for a more interdisciplinary approach to destination crisis management, need for a more technologically driven approach, need for more theoretical research, need for more transfer of knowledge across different types of crises, need for more documented distinctions of a crisis, and need for a greater understanding of the link between crisis management, resilience, and sustainability. She stated that destination crisis management as a field of inquiry still has a long way to go.

The concept of resilience in tourism and hospitality is more recent (Scarpino and Gretzel 2015; Hall et al. 2018; Paraskevasa and Quek 2019; Rittichainuwat et al. 2020; Broshi-Chen and Mansfeld 2021; McCartney et al. 2021). It has been examined from different

perspectives, such as business and organizational vulnerability, impact and disruption to hospitality operations, environmental and ecological sustainability and resilience to climate change, employee resilience and human capital, etc., but the consequences to the tourism destination post-crisis from resilient actions have been overlooked in the literature (McCartney et al. 2021).

Campiranon and Ritchie (2015), in their book “Tourism crisis and disaster management in the Asia-Pacific”, also identified many future research opportunities. We found that two of them are more interesting for our present research: (1) the examination of how local, regional, and national tourist organizations use their existing resources to manage crises; (2) provide important insights into the differences and similarities between crisis management strategies in different regions.

After considering the recommendations for future research in tourism crisis management, we decided to contribute in two areas. The first one is a development of a theoretical model which explains the role of DMOs in tourism crisis management by linking concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and organizational resilience. The second area refers to the investigation of whether (regional) DMOs in Croatia, as a popular Mediterranean tourism destination, have a crisis management plan and do they update it annually.

### **3. THE ROLE OF DMO IN TOURISM CRISIS MANAGEMENT – TOWARD A THEORETICAL MODEL**

A tourism destination is one of the elements of a tourism system (Figure 1.), representing “a touristically organized and market recognized spatial unit, that offers complete satisfaction of tourist needs through its collection of tourism products” (Križman Pavlović 2008, 58). It is “a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight” (UNWTO 2019a). A destination incorporates various stakeholders (e.g., tourists, host population, tourism enterprises, tour operators, public sector, and government) and can network to form larger destinations. Most tourism destinations are a compilation of the following components (6As) (Buhalis 2000): (1) Attractions (natural, man-made, artificial, purpose-built, heritage, special events), (2) Accessibility (entire transportation system comprising routes, terminals, and vehicles), (3) Amenities (accommodation and catering facilities, retailing, other tourist services), (4) Available packages (pre-arranged packages by intermediaries and principals), (5) Activities (all activities available at the destination and what consumers will do during their visit), (6) Ancillary services (services used by tourists such as banks, telecommunications, post, newsagents, hospitals, etc.).

Tourism destinations are some of the most difficult systems to manage, due to the variety of stakeholders involved in the development and production of tourism products and the complexity of their relationships (Sautter and Leisen 1999; Buhalis, 2000). Destination management is generally portrayed as an “over-arching process or approach which addresses the need to manage the diverse facets of a destination. It is most commonly expressed in terms of the upper-level process of coordinating and integrating the



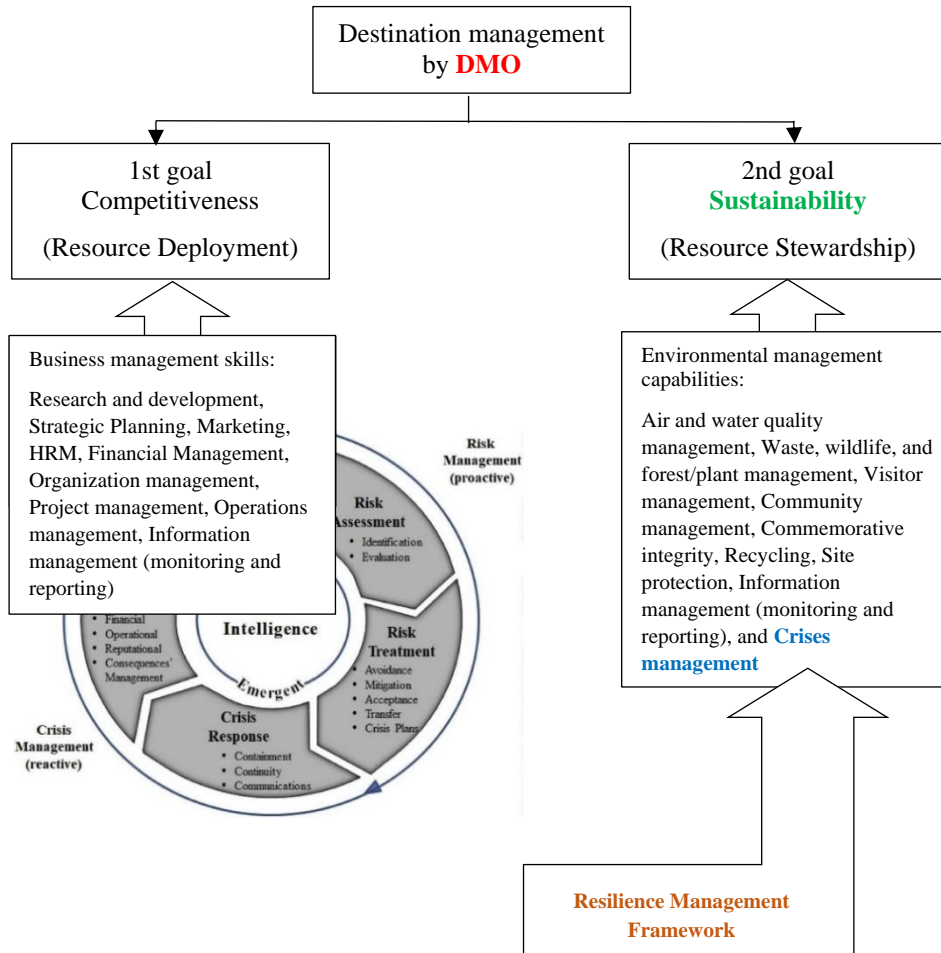
management of supply and demand, functions, and resources, or a process that involves the collaboration, cooperation, and interrelationships of relevant agencies or stakeholders” (Pearce 2015, 2).

The 15 Cs framework (Fyall et al. 2006) provides a suitable synthesis of the key challenges facing the domain of contemporary destination management: Complexity, Control, Change, Crisis, Complacency, Customers, Culture, Competition, Commodification, Creativity, Communication, Channels, Cyberspace, Consolidation, Collaboration. The degree of their importance will vary according to the destination in question. However, omitting even one of the challenges in designing and implementing destination strategies is likely to jeopardize the effectiveness of destination management. Destination management organizations (DMOs) represent the most recent conceptualization of the entity in charge of destination management. In theory, DMOs serve as the most appropriate organizational structures for effective tourism destination management. The rationale for establishing DMOs, their role, functions, organizational and governance structure, and funding may differ in practice.

The governance structures of DMOs vary “from a single public authority to a public-private partnership model with the key role of initiating, coordinating, and managing certain activities” (UNWTO 2019b, 12). Even though the functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels, some fundamental functions may include (UNWTO 2019b): (1) Strategic planning, (2) Formulation (or participation in the formulation process), and implementation of the destination's tourism policy, (3) Market Intelligence (data gathering and analysis, market research, etc.), (4) Tourism product and business development, (5) Digitalization and innovation, (6) Monitoring, (7) Crisis management, (8) Training and capacity building (not only of its human resources but also facilitate training and capacity building activities for local tourism professionals), (9) Promotion, marketing and branding, (10) Funding and fostering investments.

In essence, the main goals of DMOs must be to ensure competitiveness (i.e. the ability of tourism destinations to compete effectively and profitably in the tourism marketplace), and sustainability (i.e. the ability of a tourism destination to maintain the quality of its physical, social, cultural, and environmental resources while it competes in the marketplace) of tourism destinations in the short, medium and long terms (Križman Pavlović 2019; UNWTO 2019b; Bosnić et al. 2014; Goeldner and Ritchie 2011). We can see from Figure 2. that successful destination management involves traditional business management skills balanced with environmental management capabilities (Križman Pavlović 2019).

Figure 2. **The role of DMOs in tourism crisis management (linking the concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and resilience)**



Source: Authors

The same figure explains the role of DMOs in tourism crisis management by linking concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and resilience. Crisis management is one of the DMO activities that must be undertaken to achieve one of two main tourism destination goals, i.e., sustainability. Previously mentioned researches and

many others (e.g. Presenza et al. 2005; Borzyszkowski and Marczak 2012, Borzyszkowski 2013; Pearce 2015; Granville et al. 2016; Pennington-Gray and Schroeder 2018; Foris et al. 2020) argued that crisis management must be included as an activity or function in the contemporary destination management process, led by DMO.

Crisis management also “involves risk management, as a crisis happens when risk is not managed properly and effectively” (Wut et al. 2021, 2). Risk management is “a process in which an organization identifies and manages its exposures to risk matching its strategic goals. The scope includes goals setting, risk identification, risk measurement, handling of risk and implementation techniques, and monitoring effectiveness” (Dorfman and Cather 2013).

Risk and crisis management are not two separate functions but rather two learning-based complementary stages of the same function, which aim to develop the organization’s capacity to face adversity and disruption with no or limited consequences and recover quickly from any tourism crisis (Paraskevas and Quek 2019). This capacity is often referred to as “resilience”. It is defined as the system’s capacity to absorb disturbance and re-organize to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedback (Gunderson 2000). Accordingly, DMOs would be wise to adopt the mindset of resilient organizations (Scarpino and Gretzel 2015; Pechlaner et al. 2019). Paraskevas and Quek (2019) created a Resilience Management Network combining two distinct and complementary components: risk management and crisis management (part of Figure 2.). The distinction between them is that one (i.e., risk management) aims to proactively address threats while they are still risks (i.e., potential threats), whereas the other (i.e., crisis management) aims to reactively address actual threats that have become crises and which have adverse impacts on the destination. The threats are addressed sequentially in five stages: Sensing the Risk Landscape, Risk Assessment, Risk Treatment, Crisis Response, and Crisis Recovery. The arrows in Resilience Management Framework show the boundaries of two components, illustrating the continuity that exists between them. Although an inter-relationship exists between risk intelligence and all the framework stages, risk intelligence is essential for the starting point of risk management, which is the DMO’s ability to sense the risk landscape. The better equipped the DMO is in this aspect, the better its chances are to effectively manage risks before they become crises. When considering the implementation of the Resilience Management Framework into destination management practice, it should be considered that differences in leadership style, national culture, and available resources may influence crisis management (i.e. a crisis outcome and the speed of crisis management) in tourism destinations (Campirano and Scott 2007).

#### **4. DMOS AND TOURISM CRISIS MANAGEMENT – INSIGHT FROM CROATIA**

Croatia has a system of tourism boards following the Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) model. The rationale for their establishment is to promote and improve Croatia’s tourism and act in the economic interest of legal and natural persons by providing catering and other tourist services (Zakon o turističkim zajednicama i promicanju hrvatskog turizma NN 52/2019). The existing system of tourism boards is

hierarchically organized, following the geographical and historical principles and thematic principles of tourist offer, but also according to administrative principles. Local tourist boards are established for towns, municipalities, localities, and islands, while regional ones are established for the administrative areas of the counties and territories. In 2022 a total of 304 tourist boards were registered within the system: the National Tourist Board, 21 regional tourism boards, and 282 local tourism boards (own calculations from the List of tourism boards in Croatia). This research encompassed only the regional tourist boards (21) because, during the CORONA-19 crisis, Croatian counties had the authority to enact and enforce measures to curb the pandemic crisis. The research aimed to examine whether Croatian DMOs in their annual plans include activities related to crisis management. The analysis included the annual plans of regional DMOs for 2019 as the last pre-crisis year and 2021 as the year following the first crisis year.

In 2013 Borzyszkowski (2013) conducted a survey to assess the significance of crisis management in the activities of the DMOs. The research was carried out on a group of 59 DMOs from 19 European countries, including those from Croatia. Only in two cases (Slovenia and Slovakia) the crisis management function was organized as an independent unit in the organizational structure of DMOs. The author concluded that at the current stage, DMOs do not articulate any need to form an independent organizational unit for crisis management. The DMOs were also asked to provide a percentage share of expenses on crisis management in the whole budget structure. Only in three DMOs (Slovakia, Spain, and France) funds were spent on crisis management. Further, the examined DMOs were asked to rank crisis management in the hierarchy of their to-date, present and future activities. DMOs were asked to indicate the rank of crisis management in three periods, i.e. in the past (5-10 years ago), at present, and its potential significance in the future (during the coming 5-10 years). Results showed that half of the examined DMOs do not include the analyzed issue in their activities.

Even though our research was conducted with a time lag of 6 years, it is evident that the examined regional DMOs in Croatia lack the awareness of the need for crisis management. By analysing DMOs' plans from 2019, we found that only 2 out of 21 (i.e. 9,5%) DMOs incorporate crisis management into their activities. Analysis of DMOs' plans from 2021 revealed that much more DMOs (10 out of 21, i.e. 47,6%) gained an understanding of the need to include crisis management in their activities.

Research results should be considered worrying as the performed risk assessments revealed that Croatia is exposed to a complex set of heterogeneous risks that may severely affect both Croatia's tourism and the overall economy (Mikulić et al. 2018).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Tourism crises are not an unknown phenomenon. These are periods of intense uncertainty characterized by unpredictability and loss of control over key functions of the tourism system. Since crises have become a way of life for many tourism destinations around the world, tourism crisis management has gained importance. Destination management organizations (DMOs) represent the entity in charge of destination

management that main goals must be to ensure destination competitiveness and sustainability in the short, medium, and long terms.

The present research contributes to destination management in a theoretical and practical sense. After having systematized the literature on crises and tourism crisis management, the authors conceptualized a theoretical model explaining the role of DMOs in tourism crisis management by linking the concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and resilience. Recent research has shown that most tourism destinations are still underprepared for crises. In those circumstances, the authors conducted research on a sample of regional DMOs in Croatia with the aim to establish whether the practice, in this case, differs from other tourism destinations. It is evident that more than half of examined regional DMOs in Croatia lack awareness of the need for risk and crisis management. As the risk of tourism crises permanently increases, modern DMOs should pay much more attention to the problem of crisis management and the adoption of a resilience management framework.

The scholars are invited to research more deeply the concept of resilience management and its application to the level of tourism destinations.

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**ROLE OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN TOURISM CRISIS  
MANAGEMENT – INSIGHT FROM CROATIA**

**Danijela Križman Pavlović**  
**Enco Crnobori**

**Abstract**

The present article covers the significance of crisis management in the activities of modern destination management organizations. After analysing the results of previous research and providing recommendations for future research directions in the field of tourism crisis management, the authors have developed a theoretical model that explains the role of DMOs in tourism crisis management. The model shows the link between the concepts of destination sustainability, crisis management, and resilience. As a popular and fast-growing summer destination in the European Mediterranean, Croatia is significantly exposed to a complex set of heterogeneous risks that may severely affect its tourism and the overall economy. Given that, the authors conducted research to gain insight into whether the current activities of DMOs in Croatia include crisis management. The results showed that DMOs incorporate crisis management in their business activities insufficiently.

**Keywords:** destination, DMOs, crisis management, resilience, Croatia

**Danijela Križman Pavlović**  
Ph.D., Full Professor with tenure  
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism  
E-mail: dkrizman@unipu.hr

**Enco Crnobori**  
Mag. oec.  
Tourist Board of Medulin Municipality  
E-mail: encocrnobori@tzom.hr

## AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON RURAL DESTINATION QUALITY AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ana Gulić  
Ljudevit Pranić

### Abstract

As physical distancing and international travel restrictions in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak have forced an unprecedented number of people to remain in or near their place of residence, the access to nature and the hinterlands has become a longed-for luxury for many. Despite the resulting increase in interest from tourists wanting to visit the countryside, there is a paucity of research on tourist perceptions and behaviors in rural areas amid the pandemic.

To fill this research gap, the goals of this exploratory study are to examine (1) tourists' perceptions of destination quality (DQ) in Croatia's rural Cetina Region, (2) the effects of perceived DQ on the two dimensions of visitor loyalty, and (3) the effects of visitor demographics on perceived DQ. Based on the Tosun et al.'s (2015) model of DQ, this study explores destination service quality (DSQ) and destination natural quality (DNQ). Moreover, while the loyalty construct includes behavioral (revisit intentions) and attitudinal (word-of-mouth intentions) perspectives, demographics include gender, age, education, country of origin, marital status, and employment status.

Spearman's correlation and multiple regression were employed to analyze the visitor data collected via a self-administered questionnaire written in Croatian and English. The results indicate that rural visitors' behavioral intentions are primarily driven by the quality of destination's natural attributes, with service attributes taking a back seat in such context. Additionally, country of origin plays an important role in DQ perceptions. The study ends with theoretical and practical implications of the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, loyalty, destination service quality, destination natural quality, Croatia.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Conceptually, rural tourism may be defined as tourism activities taking place in the countryside (EEA 1998; OECD 1994; Vaishar and Šťastná 2020). There is a general agreement among both tourism scholars and industry professionals that rural areas have emerged as the most popular choice for tourists during the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite their popularity, a very limited body of research on the impacts of the pandemic on rural tourism has produced conflicting results. While some rural areas have experienced growth in tourism activity (Seraphin and Dosquet 2020; Vaishar and Šťastná 2020), others have suffered both in terms of demand and revenue (Silva 2021). Due to both scarcity and the conflicting nature of research on the subject, some scholars (e.g., Silva 2021) have suggested that future research should examine the factors that can influence the tourists' behaviors in different rural areas during COVID-19.

Thus, this exploratory research focuses on visitors to the rural Cetina Region in Southern Croatia. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to examine (1) tourists' perceptions regarding the two dimensions of destination quality (i.e., destination service quality (DSQ) and destination natural quality (DNQ) in the rural Cetina Region, (2) the effects of perceived DSQ and DNQ on the two dimensions of visitor loyalty (i.e., revisit and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions), and (3) the effects of visitor demographics on perceived DSQ and DNQ. The results of this research will not only empirically assess some important factors that may influence rural tourists' loyalty amid the pandemic, but also provide valuable information that could help (local) governments, DMOs, and individual tourism operators improve marketing planning and investment decisions in the rural tourism context. The article closes with a discussion of results, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Loyalty is generally defined as customers' commitment to consistently re-buy or re-patronize certain product/service/brand (Oliver 1999). Within the definition of rural tourism, the notion of loyalty is denoted by the construct of destination loyalty, i.e. intentions to recommend and revisit the destination or repurchase the trip (Lee and Xue 2020). To date, loyalty has been mostly defined on the basis of three dimensions, i.e. behavioral, attitudinal, and composite (Bowen and Chen 2001; Jones and Taylor 2007). While behavioral loyalty is often measured by repurchase or revisit intentions, attitudinal loyalty frequently employs indicators such as willingness to recommend the product/service to others or WOM intentions (Loureiro and Kastenholtz 2011; Rundle-Thiele 2005). Composite loyalty simply combines the behavioral and attitudinal perspectives for a more robust measure of loyalty. Thus, this study employs a composite measure of loyalty.

Service quality, an important antecedent of customer loyalty (Rajaratnam et al. 2015; McCleary et al. 2006), refers to the evaluation of service attributes that are primarily controlled by the service provider (Baker and Crompton 2000). While the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty is well-established in the literature, research on tourists' behavioral and attitudinal intentions, based on destination attributes, is still limited in the context of both destinations in general (Akroush et al. 2016) and rural destinations in particular (Rajaratnam et al. 2015). In rural settings, the notion of service quality is denoted by the construct of destination quality, which is further subdivided into destination natural quality (DNQ) and destination service quality (DSQ; Kozak 2001; Murphy et al. 2000; Sangpikul 2017; Tosun et al. 2015).

DNQ refers to the physical environment or "atmosphere" provided by the destination (Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Murphy et al. 2000), and is considered to be shaped by location, culture, and pure beauty elements (Tosun et al. 2015). While location denotes ease of access and distance of the destination (Mair and Thompson 2009), culture relates to (dis)similarities between the destination culture and visitors' own culture (Cohen 1988; Murphy et al. 2000). Pure beauty refers to a destination's unrefined features (Ross and Iso-Ahola 1991; Murphy et al. 2000).

In terms of DSQ, Kozak (2001) empirically identified eight factors as being important in the assessment of destination service quality – i.e. lodging services, local transportation services, cleanliness and hygiene, hospitality and customer care, availability of activities and facilities, price levels and food quality, foreign language proficiency, and airport services. In other studies, the attitudes and language proficiency of destination's retail workers (Tosun et al. 2007), as well as shopping, information, transportation, and accommodation (Moutinho et al. 2012), were identified as important aspects of DSQ.

Within the rural DSQ, lodging merits additional attention. Unlike urban areas where hotels and peer-to-peer (P2P) lodging establishments commonly compete on relatively equal grounds, rural settings are often dominated by P2P accommodation businesses, such as vacation rentals (VR). VRs or holiday lets are a type of lodging where a visitor rents a room or entire home for a short-term stay. While urban VRs boasted a low-cost alternative to traditional hotels before the pandemic (Kulshreshtha and Kulshreshtha 2019), the appeal of both VRs and hotels plummeted during COVID as travelers avoided unsafe destinations (Zenker et al. 2021) and public transportation (Dong et al. 2021), both of which are associated with urban areas.

However, as the research started to show that the principal mode by which people are infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is through direct human contact and rarely via contaminated surfaces, VRs in rural areas emerged as a suitable option for maintaining a "safer at home" lifestyle on the road. In particular, the availability of kitchen amenities, the greater privacy and independence, the absence of common areas shared with other guests, and the avoidance of tourist crowds created a safer environment due to the possibility of preserving physical distancing (Hidalgo et al. 2021). Despite the growing relevance of VRs in rural settings, there is a paucity of research on the users of VRs, the types of units they rent, the motivations for them renting VRs, and their evaluation of the VR experience (Tierney 2019).

In terms of the operationalization of quality, Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) discrepancy measure (i.e., SERVQUAL and its variants) is commonly used, referring to the gap between respondent's expectations and perceptions. However, comparative studies have consistently demonstrated that perceptions-only measures outperform the perceptions-minus-expectations measures in terms of predictive validity (Crompton and Love 1995; Cronin and Taylor 1994). Thus, this study employs a perceptions measure of quality.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire written in Croatian and English during September and October of 2021 in the Cetina Region in Southern Croatia. Since one of this paper's authors resides in the Cetina Region, convenience sampling was used to recruit and contact the owners of rural VRs, who in turn distributed the questionnaire to their guests by email. This is deemed the quickest and most efficient way of obtaining data (Sekaran and Bougie 2010). Cetina Region is comprised of three small cities and a number of villages. The three cities and their populations according to the 2011. census are Sinj (25,000 residents), Trilj (9,000 residents), and Vrljika (2,000 residents). VR homeowners from Sinj and Trilj were the sampling frame for this study.

Based on the information obtained from the DMO websites of Sinj and Trilj, during data collection there were a total of 74 VR homeowners. Ultimately, 10 VR homeowners were included in our convenience sample and a total of 106 valid questionnaires were obtained.

The questionnaire was comprised of four sections. The first section measured respondents' demographics (i.e., gender, age, level of education, country of origin, marital status, and employment status). The second section measured respondents' perceptions of destination service quality. Section three measured the perceived destination natural quality. Finally, section four captured their behavioral intentions, i.e. willingness to recommend the Cetina Region to others and revisit intentions. The 18 five-point Likert-type scale items anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*) used to assess DSQ, DNQ, and tourists' behavioral intentions were derived from Rajaratnam et al. (2014), Reichel et al. (2000), and Fleischer et al. (1993), and adapted to this study's context.

Within the scope of the study, Spearman's correlation was employed to investigate the relationship between DSQ, DNQ, and demographics on one hand and revisit/WOM intentions on the other. Spearman's  $r_s$  values were interpreted on the basis of the magnitude and direction of the relationship between variables, according to widely used criteria:  $r_s$  values <0.3 weak, 0.3-0.7 moderate, >0.7 strong (Akoglu 2018). Moreover, multiple regression was used to examine the effects of (1) DSQ/DNQ on WOM intentions, (2) DSQ/DNQ on revisit intentions, (3) demographics on DSQ, and (4) demographics on DNQ.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics

Of the 106 respondents, 54 were male and 52 female and most of them (68%) were between 26 and 55 years of age (Table 1). While 40% completed high school, 29% held an associate's degree and 29% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Just over 57% were from Croatia, with the remaining 42% from abroad. Among the 45 foreign visitors, there were 10 Germans, 7 from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 7 from Poland, 6 Austrians, 4 Czechs, 4 Italians, 3 Hungarians, 2 Slovaks, and 2 French. Majority (64%) were married and employed (62%).

Table 1. Respondent demographics

Characteristic	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
male	54	50.9
female	52	49.1
<i>Age group</i>		
18-25	15	14.2
26-35	21	19.8

36-45	27	25.5
46-55	24	22.6
56-65	11	10.4
≥ 66	8	7.5
<i>Level of education attained</i>		
elementary/primary	2	1.9
high school/secondary	42	39.6
associate's degree	31	29.2
bachelor's degree or higher	31	29.2
<i>Country of origin</i>		
Croatia	61	57.5
abroad	45	42.5
<i>Marital status</i>		
married	68	64.1
single/divorced	38	35.9
<i>Employment status</i>		
employed	66	62.3
unemployed/student/retired	40	37.7

Source: Authors

Table 2 presents respondent ratings of DSQ, DNQ, and behavioral intentions. It can be immediately noticed that of the two dimensions of destination quality (i.e., DSQ vs. DNQ), Cetina region's natural attributes received somewhat more favorable ratings. Within DSQ, while locals were rated as very kind and friendly, rural lodging establishments and F&B outlets fared somewhat lower, however still at an acceptable level. Among the DNQ attributes, Cetina region's climate, flora and fauna, history and culture, natural attractions, and safety received the highest ratings. Diversity of offer for young adults earned the lowest DNQ rating. In terms of respondents' behavioral intentions, the vast majority will revisit Cetina region and recommend it as a rural tourism destination to others.

Table 2. **Ratings of destination quality and loyalty**

Scales and items	Mean*	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Destination service quality (DSQ)</i>			.85
Local population is kind and friendly	4.10	.91	
Tourism staff is kind and friendly	3.93	1.08	
Diversity and quality of F&B offerings meets my expectations	3.86	1.21	
The quality of my accommodation meets my expectations	3.53	1.13	
Cetina region has the necessary F&B outlets to supplement rural tourism development	3.44	1.15	
Cetina region has the necessary lodging establishments for rural tourism development	3.39	1.16	
<i>Destination natural quality (DNQ)</i>			.87

Cetina region's climate is suitable for rural tourism development	4.58	.81	
Cetina region has a rich flora and fauna	4.51	.90	
Cetina region is rich in history and culture	4.49	.90	
Natural and environmental beauties meet my expectations	4.46	.90	
I feel safe in Cetina region	4.43	.90	
Cetina region is geographically accessible	3.96	1.06	
Cetina region has a myriad options to experience traditional lifestyle	3.87	1.13	
Cetina region offers a diversity of things to see and do	3.48	1.13	
The variety and quality of events meets my expectations	3.23	1.25	
Cetina region has divers offerings for young adults	2.47	1.15	
<i>Loyalty</i>			.90
I will recommend Cetina region as a rural tourism destination to others	4.13	1.15	
I will return to Cetina region	4.00	1.21	

\*1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree  
Source: Authors

#### 4.2. Inferential statistics

The Cronbach's alpha values (.85, .87, and .90) indicated a good reliability or internal consistency of the DSQ, DNQ, and loyalty scales, respectively (Table 2). In order to determine whether revisit and WOM intentions are associated with DSQ, DNQ, and demographics, the data were analyzed using Spearman's  $r_s$  correlation (Table 3). The results reveal that revisit intentions have a moderate positive correlation with DSQ ( $r_s = .32$ ) and DNQ ( $r_s = .48$ ), and a weak positive correlation with age ( $r_s = .20$ ) and marital status ( $r_s = .27$ ). Furthermore, the results reveal that WOM intentions have a moderate positive correlation with DSQ ( $r_s = .44$ ), DNQ ( $r_s = .56$ ), and marital status ( $r_s = .34$ ), and a weak positive correlation with age ( $r_s = .25$ ). Regarding marital status, married visitors are more likely to revisit Cetina region and recommend it as a rural tourism destination to others, as compared to their single or divorced counterparts. That said, gender, education, country of origin, and employment status are not associated with either revisit or WOM intentions.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation

	Revisit intention		WOM intention	
	$r_s$	$p$	$r_s$	$p$
DSQ	.32***	<.001	.44***	<.001
DNQ	.48***	<.001	.56***	<.001
Gender	-.01	.468	.02	.431
Age	.20*	.019	.25**	.005

Education	-.06	.258	-.11	.136
Origin country	-.14	.078	-.02	.422
Marital status	.27**	.003	.34***	<.001
Employment	.14	.083	.15	.066
N		106		

\*= $p < .05$ ; \*\*= $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*= $p < .001$   
Source: Authors

In order to check for causality between different sets of predictors and outcome variables, four independent multiple regression analyses were performed (Table 4). In the first of the four multiple regression analyses, WOM intentions were regressed on DSQ and DNQ. Results show that 38.8% of the variance can be accounted for by the two predictors, collectively ( $F(2, 103)=34.336, p=.000$ ). Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the results show that DNQ positively predicts WOM ( $\beta=.618, t=6.047, p<.001$ ). This suggests that the quality of Cetina region's natural attributes affects visitors' willingness to recommend the region as a rural tourism destination to others. Conversely, visitors' WOM intentions are not affected by the quality of Cetina region's service attributes.

In the second of the four multiple regression analyses, revisit intentions were also regressed on DSQ and DNQ. Results show that 32.7% of the variance can be accounted for by the two predictors, collectively ( $F(2, 103)=26.454, p=.000$ ). Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the results show that DNQ positively predicts revisit intentions ( $\beta=.627, t=5.853, p<.001$ ). This suggests that quality of Cetina region's natural attributes affects visitors' intention to return to the region. Conversely, visitors' revisit intentions are not affected by quality of Cetina region's service attributes.

In the third multiple regression analysis, DSQ was regressed on six demographic variables. Results show that 21.3% of the variance can be accounted for by the six predictors, collectively ( $F(6, 99)=5.730, p=.000$ ). Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the results show that country of origin positively predicts DSQ ( $\beta=.452, t=5.157, p<.001$ ). Additionally, results also reveal that foreign visitors are more likely to rate Cetina region's service attributes higher than their Croatian counterparts. Conversely, visitors' ratings of Cetina region's service attributes are not affected by gender, age, education, marital status, and employment status.

In the fourth multiple regression analysis, DNQ was also regressed on six demographic variables. Results show that 5.3% of the variance can be accounted for by the six predictors, collectively ( $F(6, 99)=1.979, p=.076$ ). Given that this is an exploratory study with a relatively small sample, using a less conservative alpha level (i.e.,  $p<.10$ ) is a recommended approach (Schumm et al. 2013). Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the results show that country of origin positively predicts DNQ ( $\beta=.226, t=2.355, p=.020$ ). Additionally, results also reveal that foreign visitors are more likely to rate Cetina region's natural attributes higher than their Croatian counterparts. Conversely, visitors' ratings of Cetina region's natural attributes are not affected by gender, age, education, marital status, and employment status.



Table 4. **Regression results**

Predictor variable	Output variable			
	Revisit intention	WOM intention	DSQ	DNQ
Constant	.061 <sup>β</sup> (.566)	-.011 (.512)	3.252 (.353)	3.565 (.321)
DSQ	-.071 (.155)	.022 (.140)		
DNQ	.627*** (.187)	.618*** (.169)		
Gender			.126 (.146)	.106 (.133)
Age			.061 (.067)	.118 (.061)
Education			-.092 (.087)	-.063 (.079)
Origin country			.452*** (.149)	.226** (.135)
Marital status			.036 (.205)	.039 (.186)
Employment			.118 (.157)	.112 (.143)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.327	.388	.213	.053
N	106			

<sup>β</sup>Standardized (Beta) coefficients with standard errors reported in parentheses.

\*=p<.05; \*\*=p<.01; \*\*\*= p<.001;

Source: Authors

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory study investigated tourists' perceptions regarding destination quality and their behavioral intentions amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Croatia's rural Cetina Region. Findings demonstrated that visitors' perceptions of the quality of a destination's natural attributes are an important predictor of their revisit intentions and their willingness to recommend it as a rural tourism destination to others. Moreover, foreign tourists are likely to appreciate the natural attributes of a rural area more than domestic visitors. Interestingly, visitors' perceptions of the quality of a destination's service attributes are of little value in predicting revisit and WOM intentions. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, our finding that DSQ is not a good predictor of revisit intentions is in contrast with the study of Tosun et al. (2015), who found that positive perceptions of DSQ may increase revisit intentions. At least two reasons could explain this discrepancy – i.e. destination type and the time of data collection. While the study by Tosun et al.

centered on a very popular and thus established coastal destination in Turkey, our study focused on Cetina Region, a lesser-known and relatively uncharted rural destination. It appears plausible that visitors to Cetina Region may be trailblazers and novelty-seekers who thus place greater value on the natural (as opposed to service) attributes of a less-frequented destination than beachgoers in a familiar sun and sea destination.

In regards to the time of data collection, Tosun et al.'s study was undertaken years before the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas our study was conducted in the midst of it. Therefore, it is possible that travel restrictions imposed during the outbreak are causing travelers to realign their priorities. That is, after having experienced unprecedented bans on travel, tourists may be exhilarated about the opportunity to explore the great outdoors and are therefore less concerned about the quality of accommodation and other related service attributes.

There is thus scope for more research to enhance our understanding of the perhaps moderating roles of destination type and time in regards to tourists' behaviors in different rural areas during and after COVID-19. Moreover, although the effects of gender, age, education, marital status, and employment status on tourists' DSQ/DNQ perceptions turned out insignificant in this study, other rural destinations are likely to have a different set of characteristics and circumstances. Accordingly, it seems rational to conduct similar studies in different rural destinations over longer timeframes.

In terms of practical implications, based on this study's findings, local governments, DMOs, and individual tourism operators in rural areas should concentrate their marketing activities on natural aspects of their destination. Specifically, they should focus their efforts on developing and properly signposting hiking and bicycle trails for different types of users (e.g., families with children, seniors, wheelchairs, strollers, rollerblades, etc.), creating user-friendly maps of area attractions, lookout points, and parking spaces, and using drones and cycling action cameras to capture visually appealing video content for online sharing and promotion.

The results of this study notwithstanding, this study's sample size may have affected the findings. The review of various rules-of-thumb by Green (1991) suggests that the recommended case-to-variable ratio (i.e., respondents per scale item) should be 5:1 at the lowest (Bartlett et al. 2001; Hair et al. 1995; Tabachnick and Fidell 1989). While this study meets the minimum sample size threshold, future studies should aim at a more desired 10:1 ratio (Halinski and Feldt 1970; Miller and Kuncze 1973).

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**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON RURAL DESTINATION QUALITY AND  
BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Ana Gulić**  
**Ljudevit Pranić**

**Abstract**

As physical distancing and international travel restrictions in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak have forced an unprecedented number of people to remain in or near their place of residence, the access to nature and the hinterlands has become a longed-for luxury for many. Despite the resulting increase in interest from tourists wanting to visit the countryside, there is a paucity of research on tourist perceptions and behaviors in rural areas amid the pandemic.

To fill this research gap, the goals of this exploratory study are to examine (1) tourists' perceptions of destination quality (DQ) in Croatia's rural Cetina Region, (2) the effects of perceived DQ on the two dimensions of visitor loyalty, and (3) the effects of visitor demographics on perceived DQ. Based on the Tosun et al.'s (2015) model of DQ, this study explores destination service quality (DSQ) and destination natural quality (DNQ). Moreover, while the loyalty construct includes behavioral (revisit intentions) and attitudinal (word-of-mouth intentions) perspectives, demographics include gender, age, education, country of origin, marital status, and employment status.

Spearman's correlation and multiple regression were employed to analyze the visitor data collected via a self-administered questionnaire written in Croatian and English. The results indicate that rural visitors' behavioral intentions are primarily driven by the quality of destination's natural attributes, with service attributes taking a back seat in such context. Additionally, country of origin plays an important role in DQ perceptions. The study ends with theoretical and practical implications of the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, loyalty, destination service quality, destination natural quality, Croatia.

**Ana Gulić**  
MEcon  
Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism  
University of Split  
agulic00@student.efst.hr

**Ljudevit Pranić**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism  
University of Split  
ljudevit.pranic@efst.hr

# 1<sup>ST</sup> GREEN RESTAURANT IN CROATIA CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING GREEN PRACTICES

**Matina Gjurašić**  
**Damir Krešić**

## **Abstract**

In today's fast-changing dynamics of the service industry, the mission of foodservice entrepreneurs is going through a significant transformation. The increasing number of consumers are looking for products and services that are healthy, sustainable, and environmentally friendly. They want to be a part of restaurant sustainability which includes utilizing energy-efficient equipment, purchasing local or organic ingredients, offering healthy menu items, banning disposable cups and polystyrene containers, training employees for green practices, recycling, and composting, and reducing pollution. Such restaurant that employs green practices is called a "green restaurant" and can obtain a worldwide know certificate which increases restaurant brand and loyalty. Despite the potential benefits that green practices bring to the restaurant business and destination; some restaurants are reluctant to invest in the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. Therefore, this case study presents the first green restaurant Konavoski Dvori in the Konavle region, Croatia, and its major challenges while implementing green practices into operation. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with the owner, management, and employees of the restaurant. Results revealed that even though there were several major challenges during the implementation phase such as policies, regulations, investment costs, and awareness, in overall there are more business advantages that such model brings. Moreover, respondents emphasized that restaurant green practices contribute to rural tourism by respecting-protecting and landscaping nature, supplying local foods, serving local dishes, and employing local people.

**Keywords:** green restaurant, rural tourism, sustainable practices.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The hospitality and tourism industry is one of the biggest and fastest growing industries in the world. Such fastest and uncontrolled growth, especially in the restaurant business has negatively impacted the environment. In their daily operations, restaurants significantly contribute to the effects of global warming with excessive energy consumption, global green gas emissions, and significant food waste (Krause 1993; Han et. al. 2011; Hwang and Lee 2019; Martin-Rios et. al. 2018; Langgat 2019; Asadi et. al. 2020). Therefore, an urgent action by the restaurant management should be done.

Despite the negative environmental impacts, restaurants are confronted with the challenge of integrating environmental issues into their strategic and tactical decision-making processes. They are more likely to implement environmentally friendly practices into their operation for marketing purpose which involves activities such as discouraging the use of disposable tableware and developing locally sourced organic menus (Jang et.al. 2011; Shin et..al. 2018). However, when it comes to major equipment investment and moving their whole operations towards green practices, restaurant management is

reluctant to it. Major reasons for these are lack of access to the monetary assets (Virglerová et. al. 2017) and lack of specific guidelines for green practice implication (Cardoza et.al. 2016; Hollender 2017; Kmiecik and Michna, 2018; Fahad and Wang 2020). Hence, this case study aims to emphasize major challenges and benefits of implementing green practices into restaurant operation. Furthermore, by giving the successful example for green restaurant business in Croatia, it will identify the internal, external, and individual factors that need to be considered for the adoption of green practices in food service sector.

## **2. GREEN RESTAURANTS**

Due to the increasing number of environmental laws and pressure from the market., restaurant businesses have started to adopt some green practices to reduce costs and maintain competitive advantage (Alameeri et. al. 2020; Han 2020; Peng 2020) which introduce the concept of green restaurants. Green restaurants are environmentally sustainable restaurants which take actions to minimize their negative impact on the environment by implementing green practices, such as recycling, utilizing renewable energy, responsible waste disposal, reducing food waste, and serving sustainable food locally sourced or organic (Jang et. al. 2011). Green restaurants are focused on “reduce, reuse, recycle” activities and emphasize energy efficient practices in restaurant operations (Gilg et. al. 2005). Most of these restaurants have implemented green initiatives by decreasing energy use and water consumption, recycling, and buying sustainable and fresh products (Numkung and Jang 2017). Additionally, these initiatives include avoiding plastic cutlery and plastic water bottles in the dining room (Nimri et. al. 2021).

### **2.1. Benefits of implementing green practices**

Additionally, the literature review reveals that the restaurant management believes that green practices have significant positive impacts on the financial situation, competitive advantage, and efficient use of resources (Hussain et. al. 2020; Filimonau et.al. 2021), increased customer demand (Assaker 2020), enhanced brand image (Dhir et.. al. 2021), and customer willingness to pay a premium for their services (Sanchez- Ollero et. al. 2014; Cantele and Cassia 2020). Furthermore, the high consumer interest in organic and sustainable food and eco-friendly practices has led to a proliferation of green restaurants to satisfy consumer demand.

## **3. RESTAURANT GREEN PRACTICES**

There is not specific guideline for implementing green practices in the restaurant business. In the literature there are several authors that suggested various dimensions which conceptualized the green practices in the restaurant business. One of the first concept was developed by Choi and Parsa (2007) which covers ten categories of green restaurant practices associated with environmental, health and social concern. Szuchnicki (2009) concentrated on traditional restaurant operation which includes conservation, organic food, and carbon footprint reduction. While Schubert et.al. (2010)



emphasized the green action, green food and green donation/giving as important restaurant green practices. The same year, Jeong, and Jang (2010) in their study focused on recycling and composting, energy-saving equipment, environmentally friendly cleaning supplies and packaging and menu with choices of local and organic food. Later studies continue to address green food and PR environmental activities in the framework for green restaurant (Jang et. al.2011; Namkung and Jang 2012).

According to Green Restaurant Association (2022) which is a national non-profit organization that provides the only official Certified Green Restaurants mark in the world, there are eight categories of green practices which the restaurant establishment should follow to be certified as a green restaurant. Those environmental criteria cover a wide spectrum of different green practices such as:

1. Water efficiency
2. Waste reduction and recycling
3. Sustainable durable goods and building materials
4. Sustainable food
5. Energy efficiency and conservation
6. Reusables and environmentally preferable disposables
7. Chemical and pollution reduction
8. Transparency and education

Restaurants must meet. these eight environmentally friendly criteria to be recognized as certified green restaurant. In Croatia there is no association to verify the restaurant as certified green restaurant, even though, going green and practicing green is highly encouraged in Croatia. There are initiatives by government and agencies to support and promote green practices, but they are more related to accommodation service and travel agency. In that sense, through *the Competitiveness of Tourism Sector Program* the Ministry of Tourism and Sport has co-financed projects for sustainable development by investing in sustainable (green) entrepreneurship in tourism and development of special forms of tourism (health, cultural, cycling tourism, nautical, congress, rural etc.) (HrTurizam 2019).

#### **4. CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING GREEN PRACTICES**

Major obstacles or challenges that have been defined in the literature are related to administrative or management constraints, economic and financial obstacles, exterior collaboration and stakeholder participation, government assistance, customers, and market. obstacles, and intellectual and knowledge restricted boundaries. The below table summarizes major challenges.

Table 1. **Challenges of implementing green practices in the business**

Challenge	Sub-challenge	References
	Lack of commitment from SME entrepreneur	Ashford 1993 ; Ravi and Shankar 2005 ; Zhu et.al. 2012a,2012b ;

Management, organization, and human resources	SME reluctant to switch to green practices Lack of training and consultancy programs related to green innovation practices Lack of human resources for green innovation High costs for certifications related to green practices for SMEs	Mathiyazhagan et.al. 2013 ; Dubey et.al. 2015 ; Mangla et.al. 2017 Ashford 1993 ; Zhu et.al. 2012a, 2012b ; Lin and Ho 2008 ; Jones et.al. 2011 Ashford 1993 ; Carter and Dresner 2001 ; Urban and Naidoo 2012 ; Longoni et.al. 2014 ; Mangla et.al. 2017
Management, organization, and human resources	Lack of interaction with government agencies and participation in programs organized by government related to green initiatives Lack of reward systems for green innovations	Collins et.al. 2007; Lin and Ho 2008 Hillary 2004 Gupta and Barua 2018
Financial barriers	Lack of internal and external financial resources Less payoff as compared to investment in green innovations Lack of access to government subsidies and financial incentives Unavailability of bank loans to promote green practices High change over costs from traditional to the green system. No economies of scale for green products for SMEs due to lesser demand	Pinget. et.al. 2015 Matus et.al. 2012 ; Govindan et..al. 2014 Cecere et.al. 2016; Hojnik and Ruzzier 2016 Mathiyazhagan et.al. 2013 ; Cecere et.al. 2016 Konar and Cohen 2001; Mudgal et.al. 2010 Gupta and Barua 2018
Poor external partnership and stakeholders' engagement	The unwillingness of supply chain partners to exchange information on green practices Lack of understanding regarding green practice by other SMEs Poor communication with external partners and lack of role clarity Lack of platforms or forums for SMEs to discuss problems related to green innovation Lack of pressure from large organizations to switch to green practices	Walker et. al. (2008), Hong et. al. (2009), Mudgal et. al. (2010), Ninlawan et. al. (2010), and Dhull and Narwal (2016) Sarkar and Mohapatra (2006), Wolf and Seuring (2010), Dhull and Narwal (2016) Lettenmeier et. al. (2012), Dubey et. al. (2015), and Mangla et. al. (2017) Madrid-Guijarro et. al. (2009); Gupta and Barua (2017)
Lack of government support for green initiatives	Complex and rigid rules for green practices Lack of training programs by the government for SMEs to incorporate green practices Lack of help by the government for technology upgradation by SMEs	Runhaar et. al. (2008), Brammer et. al. (2012), and Zhu et. al. (2012a, b) Runhaar et. al. (2008), and Zhu et. al. (2012a, b) Blok et.al. 2015
Market. and customer	Lack of customers' responsiveness towards green products	Ashford 1993; Silva et.al. 2008; Dhull and Narwal 2016

related barriers	Lack of awareness and knowledge regarding green products	Min and Galle 2001; Chen et.al. 2006; Mudgal et.al. 2010; Dhull and Narwal 2016
Insufficient knowledge /info on green practices	Lack of knowledge regarding green practices and legislations among employees and entrepreneurs Lack of ability of employees to identify environmental opportunities Lack of belief in environmental benefits of green products Lack of technological information regarding green technologies Lack of awareness about recycling and reverse logistics facilities	Shen and Tam, 2002 ; Simpson et.al. 2004 ; Runhaar et. al. 2008 ; Mudgal et.al. 2010 ; Horbach et.al. 2012 ; Mathiyazhagan et. al. 2013 ; Longoni et.al. 2014 ; Mangla et.al. 2017 Theyel, 2000 ; Runhaar et.al. 2008 ; Govindan et.al. 2014 Revell and Rutherford 2003 ; Walker et..al. 2008 ; Mathiyazhagan et..al. 2013 ; Govindan et..al. 2014 Woolman and Veshagh, 2006 ; Madrid-Guijarro et..al. 2009 ; Pinget. et..al. 2015 ; Mangla et..al. 2017 Ravi and Shankar, 2005; Marsillac, 2008; Meade et..al. 2007; Mathiyazhagan et..al. 2013

Source: adopted from Gupta and Barua (2018)

Researchers stated that administrative or operational obstacles are mainly caused by lack of commitment by management to sustainable green practices since restaurants seek to run an operation in a traditional manner. This case study analysis implementation of green practices in the restaurant in Konavle region, Croatia and identifies its major challenges.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The research applied qualitative approach through face-to-face interviews using Zoom online application. This alternative method contributes to high quality and in-depth interviews when face-to-face interviews are not possible (Gray et. al. 2020). The same study points out that such tool is convenient, saves time and creates possibility to share/discuss personal view, issues.

Furthermore, under the qualitative approach, case study method was adopted. This method assists a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study (Zainal 2007). This case study used protocol suggested by Rashid et.al. (2019) which includes following activities: research question, research method, permission seeking, ethical considerations, interpretation process, and criteria for assessment.

For this case study the casual upscale restaurant Konavoski Dvori located in Konavle region was selected for observation. According to Ismail et. al. (2010), “an independent casual upscale restaurant is a restaurant that has one or more owners and are usually engaged with operations directly. These restaurants are not affiliated with any national

brand or name, and consequently offer the owner the greatest independence, creativity, and flexibility as well as the greatest risk. They offer fine dining with full table services, focusing on quality rather than price. since this is the first restaurant in Croatia which implement green practices into operation. This restaurant has first in Croatia implemented green practices in the operation.

The interview took place at the end of March 2022. The average length of the in-person video interviews lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, all participants were informed of and agreed to the use of Zoom video conference to conduct the interviews. Subsequently, the owner, the restaurant management, Chef, and employees were briefed on the objective of the interview. The first questions were related to the restaurant's history and management and reason for going green after which they were asked to give their comments on the feasibility of implementing eight areas of green practices in their restaurant defined by GRA (2022). The summary of results is described in the following part of this study.

## **6. RESULTS**

### **6.1. Restaurant Konavoski Dvor**

The restaurant "Konavoski dvori" is located on the river Ljuta, close to the old watermills which are recognized as a cultural and natural heritage of Konavle region at the south of Croatia. The restaurant was first opened in 1968 and from 1997 has been managed by independent company Esculap-Teo. The management of the restaurant consists of Food and Beverage (F&B) manager and its assistant, Chef, Finance and Accounting manager, Purchasing, and Controlling manager. Throughout the year there are 14 full-time employees while the number increases up to 22 during the high season.

The restaurant has 35 tables and bar that seats 10 which gives the restaurant a seating capacity of 150 and average check of 30 euros per person. During the spring and summer time the terrace is open which provides 150 places more. The menu has always been concentrated on the local cuisine which consists of dishes based on naturally grown vegetables, lentils, and meat, simply prepared in a traditional way. One of the specialties is a lamb or goat prepared by "peka" style which is a traditional way of roasting meat under an iron bell on the fire to retain its natural taste and smell. The favourite vegetable meal is "Zelena menestra" prepared according to the original recipe from 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Due to its countryside location, restaurant attracts many tourists and families during the summer season and weekends, but the owner believes there is possibility for increased business during the wintertime. The restaurant has not been renovated for many years and had a weak thermal insulation of the building, moreover, used outdated and energetically inefficient technology. Hence, in 2018 the owner started to think about major renovation and transforming the whole business operation towards green practices. He believed that such step would create competitive advantage at the market., cut the operational cost and bring the business success on the long run.

### **6.1.1. Going Green**

The specific actions were related towards activities which contribute to the protection of nature and the environment. This primarily refers to the use of renewable energy sources (sun, water, air), the use of sustainable building materials and environmentally mobile equipment, efficient use of water, reduction of waste and pollution.

From the beginning of the project, the owner was aware that for such huge step in the business they need someone who will lead the whole project. Therefore, the company appointed a licensed architect Lea Đurović Ruso to create and prepare project which will lead to more sustainable restaurant operation. Her studio Proto Arch already had some experience in preparing and implementing similar projects.

During the interview the owner stated that the major challenge was lack of information or guidelines for implementing green practices in the restaurant business and more over lack of financial support to cover such investment. Proto Arch studio did in this process a huge role. They created a new concept for restaurant Konavoski Dvori to become a first green restaurant in Croatia and applied for at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Energy for the financial support. The project has been recognized as a valuable and company received 70% of non-repayable EU support through the European Regional Development fund. This was a first such financial support in Croatia given to restaurant business. The purpose of the funded project was to reduce the energy consumption of the restaurant by 52,79% (with respect to energy delivered before the project was conducted) and to increase the share of renewable energy sources in the gross energy consumption. This encompassed the complete renewal of the restaurant facility and installation of thermal insulation on the building. Furthermore, solar panels and photovoltaic electrical power generation were installed to generate electricity for the restaurant. For the interior design and decoration, architect involved local artist and craftsmen, so the wood furniture has been refurbished by them. Restaurant manager emphasized that without good teamwork synergy, effective cooperation with all relevant institutions, and more over architect 's vision and drive, project would not be achieved.

Additionally, the restaurant upgraded their equipment with water efficient models in the whole restaurant which maximize saving on utility bills. The restaurant employees commented that this was easily implemented as they were very well informed how to save water in the daily operations.

Another important issues which Chef pointed out is waste management. They are applying waste management procedures in the operation. This includes seasonal and customized menu which enables ordering and purchasing food upon demand and availability, furthermore the inventory is daily monitored and controlled by FIFO rules which means first-in-first-out, and if there are some leftovers at the end of day the restaurant donates to the neighbouring farm. Besides that, the restaurant requires from the suppliers to deliver their products in reusable packaging or to take back the packaging (recycle). Therefore, restaurant does not use anymore plastic and in the whole operation the chlorine-free paper products are available. The hazardous chemical products such as harmful dish detergents, germicides, toilet. bowl cleaners, floor wash and polish are avoided. Restaurant uses non-toxic and biodegradable cleaning products from Croatian

manufacturer of green cleaning supplies. As well, the cooking oil in the restaurant is properly collected and converted into renewable fuel.

Regarding the premium price of fresh local products, Chef commented that he is aware of the premium price of fresh local products, but he said that's the price of their quality. He believes and agrees that most guests are willing to pay more for green practices and organic food. It would be great to have a rooftop greenhouse at the restaurant or in some location near the restaurant to plant our own ingredients, but he said that currently it is not time for new investments.

Since the restaurant is working during the whole year, they are organizing special culinary events during the wintertime to attract more local people. Such events are sometimes humanitarian, and all income goes for charity. Recently, all income was for the Foundation "Otač Ivan Fiorović to help those in need, such as the elderly and displaced people in Konavle region. Restaurant employees emphasized that they really enjoy working on such occasions. They are delighted to contribute to community wellbeing.

At the end of interview restaurant management and Chef pointed out that education is necessary however they expressed their concern on the constraints of time and cost to provide environmental program or training to their employee. Moreover, it is very hard to motivate part-time employees during the high season when the most of businesses occurs. Currently they are educating their full-time employees about health and safety in food preparation and service. In the following period they will educate them about the green practices and how to be environmentally friendly at work and even at home.

## 7. CONCLUSION

From the extensive literature review and conducted interviews on green restaurant practices it can be concluded that the major challenge relies on the restaurant management willingness to adopt such practices and to have financial support since the investment is high and return low and slow. The owner of this restaurant emphasized that without financial support from EU fund it would be very hard to succeed especially because during the final phase of the renovation, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. The light in the tunnel was financial support from the Government during the pandemic period. In overall, this restaurant has once more pushed forward the boundaries of its operations in the hospitality industry and demonstrated that the key to success is smart and sustainable resource management. Additionally, such sustainable business model contributes to rural tourism by respecting-protecting and landscaping nature, supplying local foods, serving local dishes, and employing local people.

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**1<sup>ST</sup> GREEN RESTAURANT IN CROATIA  
CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING GREEN PRACTICES**

**Matina Gjurašić**  
**Damir Krešić**

**Abstract**

In today's fast-changing dynamics of the service industry, the mission of foodservice entrepreneurs is going through a significant transformation. The increasing number of consumers are looking for products and services that are healthy, sustainable, and environmentally friendly. They want to be a part of restaurant sustainability which includes utilizing energy-efficient equipment, purchasing local or organic ingredients, offering healthy menu items, banning disposable cups and polystyrene containers, training employees for green practices, recycling, and composting, and reducing pollution. Such restaurant that employs green practices is called a "green restaurant" and can obtain a worldwide know certificate which increases restaurant brand and loyalty. Despite the potential benefits that green practices bring to the restaurant business and destination; some restaurants are reluctant to invest in the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. Therefore, this case study presents the first green restaurant Konavoski Dvori in the Konavle region, Croatia, and its major challenges while implementing green practices into operation. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with the owner, management, and employees of the restaurant. Results revealed that even though there were several major challenges during the implementation phase such as policies, regulations, investment costs, and awareness, in overall there are more business advantages that such model brings. Moreover, respondents emphasized that restaurant green practices contribute to rural tourism by respecting-protecting and landscaping nature, supplying local foods, serving local dishes, and employing local people.

**Keywords:** green restaurant, rural tourism, sustainable practices.

**Matina Gjurašić, PhD,**  
Research Associate  
Institute for tourism, Zagreb, Croatia  
matina.gjurasic@iztg.hr

**Damir Krešić, PhD,**  
Research Associate,  
Institute for tourism, Zagreb, Croatia  
damir.kresic@iztg.hr

## **EFFECTS OF BIOSTIMULANTS ON *THYMUS VULGARIS* L. 'DEUTCHER WINTER' CULTIVATED IN MOUNTAIN REGION OF CROATIA**

**Stela Pleša**  
**Melita Zec Vojinović**  
**Marin Tomičić**  
**Martina Peršić**  
**Slavica Dudaš**

### **Abstract**

Thyme is a perennial shrub whose cultivars enable differentiate cultivation in temperate continental, hilly or Mediterranean areas, and is used as a spice, medicinal or aromatic plant for the production of essential oils. A three-year study of the effects of biostimulants on thyme growth started by establishing a field experiment in June 2021. Biostimulants influences biochemical processes of the plant to enable a fully realization of the genetic potential of productivity due to changes in hormonal status, activation of metabolic processes, increasing dietary efficiency, stimulating growth, development and strengthening the ability to withstand abiotic and biotic stresses. The aim of using different biostimulants as Amino Vital, Ilsamin N90, BioPlantella Vita and Bombardier in field experiment is to strengthen plant resistance and to minimize the use of synthetic chemicals in the cultivation of high quality medicinal drugs. The parameters included in present research overwintering and frost hardiness, the height of shrubs, the yield of fresh, dry herb and leaf drugs, the percentage of leaves in the herb, dry matter content, essential oil content and total yield of essential oil (lha<sup>-1</sup>). In the first year of cultivation, three foliar treatments with biostimulants were carried out and the initial effects of biostimulants were observed on the growth of shrubs, the height and diameter of shrubs.

**Keywords:** biostimulators, growth, morphometrical parameters, quality, thyme, yield

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Biostimulators are substances mostly based on natural material, used in ultrasmall and small doses in order to modify physiological and biochemical processes in plants (Yakhin et al. 2016). The main goal of treatment with biostimulators is to fully realize the genetic potential of plant productivity due to changes in hormonal status, activation of metabolic processes, increase nutrition efficiency, stimulating growth, development and strengthening the ability to withstand abiotic and biotic stresses. According to Torre, Battaglica and Caradonia (2015) biostimulators can be classified into several types according to their basic content; humic extracts, seaweed extracts, amino acids and hydrolyzed proteins, inorganic salts and microorganisms. Humic extracts contain humic acids, fulvic acid and humin formed by humification of organic matter, and their effect is manifested as increasing the efficiency of fertilizers, reducing soil compaction, and overall improving the content of biomass.

Seaweed extracts, containing many active mineral and organic compounds, contribute to plant growth and can improve tolerance to stressful conditions. Hydrolyzed proteins and amino acids indirectly improve enzyme activity, regulate growth regulators and biochemical processes. Additionally, they are a significant source of organic nitrogen and can boost defenses against abiotic stresses. Inorganic compounds have a similar effect, which with their cations and anions of phosphite, phosphate, bicarbonate, silicate, sulfate, and nitrate have a direct effect on plant metabolism.

Biostimulators with microorganisms (bacteria, yeasts, filamentous fungi, and microalgae) isolated from soil, plants, water, or composted fertilizers increase tolerance to stressful conditions, modify the hormonal status of the plant, as well as the hormone production and promote the uptake and fixation of some nutrients (Torre et. al. 2015). Amino acid-based biostimulators are dominant on the Croatian market (Gluhić 2020). The typical composition of these biostimulators consists of free amino acids, micro and macronutrients, sugars, vitamins, cytokinin, auxins, abscisic acids, and betadine. In accordance with their composition, biostimulators are classified as organic fertilizers and soil improvers and are accordingly regulated by the Fertilizers and Soil Improvers Act (NN 163/03, 40/07, 81/13, 14/14, 32/19).

Biostimulators differ from fertilizers because they do not have the main nutritional role. They also differ from pesticides because they condition the plant without protection from pests. According to the Agriculture Act (NN 118/18, 42/20, 127/20, 52/2) biostimulators can be used in organic agriculture since they are obtained naturally. Nowadays we are witnessing the global change in climate and growing conditions bringing new challenges in plant production. At the same time, there is a permanent growth in demand for organically produced goods, particularly organically produced raw material used in pharmaceutical and cosmetical industry. To satisfy this high demand for organic products there is a need for application of new plant conditioning and strengthening agents in order to increase resilience, improve phytosanitary conditions and reduce pesticide use.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Republic of Croatia (2020), there is 863,000 hectares of used agricultural land. 60.7% of that area is under cereals (524,000 hectares), industrial crops are grown on 20.5% or 177,000 hectares and fodder on 11.9% or 103,000 hectares.

There are 35 different types of spices, aromatic and medicinal plants grown in Croatia grown on 5 – 8 thousand hectares, with positive trend in total area of production. In 2021, the total area under spices, aromatic and medicinal plants was 7,376.70 hectares (Agencija za plaćanja u poljoprivredi 2015-2021). In year 2021, the most common plant species in cultivation were chamomile (6,359.92 ha), immortelle (589.18 ha), hybrid lavender (225.32 ha) and fennel (93.29 ha). Thyme is cultivated on the area of 1.83 ha (2016) to 2.83 ha (2021) (Agencija za plaćanja u poljoprivredi 2016, 2021).

According to the taxonomic classification, thyme is classified in the genus *Thymus*. Genus *Thymus*, together with 210 other genera, forms the botanical family *Laminaceae*, one of the most important spice families. The genus *Thymus* contains 18 wild species and one cultivated species (*Thymus vulgaris* L.). Cultivated thyme has more than 300 subspecies, varieties, hybrids, and ecotypes (Mustafa et. al. 2020). The assortment of

thyme is divided into two groups; winter perennial and summer, Mediterranean type of thyme. The summer, Mediterranean type of thyme is a perennial shrub in subtropical regions, while in the continental part it is annual due to insufficient resistance to low temperatures.

During history, a diverse terminology has been created for this *Thymus vulgaris* L. in Croatian language; true thyme, grandmother's thyme, wild basil, etc. Morphologically, thyme is classified as a semi-shrub that rarely grows over 40 cm in height. The leaves are tiny differing in shape, color and hair shape between species and subspecies (Prasanth et. al. 2014). It originates from the western Mediterranean region, so it is adapted to a temperate to dry climate with plenty of sun and without excessive precipitation. Thyme is a thermophilic and photophilous plant, varieties of perennial winter thyme are grown in continental and mountainous areas.

Numerous studies on the thyme assortment have shown that today's varieties of winter perennial thyme consist mostly of free pollination varieties, but hybrid high-yielding thyme varieties adapted for cultivation in hilly areas have also been developed (Dudaš and Böhme 2013).

Thyme is recognized for its rich and distinct phytochemical profile. Its phenolic profile mainly consists of flavonoids (zeaxantin, lutein, pigenin, naringenin, luteolin and thymonin) and specific phenolic component named thymol (Dauqan and Abdullah 2017). Additionally, thyme is abundant in the content of other medicinal components, volatile oils, vitamins. Therefore, thyme is characterized by antimicrobial, antioxidative, anticancerogenic, antifungal and antiviral effects.

Due to its high content of volatile aromatic components, thyme has exceptional repellent traits and is consequently rarely attacked by phytopathogens and pests. Its resistance makes thyme perfect for organic production.

As previously stated, the use of biostimulators is in accordance with principles of organic production. Furthermore, the outcomes of biostimulators use on spices, aromatic and medicinal plants has not been sufficiently studied. The aim of this research is to study the effects of biostimulator use in thyme cultivation, through analyzing its impacts on overwintering and frost hardiness, the height of shrubs, the yield of fresh, dry herb and leaf drugs, the percentage of leaves in the herb, dry matter content, essential oil content and total yield of essential oil.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The effects of use of biostimulators on yield and quality of thyme has been conducted in mountain region of Gorski Kotar in cooperation with Center for Agriculture and Rural Development in Stara Sušica. Perennial winter thyme of the "Deutscher Winter" variety has been planted in the plantation. The soil type in Stara Sušica is brown soil on clasts. This terrestrial soil is characterized by automorphic method of wetting, i.e., saturating only by rainwater, with no longer retention of excess water in the soil profile, nor the occurrence of excessive moisture (Husnjak and Bensa 2018). These soil conditions are ideal for thyme cultivation.

Soil analysis was performed before planting. The soil is slightly alkaline, pH 7.8. The results of soil analysis showed a good supply of phosphorus (poor supply of 0-10 mg, optimal 11-20 mg P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> / 100 g soil), optimal supply of potassium (optimal 11-20 mg K<sub>2</sub>O / 100 g soil), high supply of magnesium and total calcium, which is reflected in EC value of 0.23 ds/m. The disintegration of the aggregate is slow, good stability of the aggregate has been determined. Prior to planting, soil preparation and meliorative fertilization with organic pelleted fertilizer was carried out (Bioplantella, 16 kg/per 280m<sup>2</sup>). Organic agriculture has been designated as a production system for the cultivation of thyme in this research.

Thyme was planted manually on 11th of June 2021. Approximately 2000 seedling grown from biological (DEMETER) seeds from free pollination variety were used for forming the plantation. Two-year-old seedlings (Bingenheimer Saatgut A.G.) were grown in containers in standard peat substrate Klasman Steckmedium. Before planting, the seedlings were initially shortened to a height of 6-7 cm. Morphological differences between individual seedlings were observed during pruning.

Field experiment was carried out on 280 m<sup>2</sup> of total area. The research was formed as five blocks experiment – Control (no treatment) and four blocks treated with one of next biostimulators: Amino Vital, Ilsamin N90, Bioplantella Vita and Bombardier. Selected biostimulators belong to the group of biostimulators based on hydrolyzed proteins and amino acids. Table 1 resumes all of the used biostimulators. The deviation from the decelerated content was stated only for biostimulator Bombardier. Among all used biostimulators, only Bombardier has humus extract i.e., it contains fulvo acid (23.1 %)

Table 1. **Biostimulators used in the field experiment**

<i>Biostimulators</i>	<b>AminoVital</b>	<b>Ilsamin N90</b>	<b>Bio Plantella Vita</b>	<b>Bombardier</b>
<i>Percentage of free amino acids</i>	25 %	>10 %	-	13 %
<i>Percentage of nitrogen (N)</i>	8 %	8,9 %	-	8,1 %
<i>Manufacturer's description of biostimulator</i>	Plant strengthening agent containing 50% of amino acids and peptides in dry matter, what matches for 8% of total nitrogen	The formulation is based on a set of free amino acids as a result of enzymatic hydrolase	100% natural multivitamin biostimulator with an ideal combination of organic substances, proteins, amino acids, peptides and vitamins	Biostimulator rich in amino acids, micro and macro nutrients and fulvic acid (humic extract)

Source: declared manufacturer's specifications



Block design of the experiment was as follows: every treatment was carried out in four repetitions on randomly distributed plots of 10 m<sup>2</sup>. Every individual plot consisted of five rows with planting distance of 40x30 cm. There were 17 seedlings of thyme planted in every row. Every seedling contained 3 individual plants.

Hoeing and mulching with sawdust, as well as monitoring and analysis of parameters of agro-ecological conditions were carried out in the plantation. The application of biostimulators was performed three times in intervals of 14 days with the recommended dose of 30 ml/10 liters of water per 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Morphometric parameters of thyme growth were monitored: height and diameter of shrubs, changes in the number of shrubs per plot, and thyme quality parameters (% share of leaves and essential oil content in dried thyme leaves).

In the first year of thyme cultivation, the planned harvest in the initial stages of flowering was not carried out due to the late onset of flowering of the young plantation in late September and early October. The absence of harvest was due to insufficient time for regeneration of shrubs after harvest and the danger of freezing during the winter. Partial sampling of the above-ground part of the herb was performed in order to control the quality in the first year of thyme cultivation in the mountainous areas of Gorski Kotar.

The collected data was analyzed with the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 23, the statistical analysis included ANOVA, Multivariate Analysis of Variance and Tukey test at the significance threshold of p 0.05 and p 0.01.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Initially, biostimulators were used only in organic agricultural production, and over time they were integrated into various cultivation systems (Rouphael and Colla 2020). Correspondingly, the demand for biostimulators and the supply of various biostimulators on the market is increasing, and thus more frequent and intensive scientific research on the effects of individual biostimulators on the growth and yield of various crops is necessary. The effect of the application of selected biostimulators on the growth and quality of herb winter, perennial thyme type "Deutcher Winter", an old standard variety of thyme from free pollination is presented in the following text.

#### **3.1. Effect of biostimulators on thyme morphometric parameters**

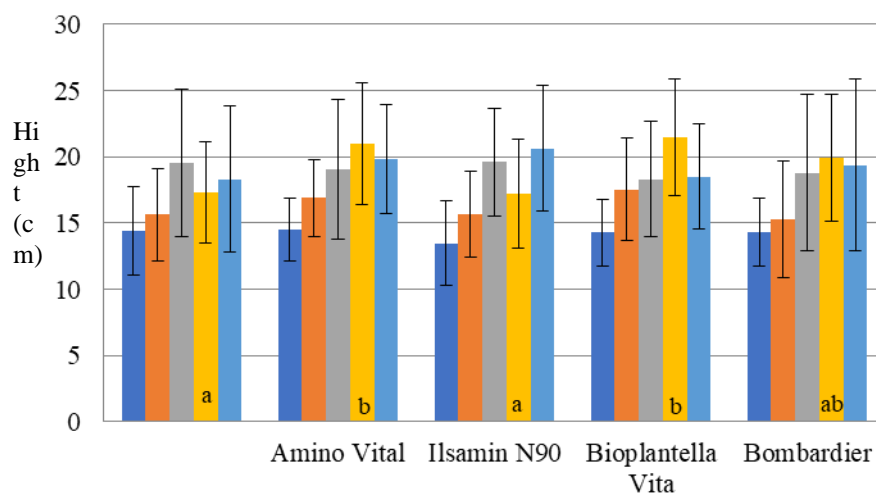
The growth of thyme shrubs under the influence of four different biostimulators in this study was monitored by measuring the height of the bush in five times during vegetation. The first three measurements were performed in the period immediately before treatment with biostimulators. In the first year, the shrubs under treatment reached a height of up to 20 cm on average, while thyme shrubs in control remained lower than 20 cm in height.

Similar results in thyme shrubs growth to a height of approximately 20 cm in the first year of cultivation were achieved in a study of the cultivation of Italian and French thyme in Istria near Pula (Dudaš et al., 2010). Other researches show that thyme rarely grows

over 40 cm (Prasanth et al., 2014), but the height of the bush depends on the variety (Dudaš and Böhme, 2013), technology and growing conditions (Dudaš et. al. 2002).

Statistical analysis of the results showed that in the first three measurements there was no statistically significant difference in plant height among the examined treatments. In the fourth measurement, conducted on September 28, 2021, after the third treatment with biostimulators, a significant difference in plant growth was confirmed in the treatment with biostimulators Amino Vital and Bioplantella Vita in relation to control and treatment Ilsamin N90 (Figure 1). No significant differences in bush height were found between control, Ilsamin90 and Bombardier application.

Figure 1. **The effect of biostimulators on the height of thyme bush**



■ **27.07.** (LSD Tukey 5% = 2.877, 1% = 4.698); ■ **09.08.** (LSD Tukey 5% = 4.467, 1% = 5.235); ■ **29.08.** (LSD Tukey 5% = 3.487, 1% = 4.179); ■ **28.09.** (LSD Tukey 5% = 3.007, 1% = 3.609); ■ **12.11.** (LSD Tukey 5% = 3.458, 1% = 4.15)

Naghdi Badi et. al. (2015) confirm positive effect on growth of thyme shrubs in parameters such as plant height, number of branches, number of leaves, as well as dry matter of stems, leaves and young shoots as a result of application of biostimulators based on amino acids. A significant increase in thymol and carvacrol was also found to be a result of using biostimulants in 20% methanol solution. The positive effect of biostimulators on vegetative growth, root development and even yields has been also confirmed in other plants. Additionally, biostimulators based on seaweed extracts and enzyme hydrolyzed animal protein (Pepton) have a statistically significant positive effect on root development, vegetative growth, flowering and yields of cherry tomato (Polo and Mata 2018). Polo and Mata (2018) also showed how both kind of biostimulants

positively affected not only high of the plant, but also other measured parameters of growth.

Kwiatkowski et al. (2020) studied the effect of application of biostimulants in various concentrations. Growth stimulant Bio-algeen, fertilizer Herbagreen Basic, and Effective Microorganisms in the form of EF Farming spray was used on thyme shrubs. Their results also confirmed positive effects on shrub growth and productivity.

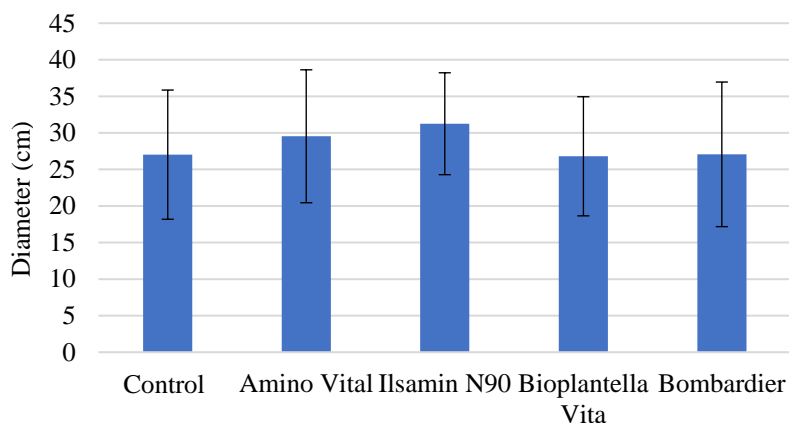
In this research, Bioalgeen - a biostimulator based on algae extracts had a statistically confirmed positive effect after double foliar application on growth and yield of thyme shrubs. Matching results were accomplished in research conducted on butter salad, where Bioalgeen had a significant positive effect on growth, total yield, and reduction of non-marketable yield. Additionally, the positive effect was also measured in the content of total dry matter and vitamin C (Dudaš et al. 2016).

The diameter of thyme bushes in the first year of cultivation ranged between 25 and 30 cm. After three consecutive biostimulator treatments, the diameter of the bush tended to increase in treatments with Amino Vital and Ilsamin N90 (Figure 2.). The effect of triple treatment with biostimulators, however, did not lead to a statistically significant increase in bush diameter.

Juričić (2019) obtained similar results and found that the lowest number of nettle shoots per plant was achieved by using the AminoVital biostimulator. He also found significant differences in the number of nuds among treatments, but only in the second harvest. The diameter of the bush depends directly on the growth of shoots and the number of nuds, i.e., on the activation of lateral buds branching. In the process of harvesting of nettle, the tops of the bush with apical meristems are removed, which inhibit the activation of lateral buds and the development of lateral branches. Therefore, differences in the number of nodules and lateral branches after the first harvest are expected.

The diameter of the thyme bush will increase in the second year of cultivation due to the development of more shoots and due to the removal of apical buds after harvest. Consequently, lateral buds will activate and the develop branches of secondary, tertiary, and higher order.

Figure 2. The effect of biostimulators on thyme bush diameter

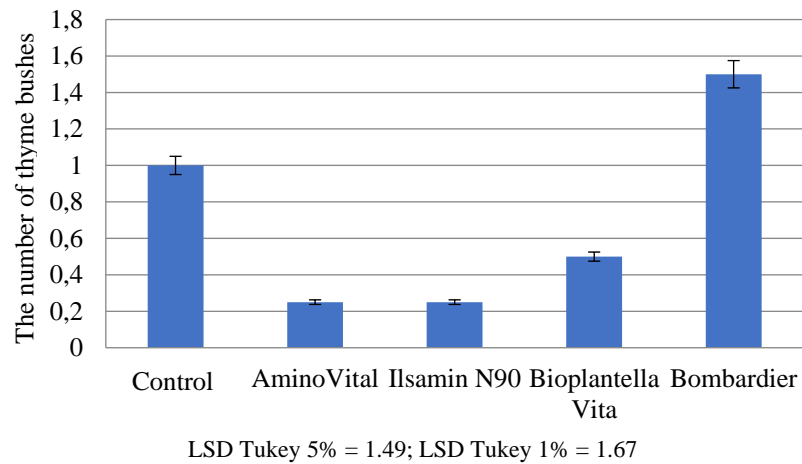


LSD Tukey 5% = 5.948; LSD Tukey 1% = 7.1385

According to research by Juričić (2019), the use of biostimulators Humisar, Phylgreen, AminoVital and Delphan Plus on nettle showed that biostimulants primarily affect net bioactive substances, not on morphometric characteristics of the plant. The highest values in mass, height, number of nodules and number of leaves of a representative shoot were achieved in the treatment of Amino Vital. A statistically significant increase in plant diameter was found to be result of application of the biostimulator Radifarm in the production of pansy seedlings *Viola tricolor* var. *hortensis* DC. Radifarm has been applied in the rhizosphere zone of the seedling, and in its composition contains amino acids, a complex of vitamins, nitrogen, potassium, and iron. A statistically significant increase compared to the control was found in the number of leaves and the number of formed flowers (Zeljkočić et al. 2021).

The number of dried and dead shrubs in the control plot averaged 1 shrub per 10 m<sup>2</sup> (1000 shrubs per ha), while the highest shrub loss was determined from 1.5 shrubs per 10 m<sup>2</sup> (1500 / ha) in Bombardier treatment (Figure 3). However, the loss of shrubs in the plantation must be attributed to the destruction caused by wild animals, deer, and stags, and after replanting the plantation was fenced with an electric fence, the so-called electric shepherd. In the other treatments with biostimulators, reduced loss of shrubs through drying was noted. Similar results on shrub loss after planting and after the first overwintering of thyme plantations were observed in the cultivation of seven different varieties of perennial winter thyme in a location with milder winter conditions in a location with a maritime influence in northern Europe (Dudaš et al. 2002).

Figure 3. Loss of thyme bushes per plot

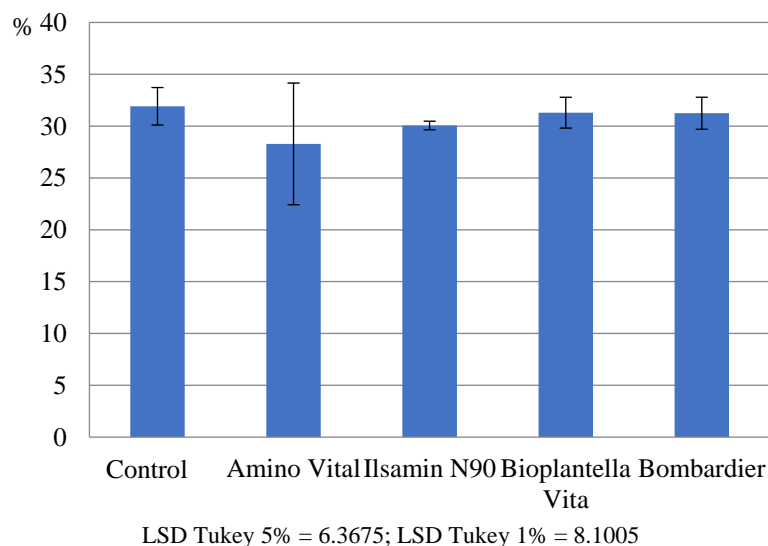


### 3.2. The effect of biostimulant application on quality parameters of thyme

The quality of aromatic and medicinal plants is defined by the dry matter content, the percentage of leaves in the dry herb and the content of bioactive compounds.

The ratio of fresh to dry mass is an indicator of the loss in mass of the plant of thyme in the drying process. Herbs with a higher water content, i.e., a lower dry matter content, will have a less favorable ratio of fresh to dry mass after drying. Drying of fresh thyme herb is carried out at temperatures of 35-45 ° C to preserve the essential oil to an average moisture content of 10%.

Figure 4. Fresh to dry mass ratio

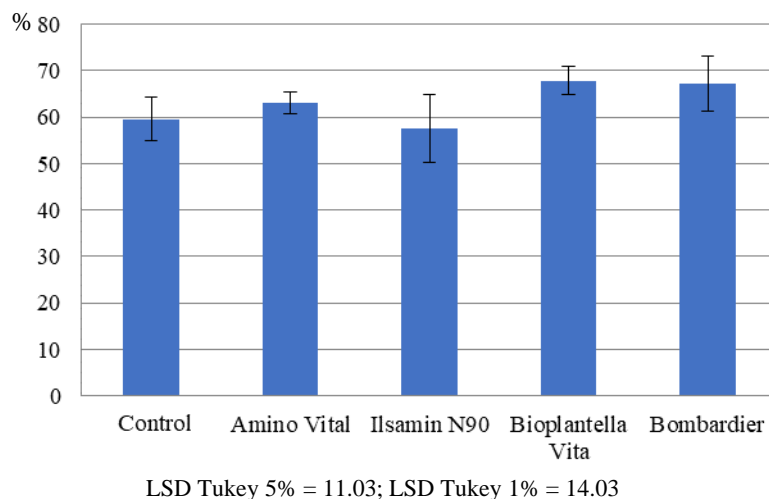


Of the initial total mass (100%), an average of 30% remains after drying fresh thyme herb (Figure 4). No statistically significant differences in fresh to dry weight ratios were found between the tested treatments in the first year of cultivation and after triple application of the biostimulator.

Naghdi Badi et al. (2015) found a significant increase in dry matter of stems, leaves and young shoots as the effect of the use of biostimulators based on amino acids called Kadostim, Fosnutren, Humiforte and Aminolforte in 10% and 20% methanol solution. Juričić (2019) confirmed the increase in dry matter content in nettle. The dry matter content of nettles was on average 24.78% in the control and 25.19% in the treatment with the biostimulator AminoVital in the herb from the first harvest. In the second harvest, the dry matter content of the herb was increased to 32.99% in the control and 29.86% in the treatment with AminoVital. It is expected that in the second year of thyme cultivation the dry matter content will also increase, especially in the herb from the second harvest of the same year, which is initiated by the growth of thyme in summer, during warm, dry and intensely sunny months.

A significant indicator of the quality of dry herb is the share of leaves in dry herb. The lowest percentage of leaves in the dry herb was found in the treatment with the biostimulator Ilsamin N90 and averaged 57.6 %, the highest in the treatment of Bioplantella Vita with 67.9 % (Figure 5). The percentage of leaves in the control averaged 59.6 %. The content of dry matter has a tendency of increasing in treatments with Amino Vital, Bioplantella Vita and Bombardier. One of the main goals in thyme breeding is to improve the share of leaves to more than 50% in dried thyme herb. All treatments, including control in the experiment met the quality criterion of at least 50 % leaf content in dried thyme herb.

Figure 5. Percentage of leaves in dry herb



The highest amount of essential oil was determined in the treatment with Bombardier biostimulator (2.79 ml/100 g), 2.71 ml/100 g in the treatment with Ilsamin N90; Biopiantella Vita and Amino Vital contained 2.57 ml/100 grams of leaves, and the minimum amount of essential oil of 2.46 ml/100 g of leaves was determined in the control. All treatments in the experiment, including control significantly exceeded the minimum quality criteria of the thyme leaf drug of the German Pharmacopoeia (DAB 2020) with 1.5 and the European Pharmacopoeia (EuPh 10.0) with 1.2 ml/100 grams of dry leaf.

In his research, Juričić (2019) found a significant increase in the content of bioactive compounds (phenols, nonflavonoids and flavonoids) in treatment with biostimulators Humistar, Phyl green and Delphan Plus, while the treatment with AminoVital lowered the content of phenolic compounds, nonflavonoids and flavonoids compared to control and other treatments. Thyme essential oils contain considerable amount of phenolic compounds and it is to be expected that biostimulators will have a significant effect in the second year of cultivation. Naghdi Badi et. al. (2015) confirm the statistically significant effect of amino acid-based biostimulators in 10 and 20% methanol solution on the essential oil content and thymol and carvacrol in *Thymus vulgaris* L. essential oil.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the results in the study of the effects of different biostimulators on the growth and quality of thyme *Thymus vulgaris* L. grown in the mountainous regions of Gorski Kotar, the following can be concluded: in the first year of thyme cultivation, after three treatments with biostimulators, 14 days apart, the positive effect of Amino Vital and Ilsamin N90 was statistically confirmed to affect the height of thyme shrubs.

The diameter of the bush in the first year of cultivation reached 25-30 cm, at a planting distance of 40 x 30 cm, the rows were not completely closed until autumn, which is unfavorable due to the increased possibility of weed development.

Triple treatment with biostimulators in the first year of thyme cultivation did not significantly affect the quality parameters such as the share of leaves in the dry herb and the content of essential oil in the dry leaf. Share of leaves in dried thyme herb is a parameter that is not subject to significant changes due to agricultural practices, it is stable and genetically determined. In the cultivation of thyme in mountainous areas, the minimum requirements of 50% of leaves in the dry herb is met in all treatments. The average content of essential oil in dry leaf is 2.62 ml / 100 grams of dry leaf, the minimum quality criteria are prescribed in the European Pharmacopoeia of 1.2 ml / 100g and in the German Pharmacopoeia (DAB) with 1.5 ml / 100g of dry leaf are significantly exceeded.

Thyme is a perennial plant that can reach ten years of age in nature, and it usually remains in cultivation for up to three years. The research of the effects of biostimulants on the growth and quality of thyme will continue in the same plantation for the next two years. Additional attention in the research will be focused on the parameters with established positive effects of biostimulants and the quality of dry drugs and essential oil.

Special thanks to the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development of Primorje – Gorski Kotar County in Stara Sušica for cooperation, providing areas for field experiment, purchasing of seedlings and support in conducting research, but particularly for the possibility of growing aromatic and medicinal plants in the hilly areas of Primorje – Gorski Kotar County.

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**EFFECTS OF BIOSTIMULANTS ON *THYMUS VULGARIS* L. 'DEUTCHER WINTER'  
CULTIVATED IN MOUNTAIN REGION OF CROATIA**

**Stela Pleša**  
**Melita Zec Vojinović**  
**Marin Tomičić**  
**Martina Peršić**  
**Slavica Dudaš**

**Abstract**

Thyme is a perennial shrub whose cultivars enable differentiate cultivation in temperate continental, hilly or Mediterranean areas, and is used as a spice, medicinal or aromatic plant for the production of essential oils. A three-year study of the effects of biostimulants on thyme growth started by establishing a field experiment in June 2021. Biostimulants influences biochemical processes of the plant to enable a fully realization of the genetic potential of productivity due to changes in hormonal status, activation of metabolic processes, increasing dietary efficiency, stimulating growth, development and strengthening the ability to withstand abiotic and biotic stresses. The aim of using different biostimulants as Amino Vital, Ilsamin N90, BioPlantella Vita and Bombardier in field experiment is to strengthen plant resistance and to minimize the use of synthetic chemicals in the cultivation of high quality medicinal drugs. The parameters included in present research overwintering and frost hardiness, the height of shrubs, the yield of fresh, dry herb and leaf drugs, the percentage of leaves in the herb, dry matter content, essential oil content and total yield of essential oil (lha<sup>-1</sup>). In the first year of cultivation, three foliar treatments with biostimulants were carried out and the initial effects of biostimulants were observed on the growth of shrubs, the height and diameter of shrubs.

**Keywords:** biostimulators, growth, morphometrical parameters, quality, thyme, yield

**Stela Pleša**  
Student of professional study Mediterranean agriculture  
Polytechnic of Rijeka  
Agricultural Department Poreč  
Karla Huguesa 6  
52440 Poreč  
[splesa@veleri.hr](mailto:splesa@veleri.hr)

**Melita Zec Vojinović**  
PhD, lecturer  
Polytechnic of Rijeka  
Vukovarska 58  
51000 Rijeka  
[melita.zec-vojinovic@veleri.hr](mailto:melita.zec-vojinovic@veleri.hr)

**Marin Tomičić**  
MS ing. hort., assistant  
Polytechnic of Rijeka  
Vukovarska 58  
51000 Rijeka  
[mtomicic@veleri.hr](mailto:mtomicic@veleri.hr)

**Martina Peršić**  
PhD, lecturer  
Polytechnic of Rijeka

Vukovarska 58  
51000 Rijeka  
[mpersic1@veleri.hr](mailto:mpersic1@veleri.hr)

**Slavica Dudaš**  
Doc. PhD, senior lecturer, mentor  
Veleučilište u Rijeci  
Vukovarska 58  
51000 Rijeka  
[sdudas@veleri.hr](mailto:sdudas@veleri.hr)

## PREDICTIONS OF GENERATION “Z” ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN THE POSTCOVID PERIOD

**Drago Ružić**  
**Ivan Ružić**  
**Petra Popek Biškupec**

### **Abstract**

Gastronomic experiences enrich tourism by providing unforgettable travel experience by combining local culture, landscape, food and wine. The Covid 19 pandemic affected tourism on a large scale and reset common knowledge about tourist behaviour in “old normal” period. The post-covid period requires questioning of tourist behaviour in the coming “new normal” reality. The heterogeneity of tourist demand, which is also manifested in gastronomic tourism, covers a wide range from neophobic to neophilic behaviour with signs of strengthening interest in local food. The change in tourist behaviour caused by the pandemic will not be equally evident in all tourist segments. This pilot study aims to examine the predictive impact of changes in the Generation Z (born after 2000), on a deliberate sample of final year students. The purpose of this pilot study is to classify the psychographic profiles of the student population depending on their interest in gastronomic tourism. The objectives of this research are to investigate the responses of self-classified respondents as potential gastronomic tourists to a set of gastronomic-tourist activities with regard to demographic characteristics; classify dominant lifestyles and values among gastronomic tourists; and analyse the classification of lifestyles and values of students as potential gastronomic tourists in terms of VALS three primary motivations: ideals, achievement and self-expression. The results of the research can serve as a starting point for creating appropriate strategic determinants and directions for the development of tourism and gastronomic offer.

**Keywords:** Covid 19, gastronomic tourism, Generation Z, consumer behaviour

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The changes caused by the Covid 19 pandemic have greatly affected tourism and have encouraged new forms of tourist behaviour oriented to individualized products and services of high quality and specific characteristics. The gastronomic offer is becoming an increasingly important component of the tourist stay. Gastronomic tourism as a special type of tourism, has showed the rapid growth, where the gastronomic experience becomes the primary or secondary motive for choosing a destination. During the pandemic period, consumers in their daily diet, have changed their habits, which is reflected in changes in eating habits during tourist trips.

The most important change is the growing trend of plant-based diets, as people are better acquainted with the multiple health implications associated with a meat-based diet. They began to turn to local food suppliers and quality and organically grown food. People are more oriented towards the flexitarian diet: meat becomes a food that is consumed only once in a long period or only on weekends and is not a daily part of the regular rotation of meals. According to Whole Foods Market (2021), the other side of the flexic diet

means that the highest quality meat, dairy and eggs are also in demand. This is because consumers are more aware of animal welfare and care for the environment, so they focus on quality instead of quantity. According to the Bailey (2021), "The past 19 months have seen us fall back in love with our homes. We've rediscovered the fun, creativity and sense of togetherness that food brings to our households and many have embraced the inspiration that we get from popping to the shops to pick up our groceries. The majority of the people we surveyed told us the pandemic has fundamentally changed their outlook: they're more conscious of their mental and physical health, they're enjoying life's simple pleasures, and they've embraced the importance of family and friends". Waitrose's (2022) food and drink report found that nearly 70% of customers said that the carbon footprint of their food was important to them. Food and drink have become central to people's lives. People enjoy rituals associated with eating and drinking. There is also a greater awareness of the origin of food. According to the results of the Waitrose's survey, 47% respondents declared that they value local products more than before on the nutritional needs and preferences of tourists.

Therefore, in creating the future tourist offer, food will play a significant role as a determinant and element of strengthening potential opportunities to maximize the benefits of economic and regional development.

## **2. DEFINING THE TERM GASTRONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM**

Although "gastronomy" is defined as the art of eating and drinking, it is an interconnected branch of art and science that has a direct relationship with chemistry, biology, geology, literature, history, music, philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, nutrition and agriculture (Kivela and Crotts 2006). Since it is about food and drink, gastronomy covers areas such as food science, sense of tasting and physiology, wine production and other drinks, functions of nutrients in the human body, determining quality in food selection and development of production processes in accordance with hygienic and sanitary norms to prevent physical, chemical and biological processes from endangering food (Shenoy 2005). The purpose of gastronomy is to maintain human health with the best nutrition and ensure enjoyment of life and nutrition. The gastronomy refers to the food and drink that is produced in hygienic conditions and that is ready for consumption in a way that will encourage palatal and visual pleasure.

There are two psychological dimensions that control food consumption in general but also among tourists: Food neophobia (shy away from new and unknown foods), and Food Neophilia (curiosity and willingness to taste new foods). Nutritional neophilia is described as a motivating factor that motivates many tourists to try local food and encourages the phenomenon of gastronomic tourism (Lin et al 2011; Dimitrovski and Crespi-Vallbona 2017). Neophile food consumers are described as gourmands or people who enjoy food.

There is no unambiguous term in the Croatian literature that would describe the situation when food is the main or secondary motive for a tourist trip. The terms enogastronomic, gastronomic or, less frequently, culinary tourism is most often mentioned. Sometimes

the term gourmet or gourmet tourism can be encountered. In the Anglo-Saxon-speaking area, it is also possible to find various terms that emphasize the link between food and tourism (Kuan-Huei 2014):

- Gastronomy tourism: emphasis is placed on travel for the purpose of exploring and enjoying the food and drink of the destination and enjoying unique and unforgettable gastronomic experiences (Kivela and Crotts 2005).
- Culinary tourism: the emphasis is on the destination of food authenticity that brings the unique experience (Long 1998).
- Food tourism: the emphasis is on visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific places, where food tasting and experience of attributes of specialized regions in food production are primary motivating factors of travel (Hall et al 2001).
- Tasting tourism: emphasis is placed on travel to destinations for food and beverage tasting (Boniface 2003).
- Restaurant tourism: the significant role is put on the hospitality industry in the tourism experience and destination selection (Sparks et al 2003).
- Wine tourism: a form of special interest based on the desire to visit wine-producing regions, including gastronomic offer (Brown and Getz 2005).
- Gourmet tourism: where participate tourists with a great interest in food and wine; their traveling motivation is primarily to visit certain food events or farmers markets. Most of their activities are related to food (Hall and Sharples 2008).

It could be concluded that in Anglo-Saxon sources three terms predominantly exist as synonyms: Food Tourism, Culinary Tourism or Gastronomy Tourism. The official position of the World Food Travel Association (2020) is that these three terms are functionally equal.

### **2.1. Habits and attitudes of consumers in gastronomic tourism**

Contemporary awareness of nutrition can only be properly understood if it is considered historical destination development whose critical aspects and outcomes have led to the current situation. In fact, over time, there have been changes in scientific knowledge, food availability, and methods of processing and canning. Commercial trade in food has increased significantly so that it has defined a completely different scenario than in the past and affected food availability, distribution models, canning methods and the composition of individual foods.

Ignoring this important many evolutionary elements that led to the current state of the human diet, it could be concluded that today the usual diet is the rotation of meals in the consumption of food preparations and is influenced by many factors that result in recognizable food "landscapes", ie many local cuisines. However, several causes can lead to disorders and there is a constant need and aspiration to strike a balance between the latest scientific knowledge, technological advances, food intake traditions and dietary trends.

The Covid 19 pandemic has changed many human activities and has indicated new dietary trends. The ongoing changes in the food economy need to be viewed critically and far-sightedly. In the times of upheaval, the key is to assess which changes will remain in the long run and which will disappear after current crisis. In the future, "New Normal" will be more adapted to the needs and tourist demand; and sustainability, in its ecological and social sense, is becoming as much a new criterion of quality as transparency and credibility.

## **2.2. Characteristics of generation "Z" and prediction of their behaviour in gastronomic tourism**

Information on local cuisine and gastronomic facilities is important for potential visitors of the destination. Accordingly, in order to understand the perspectives of potential consumers and future trends related to food and beverage travel, students born after 2000 were specially selected for this research. Namely, according to sociologists, all people born in a certain period develop certain common characteristics. After the popular baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y or popularly called 'millennials' (1981-1995), the generation of completely new "kids" came - Generation Z.

Generation Z includes all those born between 1995 and 2011. The most important feature of the members is the "mobile phone in hand". This is a generation that, unlike its predecessors, grew up with technology. It has always been normal for them to look for everything they are interested in on the Internet, and in addition, statistics show that, unlike millennials, the members of Generation Z are heavily involved in creating Internet content. Therefore, social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok and Snapchat are also very popular, while Facebook is losing some popularity (Petrock, 2021). According to research by scientists (Gaidhani, 2019), the main features of this generation are, logically, closely related to the emergence of digitalization. It is normal that the Zoomers, who are miles away, lose interest in face-to-face meetings. Generation Z tends to be impatient, instant, without the ambitions of previous generations, has acquired an attention deficit disorder with a high dependence on technology and a low range of attention, an individualistic, self-centered, most demanding, acquisitive, materialistic generation (Rose, 2011). Mihelich (2013) described Generation Z as very concerned about environmental issues, very aware of threatening water shortages, indicating that they have a high sense of responsibility towards natural resources. Amanda Slavin (2015) believes that Generation Z wants to be heard regardless of their young age. Technology is part of their identity and they are technically savvy, but do not have problem-solving skills and have not shown the ability to see the situation, put it into context, analyse it and make a decision (Coombs, 2013).

According to estimations made by the WYSE Travel Confederation and the UNWTO, youth travel in 2017 amounted 23% of all tourist travel in the world (WYSE, 2018). The reasons for such a situation are multiple. First, these are people who do not know the world without modern technologies - computers, mobile phones and Internet access are present in their lives almost all their lives. For many of them, the line between real life and online reality is blurred (Seweryn, 2018). In this light, tourism is for them an alternative that allows them to detach themselves from the virtual world and open up to



new experiences and social values that are only available in real life. Second, in the global world, the barrier of geographical isolation is disappearing, as it is possible to connect with Internet users from other countries at any time (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018). Therefore, Generation Z is one of the most open generations in terms of tourism. According to the research made by Expedia Media Solutions, Expedia's advertising arm, and published by Skift (2017), members of Generation Z travel 29 days per year (Sheivachman, 2017). Third, young people usually know foreign languages and find themselves easily in a multicultural environment, which facilitates the establishment of global relationships (Wood, 2013). Fourth, their motto is YOLO (You Only Live Once), so they like to travel and don't feel afraid to leave home. Fifth, representatives of Generation Z are not afraid of distance. Therefore, if they have the opportunity, many of them decide to go on a journey, learn about the world (Zajadacz & Kugiejko, 2016).

### **2.3. Gastronomic tourism as a determinant of the future development of tourism in the Republic of Croatia**

The gastronomic offer has become an unavoidable topic to attract domestic and foreign visitors to a destination (Crespi-Vallbona & Dimitrovski, 2016; Horng & Tsai, 2010). Many destinations use food as one of the main attractions in marketing communication (Lin et al. 2011) to highlight this advantage and expand its potential market base (McKercher et al., 2008). In addition, tourism professionals are very interested in a clear understanding of restaurant behaviour and visitor choices to improve decision-making in marketing areas (Min and Lee 2014), particularly consumer relationship management (Lee et al. 2016). Gastronomic tourism has become a critical part of the development of tourist destinations (Kim et al 2009). This type of tourism is advancing as a new tourist asset due to the findings that one third of the travel budget is spent on food (Telfer and Wall 2000) and therefore domestic food is an important element in assessing the quality of vacation. One of the most used descriptions of gastronomic tourism (Hall and Mitchell 2001: 308) is: "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel". According to Harrington and Ottenbacher (2010), this is a type of tourism that has enormous added value in behaviour and motivation to travel and food experience. Gastronomic tourism is closely related to the lifestyle that counts towards experience, learning cultures through eating and features related to gastronomic tourism (Diaconescu and Nistoreanu 2013.) Finally, if the above factors are fundamental motivation to travel to a particular place the gourmet tourism could be described as relevant (Gheorghie et al. 2014).

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The survey was made in the period 13 February till 13 March 2022 and was conducted among student population in the region of central and eastern Croatia. There were 75 valid answers. The survey questionnaire covered questions that are related to the attitudes and preferences of members of Generation Z on gastronomic tourism. The aim of the research was to gain data for determination attitudes and preferences of Generation Z members.

The most important gastronomic characteristics of Generation Z derived from research are:

- 64,0% of respondents classify itself as opportunistic gastronomic tourists for whom food is incidental or second travel motive
- 69,3% of respondents consume meat every day
- 56% of respondents would certainly not participate in an education or workshop related to the preparation of food and beverages during the trip
- 52% of respondents would like to have meals in a restaurant with a Michelin recommendation
- 50,7% of respondents would participate in tasting food or beverages during the trip
- 50,7% of respondents would buy local or traditional food while traveling
- 70,7% of respondents are willing to pay a higher price if the restaurant offers natural / ecological / organic ingredients in their meals

After conducting the most important characteristics of Generation Z due to gastronomic tourism, the factor analysis detected relevant statistical information. Factor analysis is a technique for reducing variables to a smaller number of factors. This technique is used for grouping factors and detecting relevant statistical information. Due to the factor analysis, maximum common variance from all variables is extracted and put into a common score (Rummel, 1970). Factor analysis assumes several principles: linear relationship among variables, no multicollinearity, and existence of true correlation between variables and factors (Child, 1990).

Table 1. **Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
The gastronomic offer is important when choosing a tourist destination	3.77	1.021	75
When going to a restaurant, it is important that the restaurant works with local suppliers	3.32	1.296	75
It is important that the restaurant offers natural and organic ingredients	3.37	1.171	75

Source: Authors' calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

Descriptive statistics included arithmetic mean and the standard deviation for each statement. The high value of the arithmetic means (3,77) indicates that the gastronomic offer is important for members of generation Z when choosing a tourist destination. According to value of standard deviation (1.021), the most common answer referred to the “The gastronomic offer is important when choosing a tourist destination.”

The measurement of internal consistency and reliability Cronbach`s Alpha is 0,708, what means that there is high degree of reliability.

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.715	.708	3

Source: Authors` calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

Factor analysis is performed in order to reduce the manifest variables to a smaller number of dimensions. The first step of the analysis is to check the suitability of the correlation matrix for factorization. Since factor analysis uses correlations between variables, it should be checked whether the variables are correlated before starting the procedure, and the Bartlett sphericity test is used for this purpose. Bartlett’s test determines whether all correlations between variables are equal to zero. (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test are presented in Table 2.

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.605
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	52.223
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Source: Authors` calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

According to the results of the Bartlett test ( $p < .001$ ), there is statistical significance. The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.602) is acceptable and preferred.

Furthermore, it is necessary to provide the extraction by an appropriate procedure and to justify the choice of the method for factor extraction. In this paper the Principal Components method is selected. After the procedure, the Community Matrix was obtained and the proportion of variance of each variable was explained by the extracted factors.

**Table 4. Communalities**

	Initial	Extraction
The gastronomic offer is important when choosing a tourist destination	1.000	.417
When going to a restaurant, it is important that the restaurant works with local suppliers	1.000	.763
It is important that the restaurant offers natural and organic ingredients	1.000	.733

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Authors` calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

The value of extraction at the level 0.763 and 0.733 is considered acceptable, so it can be concluded that is very important that the restaurants work with local suppliers and offer natural and organic ingredients.

Based on the Principal Component Analysis, a decision is made on the number of factors that are justified to retain and describe possible criteria for factor retention. Varimax factor rotation was chosen for factor rotation to minimize the number of variables that have a high load on each factor.

**Table 5. Component Matrix**

	Component 1
The gastronomic offer is important when choosing a tourist destination	.873
When going to a restaurant, it is important that the restaurant works with local suppliers	.856
It is important that the restaurant offers natural and organic ingredients	.646

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.<sup>a</sup>

a. 1 components extracted.

Source: Authors` calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

According to the results given in Table 4, the gastronomic offer and working with local suppliers have strong loading. The results of the total variance are given in Table 5. It is visible that the first two components describe 88,629 % of total variance.

**Table 6. Total Variance Explained**

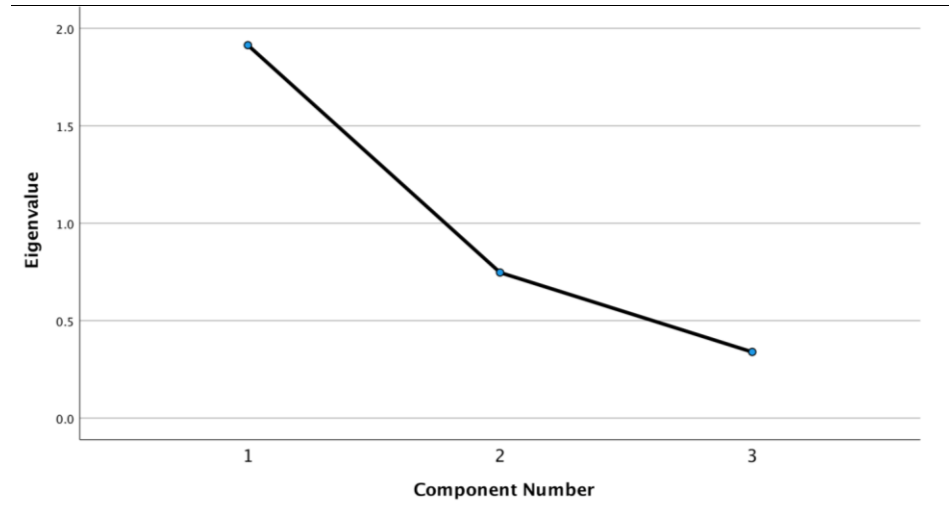
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.914	63.791	63.791	1.914	63.791	63.791
2	.747	24.900	88.692			
3	.339	11.308	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Authors` calculations based on analysis using SPSS program

Based on the graphical representation (Figure 1), the number of factor retentions is determined. Only the variable "The gastronomic offer is important when choosing a tourist destination" is greater than 1.

Figure 1. Scree Plot / Eigenvalue



According to the Scree Plot, it is confirmed the main starting point, that for members of Generation Z the gastronomic offer is important for choosing a tourist destination.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The development of tourism needs has to be defined through continuous monitoring of the attitudes and preferences of consumers, especially young people who in the near future will be fully profiled tourists with full purchasing power. Due to the definition of adequate models of tourism development, the paper conducted a survey of Generation Z members on their preferences related to gastronomic tourism. The results of the research show that gastronomic offer has significant impact for determination of tourist destination for members of Generation Z. In accordance with the obtained results, the development of gastronomic tourism should be reflected in strengthening cooperation with local suppliers and focusing on organic and foods in the restaurant's offer.

The limitations of the research are evident in the relatively short time in which the survey questionnaire was available and in a small number of respondents. This can be considered as a pilot study and a more extensive analysis is recommended according to a similar model.

The results of the research are extremely important for decision makers for the development of a tourist destination and future policies and strategies for tourism sustainable growth.

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## **PREDICTIONS OF GENERATION “Z” ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN THE POSTCOVID PERIOD**

**Prof.dr.sc. Drago Ružić**  
**Dr.sc. Ivan Ružić, prof.v.š.**  
**Dr.sc. Petra Popek Biškupec, prof.v.š**

### **Abstract**

Gastronomic experiences enrich tourism by providing unforgettable travel experience by combining local culture, landscape, food and wine. The Covid 19 pandemic affected tourism on a large scale and reset common knowledge about tourist behaviour in “old normal” period. The post-covid period requires questioning of tourist behaviour in the coming “new normal” reality. The heterogeneity of tourist demand, which is also manifested in gastronomic tourism, covers a wide range from neophobic to neophilic behaviour with signs of strengthening interest in local food. The change in tourist behaviour caused by the pandemic will not be equally evident in all tourist segments. This pilot study aims to examine the predictive impact of changes in the Generation Z (born after 2000), on a deliberate sample of final year students. The purpose of this pilot study is to classify the psychographic profiles of the student population depending on their interest in gastronomic tourism. The objectives of this research are to investigate the responses of self-classified respondents as potential gastronomic tourists to a set of gastronomic-tourist activities with regard to demographic characteristics; classify dominant lifestyles and values among gastronomic tourists; and analyse the classification of lifestyles and values of students as potential gastronomic tourists in terms of VALS three primary motivations: ideals, achievement and self-expression. The results of the research can serve as a starting point for creating appropriate strategic determinants and directions for the development of tourism and gastronomic offer.

**Keywords:** Covid 19, gastronomic tourism, Generation Z, consumer behaviour

**Prof.dr.sc. Drago Ružić**  
Ekonomski fakultet Osijek  
Trg Ljudevita Gaja 7, Osijek  
[ruzicd@gmail.com](mailto:ruzicd@gmail.com)

**Dr.sc. Ivan Ružić, prof.v.š.**  
Veleučilište s pravom javnosti Baltazar Zaprešić  
Vladimira Novaka 23, Zaprešić  
[iruzic@bak.hr](mailto:iruzic@bak.hr)

**Dr.sc. Petra Popek Biškupec, prof.v.š**  
Veleučilište s pravom javnosti Baltazar Zaprešić  
Vladimira Novaka 23, Zaprešić  
[pbiskupec@bak.hr](mailto:pbiskupec@bak.hr)



## THE ROLE OF SMARTPHONE IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM BOOST

**Zacharoula Andreopoulou**

**Argyrios Georgilas**

**Thekla Tsitsoni**

**Marianthi Tsakaldimi**

### **Abstract**

On 21st century, social media platforms were launched and dominated the field of communication, whilst their usage raises constantly. The incorporation of a camera into smartphones, boosted the usage of the medium. Photos constitute the dominant posted content in social media, and a unique content for some platforms. Ecotourism activities, either a simple visit for walk or a trip in a beautiful landscape, is usually enriched by the activity of photography, which further enriches the tourist experience. When shared online, even in real time, it promotes the acknowledgement of beautiful landscapes and augments their visits. Nature based tourism is being used as a lever for local development of rural/mountainous areas.

The aim of this paper is to study the role of photography and smartphone within ecotourism especially during the pandemic. The role of the smartphone is examined in the promotion of nature-based tourism activities. The shared online photographic data can be used as research material for assessing visitors' satisfaction and for economic evaluation of recreational ecosystem services.

For the research, 501 questionnaires were completed online. The great majority of nature based tourists capture the landscape in a photo while visiting a natural landscape, mostly using their mobile camera. Nature beauty of the landscape as a main tourist resource is depicted in the visitor's photos. Three quarters of them, share these photos on social media. This social media photographic content while of zero cost, promoted the high value of natural environment and further enhanced ecotourism visits.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Nature based tourism, Photography, Smart phone, social media

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since July 1841 when Thomas Cook organized the first excursion between Leicester and Loughborough, marking the beginning of contemporary mass tourism (Walton 2010), and the invention during the same era of the photographic camera by Nicéphore Niépce, Louis Daguerre and Henry Fox Talbot (Hirsch 2017), tourism and photography gained benefits of one another and evolved in intertwined ways. In 1888, the introduction of the first easy to use portable photographic camera by KODAK turned the medium into an essential holiday accessory that contributed the most in shaping the tourist identity ever since. The idea of capturing images and "preserving" memories became commonplace and photographs turned into the most significant proof of a visit to a tourism destination (Robinson and Picard 2009). Right after World War II Polaroid introduced the first camera with real time printing capability. Photography passed into the digital era in 1975 with the invention of the Charged Couple Device (CCD) (Hirsch 2017).

The evolution of the simple mobile phone into a smartphone at the beginning of the new millennia revolutionized and boosted the use of the apparatus in everyday life by combining mobile telephone, computing, internet and multimedia functions into a pocket size portable device (Reid 2018). The integration of the photographic camera into the smartphone has enhanced the relationship between photography and travel, especially after the launch of social media platforms such as Facebook in 2003 (Larsen 2008). In less than ten years almost 90% of the tourists were using their mobile phone as a camera with nearly half of them sharing photo and video content on Social Media (Lo et. al. 2011). This ability of real time capture and share of photographic content has evolved the very nature and essence of the tourist experience. The visitation proof offered by the art of photography during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been transformed from “I have been there” to the emphatic “I am here, now!” at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the usage of the smartphones (Larsen 2008). The multimedia content produced by smartphones gain a rising importance that have to be explored throughout space and time. Research that answers why, when, how, what and with whom users choose to create and share multimedia content is vital information for tourism markets and destinations management (Urry and Larsen 2011). The shared on social media multimedia content combined with text from the tourists is considered to provide more reliable information than the marketing and advertisement campaigns of the tourist business and destinations managers. In the social media environment, users are both consumers and producers of the digital culture and can influence the holiday choices and programming of the tourists (Schmallegger and Carson 2008). The tourist, using his mobile phone as a camera can enhance his experiences in relation with places, himself and others and himself in the passage of time. ‘Selfies’ photos using the smartphone as a camera is a significant globally growing trend (Lo 2012). The usual categories of photographic content produced by tourists in natural areas are landscapes, plants and animals, human activities, poses and selfies, accommodation structures and food (Hausmann et. al. 2018).

The wider concept of ecotourism tourism concerns various leisure activities provided to guests at the countryside or forest areas. The manifestation of these activities depends on the special natural characteristics, the landscape and cultural heritage of rural areas (Lane 1994). Contrary to mass tourism globally standardized procedures, ecotourism formation depends a lot on the way that locals and tourists interact and conceptualize the meaning of rural space and think of rurality as a lifestyle that cultivates expectations for quality living in broad countryside areas (Cloke and Park 1984). Inhabitants in urban areas tend to beautify the idea of life in the province and form the conception of rural idyll. The profile of contemporary tourists, especially in younger ages fits in people who seek monumental and cultural heritage sites, natural and wild areas and authentic experience activities. The entrepreneurship concerning tourism in the countryside is associated with this rural idyll for the creation of specific and attractive tourism products (Duruz 1999). During the Covid-19 era, although

mass tourism collapsed, rural area visitations gained a high importance in the way people coped with the necessary social distancing needs. Research findings across Europe showed a significant rise of visitation rates in rural areas and forests when conditions allowed these visits to take place. All these excursions created a rising trend towards future ecotourism development (De Haas et. al. 2020; Derks et. al. 2020; Georgilas et. al. 2021).

The needs for social distancing in order to minimize the spread of the covid-19 coronavirus during 2020 and 2021 made even more important the use of information and communication technologies among citizens and contributed the most in decision making concerning tourist behaviors and the formation of tourist trends (Andreopoulou et. al. 2016). The rising use of the internet and social media during the era of the covid-19 boosted the use of smartphones (Tankovska 2021). The purpose of this research is to explore the rising importance of the use of the smartphone as a communication, photographic camera and social media portal in the boost of ecotourism at the post covid-19 era and relate demographic characteristics such as age and gender of the users, to specific behaviors.

## 2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research took place between 12/4/21 and 19/4/21 while social distancing was still necessary. The creation of a questionnaire consisted of 19 closed ended questions and 5 demographic ones was the chosen method to perform a quantitative research. The questionnaire was distributed through social media (mostly Facebook) with no specific targeting concerning profiles and groups. At the end of the first year of the pandemic (since its beginning on March 10, 2020), social media users were requested to complete the questionnaire only in case they have managed to visit an area of natural beauty or a forest, at least once during the pandemic. Not knowing the specific amount of the population that visited rural areas for covering their touristic needs during the pandemic and taking under considerations that a part of this population that doesn't use social media was excluded, it was necessary to calculate a sample quantity in order to extract conclusions that will match the data of the whole population with specific accuracy (Dimopoulos 2004). In order to achieve a 95% accuracy with only a 5% chance of statistical error, independent of the size of the population, a sample of 384 completed questionnaires is necessary according to the following type (Aaker and Day 1990, Akis et. al. 1996):

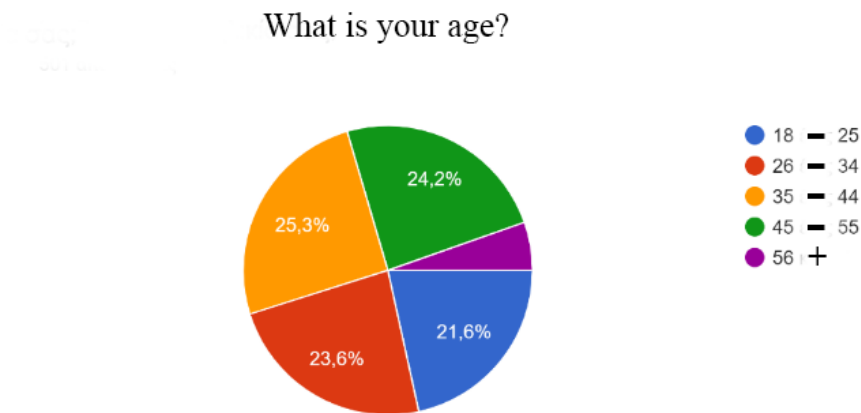
$$N = \frac{Z^2(\text{hypothesis})}{S^2} \Rightarrow N = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2} \Rightarrow N = 384.16$$

A final number of 501 questionnaires was successfully completed. The data was imported in IBM's SPSS statistical software application and managed for frequencies distribution analysis and check of possible correlations between the questionnaire parameters.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The part of the data of the research concerning the usage of the smartphone as a camera and as a social media portal in relevance with rural tourism promotion is analyzed and matched with the demographics of the sample as follows:

Graf 1. Age categories of the sample and their percentage

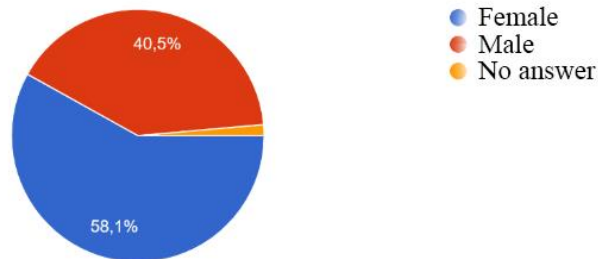


Source: authors

All age groups are represented with a percentage between 21,6% and 25,3, except respondents over 55 years old that represent a 5,3% of the sample (Graf. 1)

Graf 2. Gender of the sample

### What is your gender?



Source: authors

The ratio between females and males of the sample are almost 6 to 4 (58,1% females to 40,5% males) (Graf. 2).

### Graf 3. Data distribution analysis of question: During the visit, I shot pictures using my...

#### During the visit, I shot pictures using my...

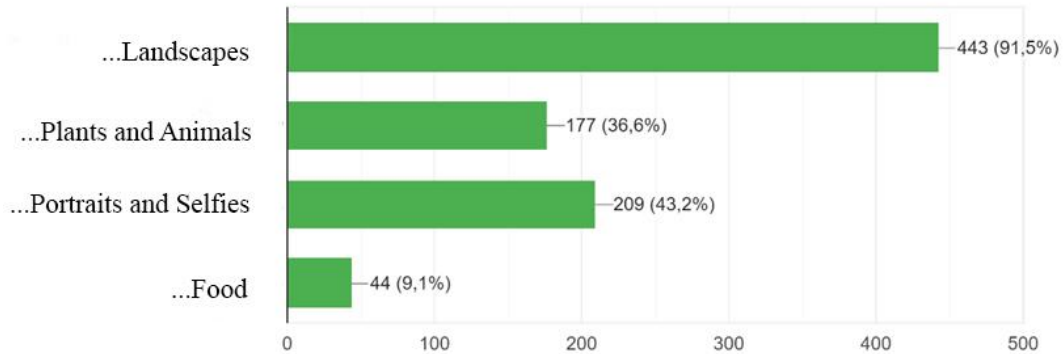


Source: authors

Regarding the device used for multimedia content capture by the respondents, 81.2% stated that they took pictures using their mobile phone camera, a percentage of 5.6% using an "amateur" camera, a percentage of 7.2 % using a "professional" camera while only a minor 6% did not take photos during the visit to nature (Graf. 3).

### Graf 4. Data distribution analysis of question: During your visit to nature, you shot pictures of...

During your visit to nature you shot pictures of...  
(you can pick more than one choices)

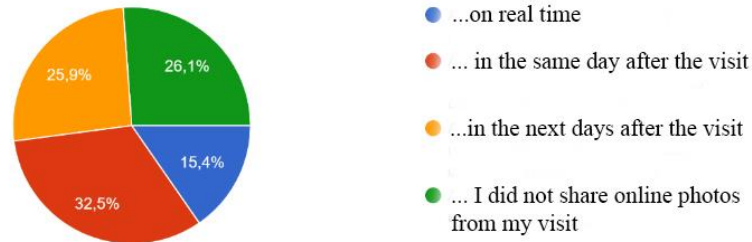


Source: authors

Regarding the type of photography and having the option of choosing more than one picks, the total number of picks was 873 with an average of 1.8 picks per person. The most preferred type of photography stated from the respondents with a percentage of 91.5% was landscape photography followed by portrait photography and selfies with a 43,2%. A percentage of 36.6% stated that they took pictures of animals or plants and a 9.1% of the sample took food photography (Graf. 4).

Graf 5. Data distribution analysis of question: I shared online photographic content of my visit to nature...

I shared online photographic content of my visit to nature...

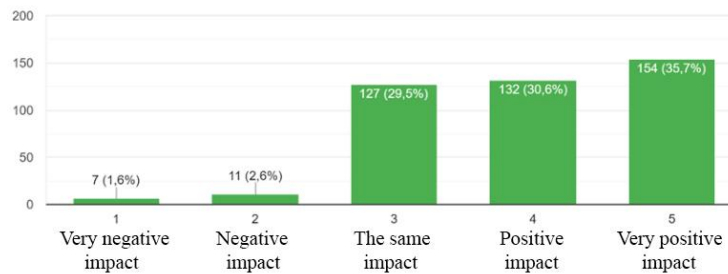


Source: authors

A 73,9% of the respondents shared online the photographic content taken during their visit to the nature, while a 26,1% didn't share any of the pictures taken. A 15,4% of the respondents stated that they shared online photographic content on real time during the excursion. A percentage of 32,5% stated that they shared photographic content online after the end of the excursion but before the end of the same day. A 25,9% of the respondents stated that they shared online the photographic content of their visit, the following to the excursion days (Graf. 5).

**Graf 6. Data distribution analysis of question: The photographic content of my visit to nature that I shared online had, compared to my usual posts...**

The photographic content of my visit to nature that I shared online had, compared to my usual posts...



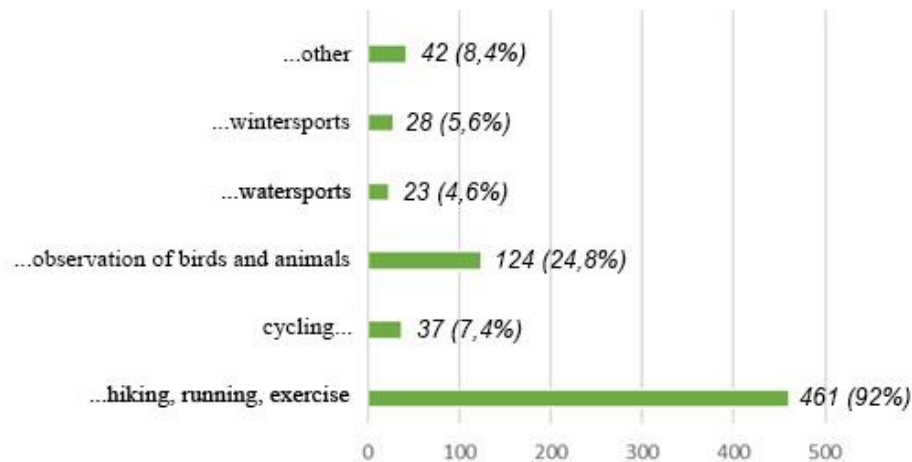
Source: authors

Shared photographic content from visits to the nature during the first year of the pandemic had a massive positive impact according to the respondents. Two out of three, with a total

percentage of 66,3% stated that their shared content had a positive and a very positive impact to their social media contacts. A 29,5% of the respondents did not notice any difference from the perspective of impact than their usual shared content. Only a small fragment of the respondents stated that their posts had a negative or a very negative impact with a total percentage of 4,2% (Graf. 6).

**Graf 7. Data distribution analysis of question: During my visit to the country side (such as a forest), my preferred activities are...**

During my visit to the countryside (such as a forest), my preferred activities are... (you can pick more than one choices)



Source: authors

A very important data of the research concerns the preferred activities of the respondents when visited the countryside during the first year of the pandemic. At the open end part of the question, respondents could add an additional preferred activity. Among the 42 answers, 14 respondents (2,8%) mentioned photography as a visitation motive (Graf. 7).

**Table 1. Share content online in real time or during the day of the visit, in relation to age categories**



AGE	TOTAL RESPONDENTS	SHARE IN REAL TIME OR DURING THE DAY	PERCENTAGE
UP TO 35 YEARS	226	120	53,10%
OLDER THAN 35	275	120	43,64%

Source: authors

Younger people up to 35 years of age seem to share online the photographic content of their visit in real time or during the day of their visit, in a larger percentage than the category of older than 35 years of age people. Even so, a percentage of 43,64% for the plus 35 years old category is impressive and shows the rising significance of the smartphone usage as a photographic camera and social media portal (Table 1).

**Table 2. Share content online in real time or during the day of the visit, in relation to gender**

GENDER	TOTAL RESPONDENTS	SHARE IN REAL TIME OR DURING THE DAY	PERCENTAGE
MALES	203	81	39,90%
FEMALES	291	155	53,26%

Source: authors

Women seem to use the smartphone as a camera and instantly share the photographic content online in a significantly larger percentage compared to men. A percentage of 53,26% of the samples' females share online the photographic content of the visit in real time or during the day, while only a percentage of 39,90% of the males do so (Table 2).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Information and Communication Technologies contribute to the implementation of green and sustainable tourism practices by introducing innovative network tools and practices for improved destination management and enriched tourist's experiences (Misso et. al. 2018). Social media and smartphone internet apps are additional tools in green business management that contribute in rural development and environmental protection (Andreopoulou et. al. 2014). They are among the most effective internet marketing tools in promoting rural and sustainable tourism. There is a positive correlation between Information and Communication Technologies rising usage and sustainable development (Andreopoulou et. al. 2014).

Smartphones have become necessary gadgets in our daily lives. Their usage constantly rises and especially in western developed countries, have reached universal usage. Their ability to

operate as a photographic device and as a social media portal is turning the users simultaneously into consumers and producers of digital culture that affects among others, choices of touristic products consumption.

While visitors at forests and in the countryside enjoy their experiences, the vast majority of them are taking photos mostly using their smartphone. Part of them are sharing online content even in real time and by doing so, they enhance and transform the touristic experience. Almost three quarters of the visitors are sharing eventually multimedia content on social media. Users state a high acceptance of their shared on social media multimedia content. The impact of this multimedia content produced during visits to the countryside, constitute a strong marketing tool for ecotourism and green tourism. It is considered to be highly reliable and with no cost advertisement of nature-based tourism destinations. The role and the utilization of the smartphone as a marketing tool used for nature-based tourism boost should be further explored. It also makes broadband internet development absolute necessary for wild natural areas.

The beauty of the landscapes of wild natural areas and its significance in nature-based tourism is highlighted from the fact that the vast majority of the visitors are practicing landscape photography. To make a green and ecotourism destination attractive and sustainable, the preservation and protection of the landscape and natural environment and resources is vital Any socioeconomic development actions should prioritize the nature protection, especially if touristic development aim in rising figures of tourist flows.

The multimedia content shared from visitors online, not only constitutes significant and free advertisement for ecotourism destinations. It also provides a free of charge, mass quantity of obtained data, that can be utilized for research purposes from rural tourism destination managers.

Ecotourism can be an important lever of development in rural and forest mountainous areas. It can transform and diversify the local economies but an important condition is to maintain the number of visitors and their activities within the limits of the bearing capacity of each area, in order to achieve sustainable development (Tsitsoni, 2015).

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## THE ROLE OF SMARTPHONE IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM BOOST

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**Argyrios Georgilas**  
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**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Nature based tourism, Photography, Smart phone, social media

### **Zacharoula Andreopoulou**

Dr. Professor of Forest Informatics and Technologies for Green Regional Policy  
School of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Environment, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
E-mail: randreop@for.auth.gr

### **Argyrios Georgilas**

MSc Tourism and Local Development  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
E-mail: georgilas@for.auth.gr

### **Thekla Tsitsoni**

Dr. Professor of Natural Protected Areas, Lab of Silviculture  
School of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Environment, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
E-mail: tsitsoni@for.auth.gr

**Marianthi Tsakaldimi**

Dr. Teaching & Research staff of Natural Protected Areas, Lab of Silviculture  
School of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Environment, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
E-mail: marian@for.auth.gr

## **WINE OFFER AND TOURISM: SYNERGY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KVARNER WINE OFFER**

**Christian Stipanović**  
**Elena Rudan**  
**Vedran Zubović**

### **Abstract**

Wine tourism as a specific form of tourism has become much more present in the last 20 years. The wine offer has become an important part of the products associated with the experience of a destination. Entrepreneurial initiatives by winemakers, as well as tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs, are increasingly focused on creating an indigenous tourism product by linking wine products with cultural heritage and identity. Such a link creates competitiveness and destination recognizability. The objective of this paper is to provide insight into how entrepreneurs can connect and create entrepreneurial initiatives by identifying key guidelines to promote further development in line with sustainable development. The paper aims to explore the attitudes and preferences of stakeholders towards wine tourism entrepreneurial initiatives in the destination in the fields of supply development and promotion, with a particular focus on creating cultural identity and strengthening local culture. Using an appropriate sample of key stakeholders, focus groups are used to collect data on the constructs of wine tourism route management and the economic, social, and environmental aspects of entrepreneurship in wine tourism in the destination. The conceptual model of this piece of research indicates the need for further research to explore the economic, social, and environmental aspects of developing the wine tourism of a destination.

**Keywords:** wine tourism, entrepreneurship, tourism destination, Kvarner.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the international environment, Croatian wine regions are playing an increasingly important role, and some destinations are developing their unique wine offer. In recent years, wine has become more than just a production activity, and it is considered an important element in expressing the recognizability of a destination. Many researchers are concerned with wine tourism. For example, Hall et al. (2000) describe wine tourism as the integration of wine demand as part of a tourism activity that focuses on the wine experience. Amarando et al. (2019) define wine tourism as an engagement of winemakers that motivates tourists to experience unique wines, wine landscapes, and other relevant activities in the local wine region, such as wine festivals, various gastro-events, etc. Wine tourism is characterised by a visitor experience focused on visiting wineries, vineyards, wine festivals and other events, tasting and consuming wine, all of which creates an integrated product. Based on the premise that wine is an important element of the offer and promotion of destinations, the first pieces of research describe wine tourism as a new typology of tourism, within the “tourism taste”, that could be indicated as “territorial food and drink tourism” (Hall et al. 2000). A precondition for the development of wine tourism is viticulture, which is affected by the decline of vineyards. Worldwide, there is a trend of vineyard decline, and it is estimated that on the entire planet today there are about 7.3 million hectares of vines, most of them in Spain, France, China, Italy, and Turkey. Croatia produces slightly more than half a million hectoliters of wine, while Italy, as a neighboring country and one of the most important wine

countries in the world, produces more than 260 million hectoliters of wine (Agroklub 2021).

On the territory of the Republic of Croatia, vines have always been grown and wine has always been produced. Today's wine production in the Republic of Croatia can be characterized as a production that is primarily focused on quality, because Croatia produces about 60% quality wines. There are 258 varieties on the national list of recognized grape varieties, of which about 100 varieties are recommended as varieties for wine production with a protected designation of origin (Ministry of Agriculture 2022). The Kvarner region (Primorje-Gorski Kotar County) is one of the most famous wine regions in Croatia, producing more than 2 million liters of wine per year. It contains more than 200 hectares of vineyards, of which about 150 hectares are planted with *žlahtina*. With over 50,000 bottles of sparkling wine per year, Kvarner is the third largest Croatian wine region in terms of sparkling wine production, and it is produced from indigenous Kvarner varieties (Primorje-Gorski Kotar County 2021).

With the development of grape varieties in Kvarner, new forms of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial initiatives are being developed. Thus, the research problem in this paper is to determine entrepreneurial initiatives in the creation of the wine offer in Kvarner and to make key assumptions for the development of the wine offer in Kvarner.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wine tourism is characteristic for regions that have certain and specific wine varieties. Wine tourism offers customers a unique experience that includes wine tastings, a varied gastronomic offer, learning about wine production, getting to know cultural and historical peculiarities related to specific geographical areas where the raw materials for wine production come from, etc. In the last 20 years, entrepreneurship started in the wine industry in Croatia, including the Kvarner region, where winemakers are improving their offer in order to gain a greater competitive advantage in the tourism market, and are working to improve quality through innovation, which is a key factor in economic growth and productivity (Morrish et al. 2022).

In search of a competitive advantage, winemakers refresh their offer by developing new products and relying on technological and agricultural innovations (Dressler 2022). In addition, as part of their main activity, winemakers create an additional offer aimed at the tourism market. Innovation in the wine chain is mainly related to agriculture, but also to new technologies that lead to the revival of old wine varieties and the creation of a new offer (Dawson et al. 2011). In order to present themselves in a wide range of wineries in different areas, winemakers use technologies to improve the process of winemaking, which has an impact on improving the consumer experience.

Several factors affect consumer behavior and preferences - the innovation of the winemakers' offer, and the cultural influence and individual preferences. Consumer behavior, in turn, shapes wine tourism (Santos et al. 2020). The choice of wine variety, price and brand are not enough for a successful entrepreneurial activity. Sustainable production has become a relevant issue in which quality and originality are recognized

by acquired certificates. Therefore, entrepreneurial activities in wine tourism, according to Dressler (2022), should be viewed as front-end or back-end innovations in the offer that create innovative steps in the value chain. Today, wine is also a luxury in which the emotionality of the product and the characteristics of the luxury product have merged (Heine et al. 2016). Implementing innovations in wine tourism entrepreneurship often requires, in addition to technological innovations, investing in new knowledge and education by which wineries try to better position and profile themselves based on access to resources (García-Cortijo et al. 2021). Along with technological development, the main direction must be sustainable production in order to eliminate a negative impact on the environment, community and economy. Silverman et al. (2003) state the negative impacts of the wine industry on the environment include high energy and water consumption, wastewater, chemicals and packaging materials. The International Organization of Vine and Wine enacted a global strategy on the scale of grape production and processing systems, which states that sustainable winemaking includes economic sustainability of structures and territories, producing quality wines taking into account precision requirements in sustainable viticulture, environmental risks, product safety and consumer health, as well as heritage valorization, and historical, cultural, environmental and aesthetic aspects (Dodds et al. 2013). More recently, the concept of ecology in winemaking has been classified through eco-entrepreneurship (Santini et al. 2013). The concept of social responsibility in wine tourism refers to the impact on society by creating a sense of belonging to the community and developing a system to raise awareness of social sustainability.

When creating an integrated tourist offer of destinations, it is necessary for all entrepreneurs in the value chain to take joint action, with special emphasis on winemakers. This is particularly important when tourist destinations offer, for example, wine routes, tours, etc. Their strategies have been established according to the tourist valorization of wine production. Entrepreneurial initiatives of winemakers, which also extends to entrepreneurs in tourism and hospitality, are increasingly focused on creating an indigenous tourism product by connecting wine products with cultural heritage and identity. The synergistic action of all wine-related stakeholders increases competitiveness and recognizability of tourist destinations based on the indigenous values that the destinations offer.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

For the study of entrepreneurial initiatives in the dimension of innovation of the offer of winegrowers in Kvarner (Primorje-Gorski Kotar County), a qualitative piece of research was conducted through a focus group discussion. Seven focus group participants were recruited through the network of tourist boards (Table 1). The sample consists of people responsible for tourism development in the destination and people who base their professional activity on the offer of wine and wine events. The focus group discussion was held online in real time using the Zoom platform and took place in June 2021, lasting 120 minutes.

**Table 1. Profile of the participants**



Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation
FG1	M	18-35	Winery owner
FG2	M	18-35	Tourist board manager
FG3	F	18-35	Travel agency owner
FG4	M	36-45	Winery owner
FG5	F	36-45	Winery owner
FG6	F	46-65	Event organiser
FG7	F	46-65	Winery owner

Source: Authors

Focus group participants were given the option to leave the discussion at will and that the responses given during the discussion were fully anonymous. A brief welcome session was held at the beginning of each focus group discussion to allow participants to get to know each other and to set the atmosphere for the discussions. The discussions were semi-structured using a prepared discussion guide.

The discussion was recorded and transcribed by the researchers. The content of the analysis was processed using the QSR International NVIVO 12 software package. The group interview guide was divided into three groups devised in such a way that the moderator could guide the discussion (Krueger and Casey 2000). The topics of the discussion guide were:

- Entrepreneurial initiatives that stand for the sustainable management of the wine supply.
- Actions that are a priority for the management of sustainable development in the creation of the offer.
- The attitudes and preferences of the stakeholders towards wine tourism entrepreneurial initiatives in the destination when developing offers, with a particular focus on the creation of a cultural identity and the strengthening of local culture.

In the first phase of data analysis, the data was grouped by constructing similarities and coding the associations to identify the most important themes.

In order to understand whether the participants were interested in active participation (intervention level) at different stages, additional visual explanations of specific terms related to types of adventures and forms of adventure activities were provided to them using open-ended questions.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

The participants' perception of sustainable entrepreneurship in wine tourism are covered by three basic dimensions: logistics and operations, sales and marketing, and financial

performance (Ferrer et al. 2022). Research on the perception of the implementation of sustainable principles of trends in the wine offer of Kvarner is mostly considered from the marketing point of view and is generally done through the overall evaluation of services and products, not only through the quality and perception of services.

The analysis of the current state of wine tourism offer, according to the focus group, shows that domestic wine varieties, experience and tradition are the most important comparative advantages in shaping the wine tourism offer in Kvarner. Many small wine producers that are technologically under-equipped or use outdated technology cannot achieve a competitive advantage and cannot reach the same production performance as wine producers with a larger production potential. High production costs are a characteristic of small businesses due to higher variable costs that depend on production volume, including more expensive procurement of production materials, higher labor costs, more expensive transportation costs, etc. Participants see the greatest opportunity in connecting and strengthening small producers through government subsidies and support, as well as through public administration and self-governing bodies. The greatest threat to the supply of domestic wines, based on the analysis of participants' attitudes, is the availability of imported wines at lower prices.

The results of the thematic analysis show that behavioral intentions are the topic most frequently addressed by 39 associations, dominated by the negative perception of winegrowers concerning the evolution of supply due to increasingly expensive materials in wine production. Viticulture, as a driver of local economic development with 48 associations, shows that Kvarner can build its development management by creating a new tourist experience based on the wine offer. The participants expressed this through the following statements:

"Kvarner should revive old grape varieties and present itself more as a region offering the most famous wine varieties. This will attract more wine tourists." (FG4)

"The island of Krk and Novi Vinodolski should brand *žlahtina* as a traditional product that combines local culture and wine." (FG2)

"Providing better information is needed, events should be organized with the presentation of local wine varieties, and they should be better presented on websites and social media networks." (FG7).

The next theme, which deals with priority measures for the management of sustainable development in creating the tourist offer, includes ideas such as opening an interpretation center where visitors can learn more about local varieties and find out about the possibilities of wine tasting in Kvarner. Furthermore, an integrated product offer of the local Kvarner wine varieties can be created by investing in promotional activities and joining the newly established cooperative association *Vina Kvarnera* (The Wines of Kvarner). The proof is:

"Production is becoming more expensive and winemakers must strive to better connect with the local community." (FY5)

"The wine production of each individual winemaker is not enough to cover the broad market. Winemakers creating a cooperative business is a way to create an integrated product and expand in the market." (FG1)

"We need better information-providing systems, events should be organized with the presentation of local wine varieties, and they should be better presented on websites and social media networks." (FG7)

Wines are largely presented in the tourist offer of Kvarner as an additional offer to the basic tourism product on the coast (sea, sun, beach). The participants perceive the wine offer as a product attractive to a narrow circle of potential guests. The theme is strongly associated with financial investment, in the sense that a financial investment is required to build the infrastructure to create the offer, which is a challenge for new entrepreneurial ventures. The participants feel positively about the local community's attitude and initiatives towards wine entrepreneurship, and the local community sees an opportunity for new entrepreneurial ventures. Focus group participants agree that the creation of the offer should be based on an exclusive and local offer. They confirmed that there is no such offer in Kvarner, but that Kvarner should develop an exclusive wine offer in line with growing trends. The participants believe that the Covid pandemic has encouraged locals to explore their own destination and that Covid-19 encourages visits to local winemakers and recognition of local values.

"Covid-19 has made people explore local values more." (FG2).

"Offering wine to tourists should not be presented as an easily available added value, but as a luxury that attracts guests with higher purchasing power." (FG1).

## 5. DISCUSSION

In recent years, scientific research has shown that wine tourism is a very dynamic player in new forms of tourism. A review of the literature shows that the supply of wine tourism is growing worldwide and that the development prospects are upward (Festa et al. 2020). Empirical research demonstrates that wine tourism strengthens local economies and emphasizes the importance of successfully complementing small businesses in tourism to create the conditions for developing tourism products (Campos-Andaur 2022).

Specific considerations of previous research in the analysis of the wine tourism supply are based on the sustainability of the supply development process (Amarando et al. 2020), new reasons for tourism consumption (Santos et al., 2015), innovation in the creation of tourism products (Maghssudipour et al. 2020) and the cultural significance of wine tourism (Unwin 2022). The research in Kvarner shows a growing trend, emphasizing that the wine offer is still an additional tourist offer that is not sufficiently segmented and does not represent a developed wine tourism. In shaping the wine offer, winemakers face a lack of synergy with stakeholders and tourism policy makers. The main challenges for entrepreneurship in wine tourism on Kvarner can be described in terms of economic, social, and environmental aspects.

The economic aspect is reflected in the high operating costs of doing business, which in turn leads to high prices for the final product. According to the participants, economic viability is an important indicator for Kvarner's wineries. Vintners also face the challenge of imported wine sold at lower prices, as evidenced by the fact that Croatia is the largest importer of wine in the region, with imports accounting for 27% of the country's wine market (BlueRock Consulting & Improve 2021).

The results show that the social aspect in entrepreneurship is lacking. Focus group participants see cooperative businesses as one of the possible solutions for better market positioning. Participants agree that creating cooperative businesses provides the opportunity to increase employability and ensure equitable distribution of resources, which would lead to the development of social entrepreneurship, but also to the creation of an integrated wine tourism offer focused on the diverse cultural and historical heritage.

New technologies were recognized in the discussion as an alternative to save time and shorten certain phases and procedures in the production process. In addition, positive attitudes toward new technologies were noted as they reduce hazardous waste generation and reduce costs of raw materials and energy. The analysis of qualitative research data on the topics of entrepreneurial initiatives that support sustainable management of wine supply and the actions that must be taken to manage sustainable development in supply innovation has produced two main directions. Both directions envision the development of cultural wine routes that should have a guide and an interpretation center with promotional programs. The interpretation center or wine museum stands out as one of the main proposals to improve the route through active promotions via websites and social media. The wine offer on the cultural route should be linked to the cultural offer at the destination, where visitors to the route are introduced to old monuments and cultural heritage in addition to visiting wineries. In Kvarner, the Glagolitic script and Glagolitic monuments were highlighted as the best piece of culture to be paired with wine. Special emphasis was placed on visits in the period outside the main tourist season. This provides the opportunity to provide the best cultural experience in combination with oenology. This is one of the methods how the pronounced seasonality of all Mediterranean regions, including Kvarner, may be mitigated.

The expansion of the wine offer should also be based on the development of infrastructure and the improvement of the offer through festivals and other wine-related events. Such events are key to creating a competitive advantage, as well as a combination of sports and wine, such as bicycle and wine tours. It is also necessary to enhance wine consumption with educational programs on oenology. Visitor experience when visiting wineries should be recognized as an element that can make a difference in the tourist offer. From the point of view of the participants and the analysis of the content, the basic characteristics of the wine offer in the Kvarner region should be adapted to the preferences and profile of the visitors, more precisely to family tourists interested in cultural and historical heritage, well-being and sports. Positive examples are the Wine and Hiking Experience Tour or the Run Eat Drink event in Istria, which is attended by several hundred visitors per year.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research was to provide a conceptual overview of the research on entrepreneurship in wine tourism in relation to developing offers, and to empirically investigate the possibilities of enhancing the wine offer in the Kvarner region by creating new entrepreneurial initiatives. The research shows that entrepreneurship in wine tourism grows through the innovation of the offer. Innovation of the offer in wine tourism has been explored mainly through technological investments (Dogru and Peyrefitte

2022), while new entrepreneurial initiatives addressing sustainability issues through economic, social and environmental characteristics are less represented (Gilinsky et al. 2016). Newly established companies in the wine industry show a tendency to invest in innovations that create new standards for sustainable development and pay increasing attention to the local community's well-being, cultural and historical heritage, and reducing environmental impact (Upton and Nielsen-Pincus 2021; Lereboullet et al. 2013). The success of entrepreneurship in the wine industry is measured not only by economic factors, but also by the social and environmental impacts of the supply chain, products, and services that act responsibly by minimizing negative impacts on the economy and the environment.

Santos et al. (2022) underscored the perceived importance of regional wine and winery attributes to tourists in wine regions. It has been proven that the offer is more recognizable through the creation of an integrated tourism product and cluster within the framework of regional development (Stipanović et al. 2022). This research thus proves that entrepreneurial initiatives in the Kvarner wine tourism should be approached through integrated action by all stakeholders. The suggestions the focus group participants provided for a more efficient development of entrepreneurship in the Kvarner region towards wine tourism include work on an information system (signposts, websites, and social networks), increasing the offer of typical local food, more wine events, and technological progress in the production and service processes.

The business implementation should focus on local wine varieties such as *Belica* or *Žlahtina* which are connected to the local culture and tradition. The Glagolitic heritage stands out in this sense. Strategic activities for the creation of such a holistic product can be realized through a wine route, which should have its own management and be positioned on the market as a new tourist product. The goals of creating a wine route include developing the local economy through wine tourism, sustainability and conservation, increasing visitor satisfaction, better service for wine tourism, and connecting all stakeholders at the destination level to achieve a better competitive advantage. In the future, research should be extended to tourists and visitors to Kvarner wine providers so that their views can be taken into account by destination management and entrepreneurs when considering the future development of the Kvarner wine offer.

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**WINE OFFER AND TOURISM: SYNERGY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF KVARNER WINE OFFER**

**Christian Stipanović**  
**Elena Rudan**  
**Vedran Zubović**

**Abstract**

Wine tourism as a specific form of tourism has become much more present in the last 20 years. The wine offer has become an important part of the products associated with the experience of a destination. Entrepreneurial initiatives by winemakers, as well as tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs, are increasingly focused on creating an indigenous tourism product by linking wine products with cultural heritage and identity. Such a link creates competitiveness and destination recognizability. The objective of this paper is to provide insight into how entrepreneurs can connect and create entrepreneurial initiatives by identifying key guidelines to promote further development in line with sustainable development. The paper aims to explore the attitudes and preferences of stakeholders towards wine tourism entrepreneurial initiatives in the destination in the fields of supply development and promotion, with a particular focus on creating cultural identity and strengthening local culture. Using an appropriate sample of key stakeholders, focus groups are used to collect data on the constructs of wine tourism route management and the economic, social, and environmental aspects of entrepreneurship in wine tourism in the destination. The conceptual model of this piece of research indicates the need for further research to explore the economic, social, and environmental aspects of developing the wine tourism of a destination.

**Keywords:** wine tourism, entrepreneurship, tourism destination, Kvarner.

**Christian Stipanović**  
Full Professor with tenure  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
E-mail: [christis@fthm.hr](mailto:christis@fthm.hr)

**Elena Rudan**  
Associate Professor  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
E-mail: [elenar@fthm.hr](mailto:elenar@fthm.hr)

**Vedran Zubović**  
Assistant  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
E-mail: [vedranz@fthm.hr](mailto:vedranz@fthm.hr)

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GASTRONOMIC OFFER ON TOURIST FARMS IN SLOVENIA

**Dejan Cigale**  
**Aleš Gačnik**  
**Igor Jurinčič**  
**Simon Kerma**  
**Barbara Lampič**  
**Irma Potočnik Slavič**

### **Abstract**

The article presents the characteristics of the gastronomic offer on tourist farms and its potential for the development of gastronomy (wine and food) tourism in rural Slovenia. Although this potential has already been recognized and repeatedly highlighted in various strategic development documents, no comprehensive research has been conducted at the national level to evaluate the gastronomic aspect of the offer in the context of farm tourism as a supplementary activity. Gastronomy certainly plays a central role on Slovenian tourist farms and in many ways represents a key link between the agriculture and tourism. At the end of 2020, there were a total of 4,930 agricultural holdings in Slovenia with at least one supplementary activity registered on the farm, while supplementary activities of farm tourism are carried out on 1,215 agricultural holdings. Most of these agricultural holdings (957 or 78.8%, respectively) offer accommodation, food and drink, which is particularly important for the development of gastronomy tourism in Slovenian rural areas.

Using a survey (conducted from November 2021 to February 2022) on a representative sample of 138 tourist farms from all Slovenian regions, we determined the current food and beverages offer and the inclusion of traditional and local dishes in relation to modern dishes. The interviewed Slovenian farmers see the offer of local drinks and dishes as the biggest opportunity for further development of farm tourism, while other potentials (offer of organic food, collective brands, quality schemes, etc.) are much more in the background.

**Keywords:** farm tourism, food and wine offer, gastronomy tourism, rural development, Slovenia

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gastronomy has become an important component of tourism (Hall and Mitchell 2000) and can also influence the choice of a destination (López-Guzmán et al. 2017; Stockebrand et al. 2011). This is also reflected in the increasing interest in gastronomic tourism, which has been the subject of many recent studies (e.g. Andersson and Mossberg 2017; Berbel-Pineda et al. 2019; Cohen and Avieli 2004; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2014; Kerma 2014; Gačnik 2012). Rarely, however, has attention been paid to gastronomic tourism on tourist farms (e.g. Brune et al. 2021), despite the fact that, for them, gastronomic offer is of considerable importance (Cigale et al. 2013; Jurinčič et al. 2015).

Farm tourism is an important complement to the agricultural sector, allowing farmers to easily sell their own products, part- or full-time employment of household members, an additional source of income, and a more rational use of available farm resources. It contributes to the vitality of farms and rural communities, preserving the cultural landscape, maintaining settlement and giving added value to agricultural products and services (Cigale et al. 2013; Cigale 2014).



Tourist farms can be carriers of knowledge about food heritage and culture, a kind of "gastronomic bank" of Slovenia, its agricultural and gastronomic specialties and a key-link between agriculture and tourism. The emergence of tourist farms in Slovenia is primarily the result of the needs and opportunities of the agricultural economy and only secondarily of the expressed tourism demand. All supplementary activities on the farm, including farm tourism, are regulated in Slovenia in such a way that they are secondary to the basic agricultural activity, and the annual income from supplementary activity is limited (Zakon o kmetijstvu 2008, 2012, 2017, 2021; Uredba o dopolnilnih dejavnostih na kmetiji 2015, 2018). When directing the development of tourist farms, we must be aware of the fact that farmers usually do not have experience in similar work or in communicating with visitors, etc. Therefore, the lack of experience, knowledge and skills may negatively affect their ability to adapt to tourism demand (Cigale et al. 2013; Potočnik Slavič et al. 2016).

For the successful development of farm tourism, it is necessary to observe the needs and requirements of the modern visitor. Consequently, farmers provide increasingly wide range of tourist farms offer. Among the tourists' motives for staying on tourist farms are "good, healthy, home-made food and drinks" and "spending time in a quiet rural environment". Two other factors are of above average importance: "a more personal attitude towards the guest" and "lower prices" (Cigale 2014; Cigale et al. 2013).

Such findings also point to the considerable and untapped potential of the gastronomic offer on tourist farms, which is insufficiently exploited during the times of mass "hysteria" about top chefs and top restaurants. Although gastronomy is one of the most important tourism products according to Slovenia's tourism development strategies, its importance is not recognized, emphasized, and valorised on tourist farms.

At this point, the potential of gastronomic (including wine) offer on tourist farms is faced with gastronomic tourism, which is one of the most complex and fastest growing types of tourism. The European Travel Commission highlights gastronomy as one of the key elements of attraction for tourists coming to Europe (ETC 2019). Also for young people (Generation Z), trying local food and drink is the most popular in-destination activity (ETC 2020).

It should be emphasized that gastronomic tourism includes not only the wine and culinary segment, but also the attitude to the history of agricultural industries. It is personified by our attitude towards the land, towards agricultural products, towards our food in a traditional or modern guise. Thus, properly developed gastronomic tourism on tourist farms represents an important promoter of the preservation of food heritage, cultural landscape, and natural values. It also influences the change of mentality, values and practices on tourist farms. The orientation of farms into tourism represents a new development challenge for young farmers.

In this article, we pay attention to the hitherto rather neglected gastronomic offer on tourist farms. For this purpose, we also conducted a special survey on tourist farms, which illuminated the topic from several angles and helped us to gain insight into the current situation on tourist farms and farmers' thoughts about gastronomic tourism.

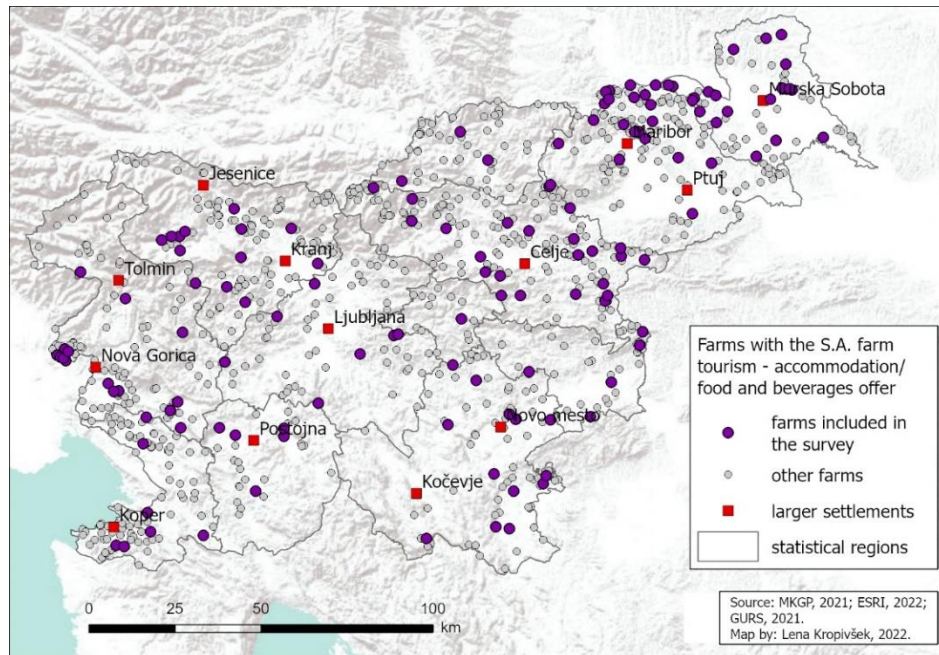
## **2. METHODS AND DATA**

The analysis included all available data on farms that have a registered supplementary activity farm tourism. The data are available in the Register of Agricultural Holdings of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, and refer to 31 December 2020. We used data on the location of the farm, area and structure of agricultural land, volume of grape and wine production, cultivation of indigenous crops, number of livestock, age, sex, and education of the holder of the supplementary activity, number of household members, etc.

In addition, we conducted an extensive survey that focused on agricultural holdings that offer farm tourism as a supplementary activity, i.e., accommodation or just food and beverages. At the end of 2020, there were a total of 957 of them, and the survey was conducted on a random sample of farms with this supplementary activity. The sample consisted of 300 agricultural holdings. In the end, we managed to get responses from 138 farms, which represents response rate of 46.0%. The survey was conducted live in the field, and some surveys were conducted by telephone.

As a rule, we surveyed the holders of supplementary activities or close family members, but often a larger number of family members joined the conversation. The survey on an individual farm lasted from one to two hours. Only a part of the obtained field results is included in the article.

Figure 1. Spatial distribution of the farms included in the survey with the supplementary activity (S.A.) farm tourism - accommodation/food and beverages offer



Source: MKGP 2021; ESRI 2022; GURS 2021; Lena Kropivšek 2022

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOVENIAN FARMS WITH SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY FARM TOURISM

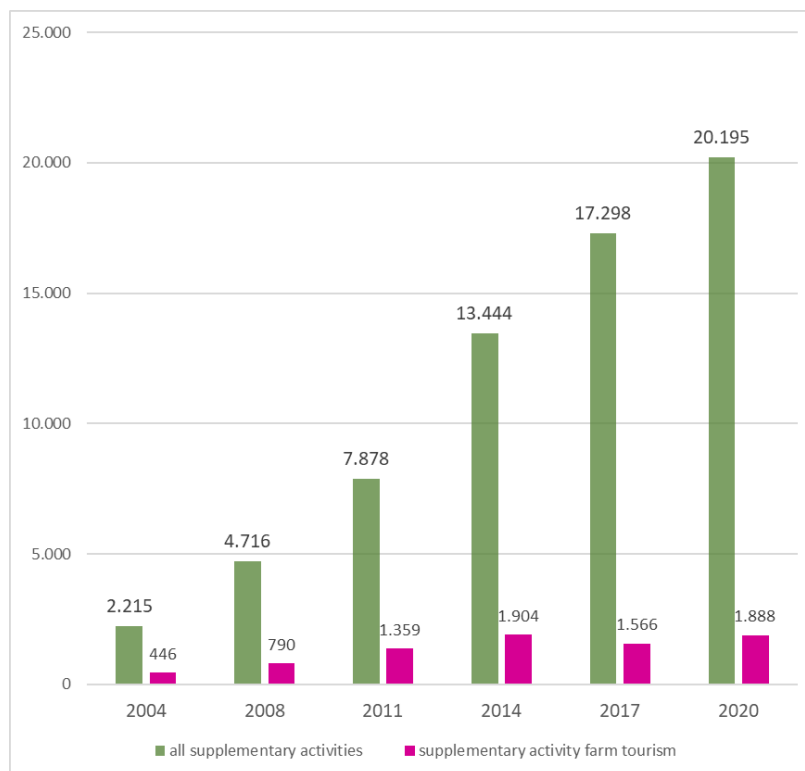
Many production, market and other social changes have a significant impact on agriculture, and are reflected by farmers as various forms of uncertainty (Lampič and Potočnik 2017). As a result, farmers must learn to detect various disturbances, respond to them, mitigate shocks, adapt to change and (relatively quickly) develop flexible patterns of behaviour. In many cases, supplementary activities help the farm to mitigate certain disturbances or unforeseen events (e.g. markedly reduced yields due to natural disasters). At the end of 2020, a total of 4,930 agricultural holdings in Slovenia had at least one supplementary activity registered on the farm. Agricultural holdings performed 20,195 different supplementary activities, i.e., an average of 4.1 activities per individual farm, which indicates a great variety of forms of resource use on the farm.

Our research is primarily focused on farms with supplementary activities in the field of farm tourism – accommodation/food and beverages offer. Slovenian legislation distinguishes four types of this supplementary activity: tourist farms with accommodation, excursion farms, wineries and osmicas. The last three types of supplementary activities offer only food and drinks, and the operation of the osmicas is

also limited in time (supplementary activities can be performed no more than twice a year for ten days) (Uredba o dopolnilnih dejavnostih na kmetiji 2015, 2018).

There were 957 tourist farms in Slovenia in 2020, and a total of 1219 supplementary activities in this field (in addition to others), namely: 589 tourist farms with accommodation, 490 excursion farms, 100 wineries and 40 osmicas. As indicated in the introduction, farms often have several activities registered at the same time, which allows them to use different resources on the farm more efficiently – e.g. selling crops or employment for family members.

**Graph 1. Number of all supplementary activities and supplementary activity farm tourism in Slovenia (2004–2020)**



Source: authors

We recognize a marked diversity in the implementation of supplementary activities on Slovenian farms, which are relatively small (they use an average of 7.0 ha of agricultural land and raise an average of 6.0 heads of livestock (Krajnc and Šuštar 2021), so it is understandable that farmers are looking for ways to diversify their income on farm as well as outside it.

In 2004, there were 1,400 agricultural holdings with supplementary activities in Slovenia. 16 years later, in 2020, over 4,900 agricultural holdings carried out

supplementary activities (MKGP 2021). It should be noted, however, that the growing interest in carrying out various groups of activities is very different – the growth of tourism on the farm is moderate compared to others, as it is considered extremely labor intensive but also investment demanding and risky for the farmer. Positive trends are also evident from data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia on overnight stays, as in the period 2010–2018 the annual number of overnight stays on tourist farms increased from 114,739 to 271,894. It remained at almost the same level (250, 401) in 2020, i.e., after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which shows the persistence of this type of tourism offer. Given the growth in the number of tourist farms offering food and beverages (excursion farms, osmicas, wineries), an increased demand in this field can be expected as well.

An even more detailed overview of all activities on farms with tourism as supplementary activity shows a whole range of "support" activities that increase or supplement the scope of the offer on the farm and increase the attractiveness for different target groups (Figure 3). In recent years, farmers are increasingly deciding to "diversify" the offer and so they e.g. market an idyllic countryside by renting out picnic areas (271 farms), others include their domestic animals in the offer (135 farms offer horseback riding, and 110 transport by horse-drawn carriage or tractor). Some farmers also decide to apply for more organizationally and investment-demanding activities – e.g. apitourism (42 farms, in connection with widespread beekeeping in Slovenia) and museums or thematic collections (64 farms).

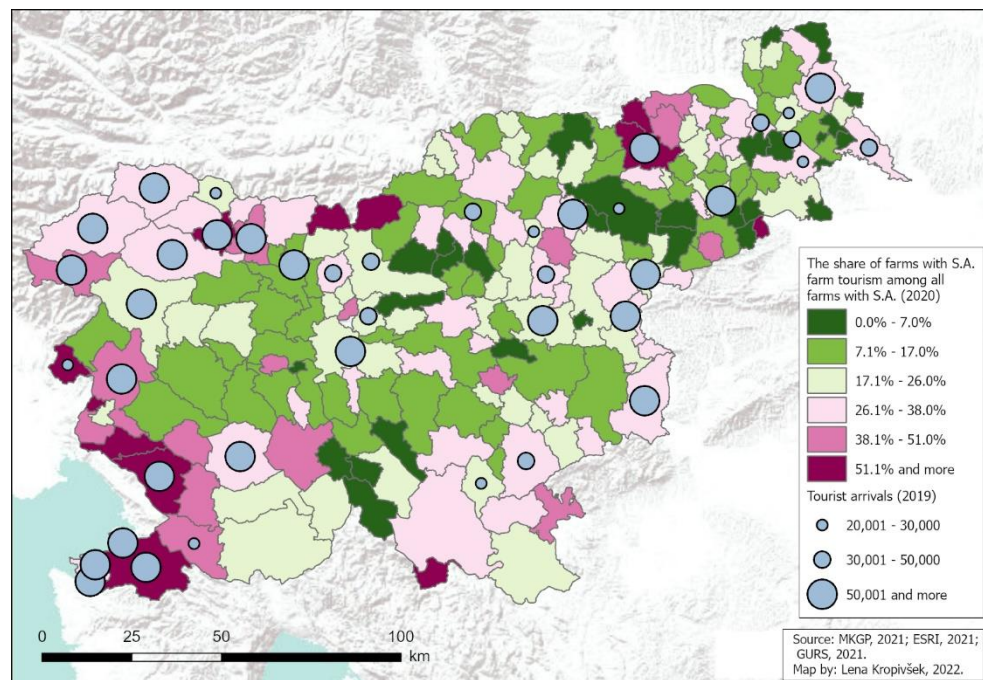
Figure 2. Types of supplementary activities of farm tourism and the number of farms in Slovenia



Source: authors

The demand for gastronomic and other offers of tourist farms is related to residents from relatively nearby settlements (locals, residents of nearby urban centers) as well as to tourists who spend the night in the area or in the surroundings. This is also indirectly pointed out by the fact that the share of agricultural holdings with supplementary activity farm tourism among all agricultural holdings with supplementary activities is above average in most municipalities with the highest tourist visits (Figure 4). In the municipalities that recorded more than 20,000 tourist arrivals in 2019 (i.e., in the last "normal" year before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic), the share of agricultural holdings with supplementary activity farm tourism among all supplementary activities is mostly higher than 26%, while at the national level this share is 19.4%. There are very few municipalities with a large share of agricultural holdings with supplementary activity farm tourism and a modest absolute number of tourist arrivals. In such rare cases, this is mainly due to the relatively modest size / area of individual municipalities, in which the relative importance of tourism is in fact very high. On the other hand, in some cases the reason for the significantly above-average representation of supplementary activity farm tourism (e.g. over 51%) is due to the border location of the municipality and high cross-border demand (e.g. border municipalities Šempeter, Miren (border with Italy) and Šentilj, Pesnica (with Austria)). Only in very rare cases in municipalities with a large number of tourist arrivals, the share of supplementary activity farm tourism is modest.

**Figure 3: Share of farms with supplementary activity farm tourism in all farms with supplementary activity by municipality (in 2020) and total number of tourist arrivals (only data for the municipalities with the highest numbers of tourists in 2019 are shown)**

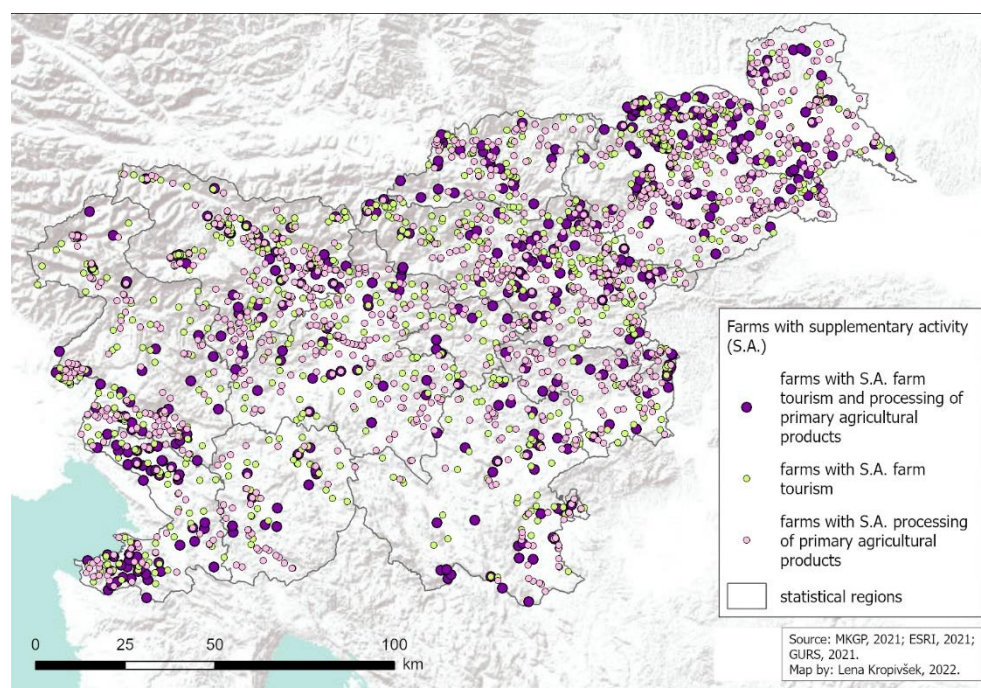


Source: MKGP 2021; ESRI 2022; GURS 2021; Lena Kropivšek 2022



The connection of farm tourism and processing of primary agricultural products represents an added value for rural supply due to the quality (fresh, local) and diversity (different forms of processing of agricultural products expand the range of farm products). It is also important for the farm itself, as it facilitates the marketing of agricultural products by the farmer (crops and products are sold as part of farm tourism), strengthens and maintains the bond between farms and their visitors/guests, who often return to tourist farms (Potočnik et al., 2016). In identifying the predominant marketing channels for agricultural products, we found that, on average, surveyed farmers sell 40% of their agricultural production through farm tourism, and 26% of respondents sell more than 50%. The spatial distribution of farms combining both activities – tourism and processing (Figure 5) also shows that this is an advantage for farmers in general throughout the country, and even more for farms in wine-growing areas.

Figure 4. **Spatial distribution of farms with supplementary activities farm tourism and processing of agricultural products**

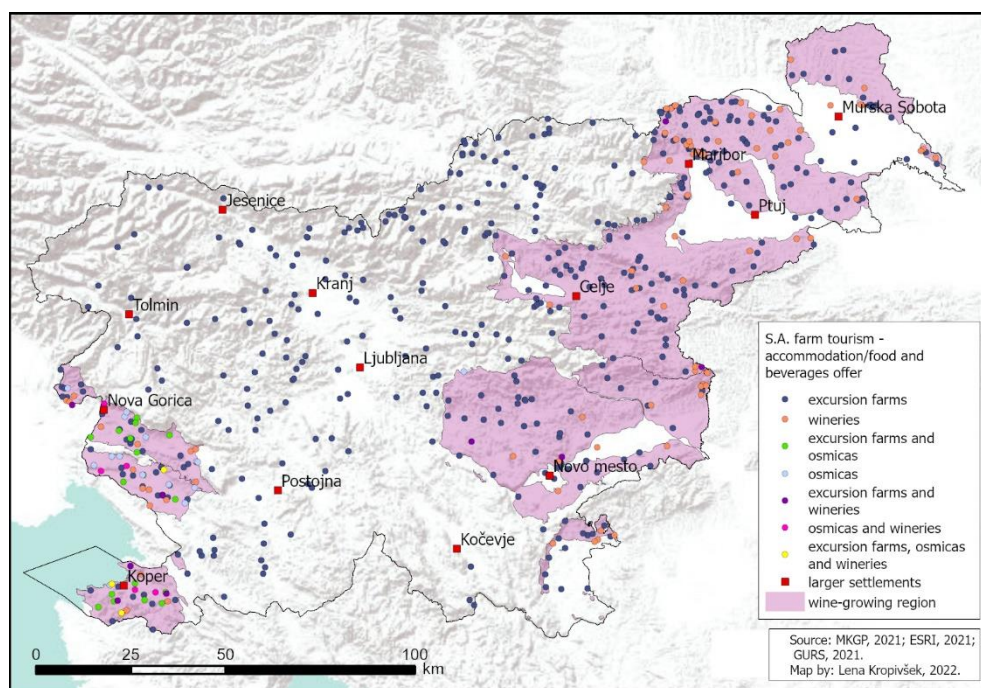


Source: MKGP 2021; ESRI 2022; GURS 2021; Lena Kropivšek 2022

It is also useful to combine the potentials of wine-growing areas for gastronomic tourism. Viticulture, wine production and wine tourism play a special role in gastronomic tourism. We note that in wine-growing regions (in Slovenia we are talking about three wine-growing regions and nine wine-growing districts) farmers more often decide to diversify into additional activities related to gastronomy and wine offer (excursion farms and wineries). Although there are excursion farms all over the Slovenian territory, the offer

of food and beverages supplemented by wineries and osmicas (Figure 6) is the largest in wine-growing regions. At the same time, the wine-growing regions are the only ones where in many cases we find two or even more supplementary tourism activities on the same farm. A frequent combination is the excursion farm and the osmica, which is also related to the seasonal nature of the osmica business, and in two cases all three complementary activities (excursion farm, winery and osmica) are present on the same farm. This indicates sufficient demand as well as the production capacity of each farm.

Figure 5. Spatial distribution of farms with supplementary activity farm tourism – food and beverage offer and wine-growing areas of Slovenia



Source: MKGP 2021; ESRI 2022; GURS 2021; Lena Kropivšek 2022

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF GASTRONOMIC OFFER ON SLOVENIAN TOURIST FARMS – SURVEY RESULTS

The complex survey among holders of supplementary activities on tourism farms included several content sets. Special attention was given to the gastronomic offer and related services, which is in the focus of this research. Firstly, we were interested in the respondents' self-assessment of the supply of food and beverages on their tourist farms, especially the relationship between the offer of traditional or local dishes on the one hand and modern dishes on the other. The respondents rated their offer on a scale from 1 (insufficient) to 5 (excellent). As expected, the vast majority are convinced of a very good or excellent (score 4 or 5) offer of traditional/local dishes on their tourist farms



(84% in total). Almost the same share (85%) assessed the house offer of local (homemade) drinks as very good or excellent – indicating once again a close connection between the basic agricultural activity, i.e. production, and complementary tourist offer, which in Slovenia depends on the volume of food production and processing on the farm. As expected, the respondents are slightly more reserved towards the inclusion of modern dishes into their offer; 38% of them rate this type of food offer as very good or excellent. The analysis of dishes and drinks on offer on the tourist farms in question proved the respondents' self-assessment as credible.

#### **4.1. Offer of food and beverages in connection with local and regional tradition and production capacities**

The following characteristics can be highlighted in the gastronomic offer on tourist farms: 1 – marked predominance of traditional dishes over modern ones, 2 – preservation and revival of old and forgotten dishes, 3 – preservation of house recipes (based on regional gastronomic heritage), 4 – seasonality of ingredients and dishes, 5 – a reflection of primary agricultural activities (e.g., cattle breeding, pig breeding) in gastronomic offer. Local and especially house specialities of all gastronomic regions, among cold or hot appetizers, as well as main dishes, side dishes and desserts, are stressed as especially valuable in the gastronomic offer.

Breakfast offered on farms with accommodation is mainly based on dairy products, meat products, seasonal vegetables and processed products (various spreads, jams, homemade bread, etc.). Among cold dishes, homemade cold cuts with vegetables predominate. Meat dishes are dominated by pork, veal, beef, chicken, and in some places venison. The most common desserts are gibanica (layered cake), štruklji (with cottage cheese, walnuts...), apple strudel, (sour cherry) cakes, potica, and to a lesser extent cheese plate.

Figure 6. Typical local cuisine offer based on house recipes



Source: Sara Mikolič

The food offered at tourist farms typically includes traditional seasonal dishes; in wintertime, these would normally include various specialities from pork, sauerkraut, sour turnip, potatoes etc. Culinary classics on Slovenian tourist farms are mushroom soup (with buckwheat spoonbread), pumpkin soup, beef soup, goulash (veal, potato), various stews, sour soup, veal and pork roasts, breaded chicken, sautéed potatoes and mixed seasonal salad. Interestingly, grilled meat typical for Balkan cuisine is relatively rare (but otherwise very popular in restaurants in Slovenia). Most tourist farms do not have a menu, as their offer adapts to the available seasonal ingredients.

The offer of non-alcoholic beverages on tourist farms includes a variety of juices (apple, elderberry, lemon balm, grape, strawberry, chokeberry, currant), various syrups (grape, elderberry) and lemonade. Herbal teas typically include briar rose, mint, elderberry, etc. Alcoholic beverages are mostly white and red wines of various qualities, both indigenous and domesticated, as well as internationally recognized grape varieties, while in fruit-growing regions, cider is usually offered. Spirits are predominantly fruit brandies (apple, pear), plum brandy, homemade wormwood liqueur and similar bitters, as well as some local specialities. Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages purchased in stores usually comprise beers, mineral waters, sodas and coke.

#### **4.2. Complementing the offer on farms – gastronomic souvenirs, catering and participating in events and festivals**

Almost half of the respondents offer various gastronomic souvenirs, among which the most typical are jams (plum, grape, strawberry, blackberry, raspberry, peach, apricot), various spreads, dry meat products, dairy products and various types of honey, juices, wines, spirits, flour, oils, and less often herbal tea blends. Less typical gastronomic souvenirs include ecologically certified cosmetics (creams, ointments, hydrolats, essential oils), chocolate and even magnets.

Only a small share of tourist farms (14%) offers catering, which shows the traditional orientation of tourist farms in offering food and beverages on their premises. Demand for catering is quite scattered, from friendly and family gatherings, closed circle events, to societies and even companies. Cold snacks or cold cuts plates predominate, also due to the special equipment needed for such type of food delivery. The minimum number is not limited, even if it is mainly from 5 to 10 people. Four of the providers offer catering for a minimum of 20 to 50 people. The maximum number of guests reaches up to 150–200 people, which significantly exceeds the legally determined quotas for the supply of food on tourist farms. In most cases, the maximum number of people is between 15 and 50 people.

The offer of tourist farms also reflects their involvement in local, municipal and parish celebrations and events, such as local evaluations of wine, sausages, salami, stews, open wine cellars, vineyard hikes, local wine celebrations, parish celebrations etc. Regional events and festivals include those celebrating one particular dish, selected fruit or wine variety, including various regional evaluations of wines and dry meats.

Holders of supplementary activity – winemakers – take part in national gastronomic events and festivals, such as Slovenian Wine Festival in Ljubljana, Wine Universe, Ljubljana Wine Route, VinDel (International Wine and Culinary Fair) and Pubec (Young Wine Festival) in Maribor, Pop up festival in Novo mesto, PortoRose (Rose and Rose Wine Festival) and Sparkling Wine Festival in Portorož, Ljubljana, etc. The biggest culinary event that includes the evaluation and the exhibition of the awarded products from all possible groups of agricultural produce and food is undoubtedly the exhibition Delicacies of Slovenian Farms, held in Ptuj since 1990, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia.

Slovenian tourist farms are included in the evaluations and offer of the international agricultural fair AGRA in Gornja Radgona and the Alpe-Adria fair in Celovec/Klagenfurt, olive growers participate in various evaluations in Italy and Croatia, however, most active at international fairs and evaluations (in United Kingdom, Italy, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Serbia, China ...) are the winemakers.

#### **4.3. Inclusion of indigenous, traditional and domesticated plant varieties and animal breeds in restaurant and tourist offer**

In Slovenia, the abandonment of older plant varieties and animal breeds led to the loss of genetic diversity, and at the national level, a fairly extensive list of indigenous and traditional varieties of agricultural plants at risk of genetic erosion has been formed. The results of the survey show that a significant proportion of farms, 64%, are engaged in the cultivation of fruit plants, vines, field crops or garden vegetables that are considered local, traditional or indigenous. Farms are therefore aware of the importance of conserving plant genetic resources in agriculture, which is crucial for the sustainable conservation of genetic resources for future generations.

Just under half of the farms (48%) engaged in the cultivation of local, traditional or indigenous plant species present these to their guests, stating that they emphasize the importance of preserving indigenous varieties, present the origins, characteristics and history of old (forgotten) varieties and the importance of preserving varieties from generation to generation. They place great emphasis on traditional and local production. In some cases, guests can visit the nearby garden or orchard and pick herbs, fruit and vegetables. In addition, farms also include plant species in their culinary offer and try to present plants through dishes, so each dish has its own story. Many present the varieties at guided tastings, especially grape varieties, or organize a tasting of local delicacies. Plants are also included and promoted in various local products, e.g., homemade buckwheat bread, homemade juices, lard with Ptuj onions, jams etc.

**Figure 7. Organic farming and tourism with an emphasis on indigenous animal breeds. Organic farm and breeding centre for Krško polje pigs Mehak, Dolenjska, 2021**



Source: Aleš Gačnik

Significantly fewer farms, namely 29%, are involved in the breeding of indigenous or traditional animal breeds. This is in line with the fact that in Slovenia fewer and fewer indigenous and traditional breeds are included in domestic animal breeding. As a result, certain breeds are already lost, while others are rarely present and, in most cases, already threatened with extinction.

All farms engaged in the breeding of indigenous or traditional animal breeds include these in the tourist offer. On most farms, animals are the main attraction for the children. Some farms present the animals, organize a tour of the barn and the feeding of the animals, demonstrate milking, show a chicken coop and collecting of the eggs. Some even offer visitors a walk around the barn or farm on their own. In many cases, pastures are located in the immediate vicinity of the farmhouse, so the guests can walk there and observe animals grazing. Farms with horses offer horseback riding, cleaning the horses and taking photographs with the horses. Bee farms organize tours of beehives and present their work with bees. At one of the farms, visitors can take part in haymaking.

Farmers were also asked how they assess the potentials for further development of tourism on farms. Almost three quarters of respondents rated the local drinks (73%) and food (71 %) the highest. This clearly shows that, according to the respondents, wine and gastronomic tourism will continue to present the main comparative advantage of Slovenian tourist farms. This was followed by respect for local heritage and culture (64%), thematic trails, with special emphasis on wine roads (60%), accommodation

infrastructure (55%), indigenous plant varieties (42%) and knowledge of global trends in rural gastronomy (40 %).

The respondents see less potential than expected in organic production (36%) and branding (29%), local supply networks (35%), indigenous animal breeds and the development of territorial and collective brands (32%), protection of agricultural products and food within European (28%) and national (26%) quality schemes, which might be linked to excessive administration and certification costs and the fact that higher prices of organic products are not recognized or properly evaluated on the market. Therefore, the farmers prefer to offer food from their own gardens and orchards, where tourists and visitors can see for themselves that it is produced in an environmentally friendly way. Only a small percentage of respondents (13%) recognize a very high potential of brands such as Gault Millau, Michelin, The Slovenia Restaurant Award, Gostilna Slovenija and others.

In 2022, we will conduct a survey among tourist farm visitors, investigating the current state of demand and needs of modern guests in rural areas. Only the comparison of both aspects, the aspect of the farmer as a provider and the aspect of the guest as a consumer, user of services, will give a realistic picture of the potentials of this segment of the tourist offer and of the directions of development of Slovenian tourist farms and rural tourism.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Over the last two decades, farm tourism has been relatively frequently discussed in the professional literature, however, the aspect of gastronomy (food and beverage offer) has been rather neglected. The present article aims to fill this gap. Using long-term monitoring of the role of supplementary activities on farm for Slovenian farmers and rural areas, the latest available data, spatial analyses and extensive survey among holders of supplementary activity of tourism on the farm, the role of gastronomic offer on the farm is evaluated in the context of sustainable rural development. Data on supplementary activity "tourism on farm" in Slovenia, collected over a longer period, show great flexibility and resilience of tourist farms to negative external influences (economic crisis, pandemic...), as their number is constantly growing. This research aimed to shed light on the role of the provider – the farmer. The key finding of the survey is that the vast majority of Slovenian farmers (providers of supplementary activity tourism on farm) is satisfied and convinced of the very good or excellent representation of traditional / local dishes and drinks in their house offer.

From the perspective of international recognition of Slovenian gastronomic tourism, its offer of food and beverages on tourist farms has not yet been properly valorised and exploited, neither from the tourist nor agricultural point of view. Tourist farms are the main driver of sustainable rural tourism development, its visibility and competitiveness. Their future, which must be based on knowledge of local heritage and culture as well as natural values, depends on the holistic, multidisciplinary and multisectoral understanding of their mission and potential. Tourist farms are the bearers of historical and modern knowledge about agriculture and food heritage, as a basis for the development of modern forms of gastronomic tourism in rural areas. In the age of globalization (also in the field

of gastronomy and tourism), tourist farms turn our attention back to local specialities, as a basis for creating a modern gastronomic tourist offer and services on farms. Innovative agricultural products and food, as well as quality gastronomic offer on tourist farms, may well become one of the main gastronomic and tourist attractions of Slovenia, with increasing international recognition, competitiveness and economic efficiency.

Farm tourism is closely integrated into the local community and the local economy, as the vast majority of food and drink comes from the tourist farm itself or neighbouring farms. This brings increasing positive economic effects to the local environment. Due to its limited scope, such tourist offer does not generate negative effects, often associated with mass tourism. For rural Slovenia, the “coexistence” of farm tourism and farming is crucial: the tourist offer on the farm strengthens the economic activity of farms and thus contributes to the preservation and development of Slovenian countryside, as it also contributes to employment opportunities for younger generations. Therefore, farm tourism can make an important contribution to sustainable rural development. At the same time, we must be aware of the real limitations of farm tourism, related to basic agricultural activities. We must draw attention to the process of increasing specialization and the high quality of food and beverages offer in connection with the development of other supplementary offers, which in the future may lead to the gradual abandonment of farming as a primary economic activity. These tendencies have already been recognized in some Slovenian regions and are reflected in the offer, which is no longer directly linked to agricultural activity.

#### **Acknowledgement**

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GASTRONOMIC OFFER ON TOURIST FARMS IN SLOVENIA

**Dejan Cigale**  
**Aleš Gačnik**  
**Igor Jurinčič**  
**Simon Kerma**  
**Barbara Lampič**  
**Irma Potočnik Slavič**

### Abstract

The article presents the characteristics of the gastronomic offer on tourist farms and its potential for the development of gastronomy (wine and food) tourism in rural Slovenia. Although this potential has already been recognized and repeatedly highlighted in various strategic development documents, no comprehensive research has been conducted at the national level to evaluate the gastronomic aspect of the offer in the context of farm tourism as a supplementary activity. Gastronomy certainly plays a central role on Slovenian tourist farms and in many ways represents a key link between the agriculture and tourism. At the end of 2020, there were a total of 4,930 agricultural holdings in Slovenia with at least one supplementary activity registered on the farm, while supplementary activities of farm tourism are carried out on 1,215 agricultural holdings. Most of these agricultural holdings (957 or 78.8%, respectively) offer accommodation, food and drink, which is particularly important for the development of gastronomy tourism in Slovenian rural areas.

Using a survey (conducted from November 2021 to February 2022) on a representative sample of 138 tourist farms from all Slovenian regions, we determined the current food and beverages offer and the inclusion of traditional and local dishes in relation to modern dishes. The interviewed Slovenian farmers see the offer of local drinks and dishes as the biggest opportunity for further development of farm tourism, while other potentials (offer of organic food, collective brands, quality schemes, etc.) are much more in the background.

**Keywords:** farm tourism, food and wine offer, gastronomy tourism, rural development, Slovenia

**Dejan Cigale**  
Assistant Professor  
Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani  
E-mail: dejan.cigale@ff.uni-lj.si

**Aleš Gačnik**  
Assistant Professor  
Fakulteta za turistične študije - Turistica, Univerza na Primorskem  
E-mail: ales.gacnik@fts.upr.si

**Igor Jurinčič**  
PhD in Geography  
Associate Professor  
Fakulteta za turistične študije - Turistica, Univerza na Primorskem  
E-mail: igor.jurincic@fts.upr.si

**Simon Kerma**  
Assistant Professor  
Fakulteta za turistične študije - Turistica, Univerza na Primorskem  
E-mail: simon.kerma@fts.upr.si



**Barbara Lampič**

Associate Professor  
Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani  
E-mail: barbara.lampic@ff.uni-lj.si

**Irma Potočnik Slavič**

Full Professor  
Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani  
E-mail: irma.potocnik@ff.uni-lj.si

## USE OF LOCAL PRODUCTS & SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM WITH CASE OF GOOD PRACTICE

**Aleš Zidar**  
**Marko Koščak**

### **Abstract:**

Healthy lifestyles and awareness of the importance of locally grown food are growing around the world, and with its products and services it is gaining in importance among consumers. That local food is important in the supply of the population is also confirmed by the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, which showed that the need for direct access to local food is extremely important for the normal functioning of supply routes. In the LAG area between Snežnik and Nanos, many projects were co-financed and implemented on the topic of local self-sufficiency, sales of local products and connections between various stakeholders in the food and service chain. Experience to date shows the need for joint integration and short supply chains, as it has been shown that individuals have major problems with the economics of business in both production and sales, and especially due to the small and diversified supply. With the introduction of a short supply chain, the introduction of a distribution center and the connection of partners in joint sales and marketing, and above all with an innovative approach to supply, the potential for a successful story of the traveling trade project is shown. Therefore, in the area of Brkini and the Green Karst, a short supply chain "Domača marendna" was established, within which 19 agricultural holdings are currently participating. The already made investment in the mobile store has created the conditions for the direct sale of agricultural and non-agricultural products to customers on the market and the connection of farms within the joint promotional campaign "Domača Marendna". Sales take place through several sales channels - in addition to the traveling store (in markets and outlets in major cities) also through the website and mobile application, and at promotional events and fairs.

**Keywords:** locally produced food, short supply chains, rural tourism, LAG between Snežnik and Nanos, Domača marendna

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

All over the world, people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and local produce. As a result, healthy products and services are becoming steadily more important. The current situation with Covid-19 is proving that guaranteeing the population with a supply of locally produced food is important and direct access to local produce has a significant role in the normal functioning of supply routes.

A growing number of government and non-government organizations are actively promoting a healthy lifestyle as a choice made by an individual for the sake of their health. This idea does not exclude the role of doctors, but it encourages us to do whatever possible to prevent illness and disease. With increasing awareness of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle comes the increased need of customers to search for healthier alternatives when it comes to food. Locally and organically produced food falls into the

healthier category, which is why more people are seeking specifically this sort of produce. What is important here is that local produce can be acquired not only in its area of origin, but also at travel destinations, as part of tourist services and catering, tourist accommodation and other tourist-focused services on offer.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The term “short food supply-chains” (SFSCs) encompasses different typologies and operating models. Farmers might sell their products to consumers in many ways: off-farm, in the neighbouring places of consumption such as farmers’ markets, in shops owned by farmers themselves, in food festivals and fairs, through farm-based delivery schemes, or through one single trade intermediary (cooperative shops, specialist shops, supermarkets, etc.). Farmers can also sell their products directly to public institutions’ collective catering, such as school or hospital canteens, in the framework of public procurement schemes, and to restaurants, hotels and private catering companies. In some of these cases, SFSCs can also correspond to non-local sales, in particular direct internet sales/long distance farm-based delivery schemes (Kneafsey et al. 2013). Other types of on-farm schemes involve consumers travelling to the place of production for shopping (farm shops, farm based hospitality and agritourism, roadside sales, pick-your-own schemes, etc.), and some other types are based on long-term partnerships between one or more producers and consumers, where the latter have a say in farmers’ decisions and labour, such as in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or Solidarity Purchasing Groups (SPGs). Broadly speaking, SFSCs aim at reducing the “distance” between agriculture and final consumption, directly re-connecting farmers to consumers, and are at the crossroad of economic, environmental and social issues and needs. The shortening of the supply chain may be interpreted under three different points of view:

- the reduction of the physical distance between the farmer and final consumers;
- the reduction of the number of steps that connect the farmer to final consumers;
- the increase of cultural and social proximity between farmers and consumers.

SFSCs are often defined according to these three dimensions, which are not mutually exclusive, although they may have different emphasis depending on the players involved and the objectives of the initiatives. Definitions vary according to cultural, political, social, and economic specific contexts where these initiatives are embedded in (EIP-AGRI, 2014). Therefore, the world of SFSC initiatives can be conceived as a universe of different types of connection between production and consumption (Slee and Kirwan 2007; Goodman et al. 2011).

In the context of SFSCs, farmers and consumers are the key categories of stakeholders, and the success of the initiatives is often measured comparing outcomes to their expectations:

- farmers’ expectations normally involve prices, in terms of higher level and stability over time, but also other benefits such as market diversification, long-lasting trade relations, access to direct information from consumers; moreover, there are “non-

economic” expectations too, such as better social gratification, or the awareness of contributing to environment protection;

- consumers’ expectations are equally diverse: from seeking lower prices for food, to access to certain types of products and quality attributes (traditional and local products, freshness), to get more information and knowledge of both products and production process, to activate social relationships and participated initiatives, to support local producers, and to contribute to environmental preservation.

In other words, objectives pursued may attain to different aspects:

- economic aspects: allow better market access for small farmers, jumping marketing middlemen and improve the value distribution along the supply chain, benefitting farmers to gain higher value added and/or consumers to obtain final price reduction (Belletti et al. 2011);

- environment / health-nutrition aspects: reduce the geographical distance between the place of production and of consumption, which aims at granting higher freshness and quality of food delivered, guaranteeing its provenience, and reducing the environmental impact and other negative environmental externalities (less energy for transportation and storage, protecting local agro-biodiversity, defending peri-urban agricultural land) (Pretty et al. 2005; Hogan and Thorp, 2009);

- social aspects: increase the active role of farmers, final consumers, and social movements in the agri-food system. The rapprochement between farmers and consumers makes it possible to increase the leading role of these categories, usually perceived as “passive” in front of the strategies of the intermediate operators of the agri-food system (processing industry, retail), and to activate direct social relationships between farmers and consumers, building new relations of trust, solidarity, participation.

### **3. SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS AND LOCAL FOOD**

An important dimension of SFSCs initiatives is related to the concept of “local food”, which is normally perceived as one of their pillars. Consumers are showing a growing interest towards localness of food, perceived as having both higher intrinsic quality (more healthy, fresh, and diverse), and the potential to benefit local community and foster rural development, environmental preservation, agrobiodiversity, and social justice, allowing the participation of small family farms to market. As Brunori (2007) states, “local food conveys meanings which are strong enough to potentially detach consumers from conventional food networks and attach them to alternative food networks whose impact is more sustainable, equitable, healthy”. There is not a clear definition of local food, its meaning depending on the specific socio-economic and political context (Tovey 2009). In practice, there is a variety of definitions; the most common and easily understandable one is strictly linked to the “food miles” concept (Pretty et al. 2005; Hogan and Thorpe 2009). According to this definition, no matter about the number of intermediate steps the food follows nor its “values”. The only thing that matters is the geographical distance (miles) between the place of production and the place of consumption, while what may change is the maximum amount of miles that food has to travel to be still included in the term “local” (Dunne et al. 2010; Martinez et al. 2010).

In short, local food is essentially a product that has been produced close to the consumption area or, to be more precise, close to the place of purchase (a shop, a restaurant, a farm). Indeed, physical distance should be extended to the distance between the place of production of other inputs (including e.g. pesticides, animal feed) and the farm. When this whole network of exchanges is analysed, some commonly held (mis)conceptions can be reversed (Coley et al 2009; Durham, King, and Roheim 2009). Other criteria can be used to define the “localness” of a product (Feagan, 2007; Belletti, Casabianca e Marescotti 2012).

Indeed, a widespread meaning of local food assumes a different interpretation of the locality, not so much related to how food reaches marketplace and consumers, looking instead to the link between the product and its place of production in terms of specificity of local resources used in the production process, history of the product and the production and consumption tradition, and its collective dimension (Belletti and Marescotti 2011). These products are commonly referred to as “origin products” or “typical products”. The specificity of local resources affects the quality characteristics of the origin product, too, and it may come from the physical environment where it is produced (winds, soils, temperature and humidity, genetic resources, etc.), as well as the human resources and know-how (breeding, handling and processing practices, cultivation techniques, etc.).

Know-how and practices are usually highly specific, and transmitted through time from one generation to the next, adapted to the evolution of the environment and society on the basis of contextual local knowledge and scientific progress. Moreover, there is also a consumption tradition specific to the place of origin, namely knowledge of how to eat the product and when, how to prepare and cook it, how to taste it, and how to evaluate its quality. History and cultural traditions are closely connected to the third specificity, the collective dimension. Actually, the link of origin products with the territorial area has been created, and transmitted over time within a community of producers and consumers in such a way that the product becomes part of the common local patrimony, something that cannot be individually owned.

The process of knowledge acquisition (often contextual and non-codified), accumulation and sedimentation makes an origin product the expression of a community of producers and often of the overall local community organisation, values, traditions and habits. That is why origin products have a patrimonial dimension (Bérard and Marchenay 2006): the product characteristics, the way of producing, storing, marketing, consuming and appreciating an origin product, are all part of the patrimony and historical memory of the local community, which alone should have the right to use it to attain economic, social and cultural benefits. The origin product can also represent a catalyst of local community action, one that can reinforce promotion initiatives at the local level. The link between the production system and the territory of production is in some cases encapsulated in legally protected geographical indications (Tregear et al 2007), as well as frequently being expressed in less formalized ways, often related to specific marketing channels (Kirwan 2006) and embedded in relational/cognitive/institutional relations with the community concerned. This geographical name is used as the main communication leverage to market the product to consumers, owing to the reputation acquired over time on the basis of repeated purchases and the maintenance of the promise of quality. In the

end, the concept of local food is quite flexible, as we can observe a variety of definitions along a “continuum” ranging from the simple criterion of distance from the place of production to the place of consumption, up to more articulated ones which includes other economic, social, cultural, environmental criteria.

#### **4. CASE OF GOOD PRACTICE: ESTABLISHMENT OF A SHORT SUPPLY CHAIN “DOMAČA MARENDA”**

In the last two EU programming periods, many projects on the topic of local self-supply food chains, the sale of local produce and products as well as networking of stake holders in the development of rural tourism were financed and conducted, regardless of the current Covid-19 situation. These projects were carried out in the LAG area between Snežnik and Nanos in the southwestern part of Slovenia. In total, 143 projects were carried out, forty-two of which focused directly on tourism, while 40 were related to it indirectly. That amounts to 82 projects or almost two thirds (58%) of all the carried-out projects.

This ties in with the fact that the population of the LAG area also considered rural tourism as an important element in the preparation of the Strategy of local development. They see a strong connection between rural tourism, the local supply of produce and products and the further development of this area. Experience with projects so far also shows the need for networking, as it turns out that individuals have difficulty with the economics of conducting their business due to the small and scattered supply. This relates to the synergies between direct investment in production, sales and tourism infrastructure and activities, services and products on offer and everything else that affects the implementation of rural tourism.

The fact is that local partnerships (LAG) are crucial for the development of the rural area since they can receive grants for co-financing projects through the Leader programme or CLLD. They also have direct access to information about the possibilities of development, enabled by the bottom-up approach. This also means that funds can be directed into projects which are based on the actual needs and potential of the area.

Evaluation of the projects to date has shown the following:

- The main stakeholders of individual activities were defined, as well as where and what the potential for cooperation between the local supply and rural tourism is. A problem that arises here is the question of cooperation between smaller and larger stakeholders (or a local and global approach) as well as whether synergy is possible between these stakeholders.
- Possibilities of investment and co-financing projects. The funds within the framework of LAG are limited. This means smaller projects, smaller investments and less interest in local communities or larger partners. On the other hand, it means easier access to the funding for smaller investors.

- Based on a marketing and expert analysis of the local market it was established that farmers and other providers in the field lack networking and support when it comes to sales. Since they do not have a substantial workforce, they have difficulty in managing both production and sales activities. That is why an intermediary is needed, whose role would be to connect suppliers and customers through a short supply chain and in this way help with the sale of products.
- Local food, produce and products can be an important part of local tourism services in the LAG area and an upgrade of the current activities.

## **5. NETWORKING OF LOCAL PRODUCT SUPPLIERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF JOINT OFFER**

### **5.1 Description of the mobile shop called “Domača marena” (Homemade meals)**

Introduction of a short supply chain, establishment of a distribution centre, networking of partners in joint sales and marketing and an innovative approach to offering the supply shows the potential for a success story of the mobile shop project.

A short supply chain 'Domača marena' has been established in the Green Karst and Brkini regions and currently involves twenty-four farming estates. The investment into a mobile shop by the leading partner created conditions for purchasing produce directly from partners, for direct sale of agricultural and non-agricultural products to customers and networking of farms withing a joint promotional campaign 'Domača marena'. Sales are made through various channels: via the mobile shop at markets and sales points in towns as well as through the website, mobile app and at promotional events and fairs.

The product offer comprises local products from the LAG area of the Green Karst and Brkini regions exclusively. The numerous farming estates and producers of quality and mostly organic products in this area are left to their own devices regarding the sale of their products. Being familiar with the geographical area and the possibility of networking towards a joint offer, the leading partner has decided to establish a short supply chain which means that quality products are offered by the producer directly to the final customer. New sales channels have been set up, putting emphasis on the quality local offer:

- A new mobile shop offering optimal selling conditions and direct sale in town centres, at markets, fairs, popular locations and promotional events.
- An on-line shop including a mobile app and all the necessary elements needed for direct on-line sales, such as order, payment and delivery system.

- Organisation of various trade events (Eco Fair of Brkini and Green Karst, Culinary flavours of the Intermittent Lakes, Farmers Market) with promotional presentation of the partnership and different promotional offers. The events are closely related to the local cuisine and the promotion of local dishes made with local ingredients (direct promotion for the producers).
- Other promotional activities such as media advertisement and social media advertising campaigns.

As a result of the partnership, sales are made by the leading partner (intermediary), which enables the farms to focus more on the production and less on the sales.

### **5.2 Set targets of “Domača marena”**

The fundamental objectives:

- Connecting agricultural producers in a joint supply and sales chain under a joint brand name ‘Domača marena’.
- Achieving recognition of the quality local products of Brkini and Green Karst and ensuring stability of sales on the market via different sales channels.
- Increasing production and sales of products that are local, organic and of protected geographic origin.
- Contributing to lessening the impact of climate change and to environmental protection of the area by the organisation and optimisation of supply and sales routes.
- Upgrade of ‘Domača marena’ activities and sustainability of the project resulting in securing jobs within the short supply chain.

### **5.3 “Domača marena” contributes to progress and innovation of the local produce offer**

Within the partnership there is a constant and guaranteed supply of quality local products. This ensures bigger sales and consequently a bigger production in the area of Brkini and Green Karst. The leading partner's years of experience in organising sales on the local market (LAG between Snežnik in Nanos projects) have shown that the key issue in networking is the presence of an intermediary who would take care of supply and sales of the products thus leaving the farmers more time to work on the farms. As a result of this, a wide network of partners has developed. The leading partner purchased a mobile shop and contributed to an innovative approach to the sales of local products. The project has been well received as the mobile shop is not an ordinary shop but a unique example of a shop selling local products exclusively. There are similar shops already located in permanent sites in bigger towns, however, this mobile shop aims at finding big enough selling capacities and providing a weekly offer in different locations. This will ensure



maximum efficiency of the shop's sales time and better accessibility in a greater area. This will also mean greater flexibility in terms of delivery of products ordered through the website. The website will be set up according to the latest standards and will be compatible with mobile devices which will make it easy for customers to choose and purchase. Delivery will be done mainly by the mobile shop in the greater area of south-west Slovenia.

## **6. CONNECTING LOCAL PRODUCTS AND LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS ON OFFER FOR THE PURPOSES TO DEVELOP RURAL TOURISM**

### **6.1 Green Karst Breakfast (Zajtrk Zelenega Krasa – domača marendica)**

The continuation and upgrade of the offer 'Domača marendica' is a new tourist product called 'Green Karst Breakfast – domača marendica'. At the moment it is still in its testing phase. The breakfast will consist exclusively of local produce typical of the Green Karst area and it will be delivered to guests staying in tourist accommodation around Green Karst. There will be two kinds of breakfast available; classic/house breakfast and vegetarian breakfast, as advised by a nutritionist. The contents of breakfast will be delivered in biodegradable packaging.

The distinctive feature of this breakfast is not only the local ingredients but also its added value in the form of free discount vouchers which every buyer will get with the purchase of a breakfast. Free discount vouchers will consist of five experiences and will enable the customer to visit, attend and explore tourist experiences in the Green Karst area. The aim is to keep customers in the area for a longer period of time, to eventually secure customers' repeated returns to Green Karst destination and to involve a wider range of local suppliers of tourist services. It is about the synergy of a short supply chain as well as of local tourist accommodation and services on offer and therefore we expect an upgrade of agritourism in this area and its added value resulting from marketing additional services.

On the downside, the development and preparation of the breakfast product can prove to be logistically costly as the geographical area that needs to be covered is rather large. The planning of preparation and delivery of breakfast packages will therefore be of utmost importance, especially in the endeavour to focus sales on areas with higher density of tourist accommodation. Currently we are collaborating with a privately owned campsite Sunrise Hill in Drskovče near Pivka and the tourist resort in Sviščaki (a scattered hotel under development) with accommodation units offering a large number of overnight stays.

### **6.2 Brkini Dishes (Brkinska kuhinja)**

The offer of local products and the 'Domača marendica' package are linked to culinary experiences. Culinary experiences create an opportunity for an additional offer in the 'Domača marendica' package. Occasionally, 'Brkinska kuhinja' is offered on the mobile shop menu, which includes local homemade dishes of the Green Karst area such as sauerkraut with potatoes, swede soup with liver sausage, rolled dumplings topped with

roasted breadcrumbs, apple “strudl” and pancakes. To this assortment, we have added sandwiches and toasties made with local ingredients, all of which are quick and easy to prepare. Our speciality is Brkinska štručka, a bun with local homemade sausage and sauerkraut filling. We feel it is vital that all the ingredients are of local origin to ensure a high-quality product.

The activity of ‘Brkinska kuhinja’ is carried out in locations where it is possible to sell food and at various events such as fairs, culinary events and promotional events. It is not a permanent offer but an occasional one, based on agreement with the event organisers and their conditions. In the future we aim to upgrade to a permanent product offer in permanent locations.

Our ultimate ambition is our involvement in the gastronomic offer of other regions in Slovenia and widespread visibility and recognition of the Green Karst culinary aspect by which we try to preserve our cultural heritage, support sustainable development of eco-friendly tourism and put emphasis on what is local and indigenous.

## **7. LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS**

Advantages and opportunities lie in the innovativeness and uniqueness of our product. The fact that it is based on local produce and services from the Brkini and Green Karst area gives us an advantage and opportunity, which needs to be additionally promoted. The focus needs to be on the target groups. An example of this is the organized groups of eco-conscious people in residential communities in Rijeka, Croatia, where joint ordering and delivering of local organic food is already underway. Similar activity is happening in bigger cities in Slovenia. Because of the proximity, Rijeka is a realistic option for our shop to visit, but this could also apply to other larger cities with an eco-conscious population.

We have an innovative marketing approach with our ‘Domača marendna’ package, in which we offer breakfast in tourist accommodation where this option would otherwise not be available. This is a relatively new concept on the market and is commercially interesting, especially with regard to the points mentioned in Chapter 1.

The lack of financing opportunities represents a marketing disadvantage since funding dictates meticulous and sensible planning of activities and costs. As a result, sales growth is smaller since the activities are conducted in accordance with planned funds. Because of this we cannot work with the full range of activities which we planned at the beginning of our investment period. Employment is also related to the conducting of activities and sales, which means that regular employment is not immediately available. Employment possibilities also depend on the suitability of the staff. We see a solution for this in the co-financing of our activities with EU funds intended for this type of activity.

There also exists the possibility of large costs that come with the sales of ‘Domača marendna’ packages, since small orders and scattered buyers could lead to higher transport costs and logistical difficulties. That is why a clearer plan and streamlining of the delivery of packages are needed, since this represents the biggest cost of the activity. We

do not see any risk within a smaller number of sales but in the heightening of delivery costs. Delivery costs stay the same regardless of sales. A possible solution is additional promotion and sales together with project partners, as well as regular coordination with the planning of daily activities.

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### **Aleš Zidar**

manager

Slovenian Rural Development Network

Slavina 31, 6258 Prestranek, Slovenia

LAG between Snežnik and Nanos

Jurčičeva 1, 6250 Ilirska Bistrica, Slovenia

E-mail: info@razvoj-podezelja.si; ales.zidar@siol.net

### **Marko Koščak, Izr. prof. dr.**

Slovenian Rural Development Network

Slavina 31, 6258 Prestranek, Slovenia

E-mail: marko.koscak@siol.net

## **ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AS A MEASURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS**

**Mirjana Delić - Jović**

### **Abstract**

Organic agricultural production is one of the basic elements of the concept of sustainable development. It is based on the use of renewable resources and pure (natural), chemical-free food production. This concept could be a favorable measure for the development of rural areas in general, but also for rural tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of the paper was to look at the state of organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compare it with the situation in the region and give conclusions on whether this type of production can contribute to the development of rural areas and rural tourism in the observed region. The area under organic production in hectares (ha) ranged from 292 ha (2012) to 576 ha (2015). The recorded growth of production is the lowest in relation to the countries of the region, as well as the total organic production and can be considered still underdeveloped. For comparison purposes, there are shown the shares of areas under organic production in the Republic of Croatia ranging from 31 904 ha (2012) to 75 883 ha (2015), as well as in the Republic of Serbia ranging from 6 340 ha (2012) to 15 298 (2015). It can be concluded that it is necessary to intensify and mass this type of production, with the support of state measures and market regulation, but also with simultaneous development of agritourism, which would be a direct potential consumer of this production, while indirectly, through this concept, other related activities could benefit.

**Keywords:** organic production, rural development, agritourism.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over 37 million hectares in the world are under organic production. According to data from 2012, about 1.8 million producers were engaged in this type of production. This number is growing every year. At the same time, the demand for organic products in the world is growing. In many countries, especially the developed countries of the European Union (EU), there is still a deficit of production in relation to demand of market, especially organic fruit, cereals and animal food (Kalentić et al. 2014).

Due to the opening and expansion of the market with organically produced food, but also the growth of agricultural land under organic farming, it is concluded that organic agriculture in Europe and the world is gaining in importance. This type of production contributes to the preservation of the environment, but also to the development of rural areas. Organic agriculture is one of the basic elements of the concept of sustainable development. It is based on the use of renewable resources and pure production without the use of chemicals in food production. Thus, it represents the basic opposite of conventional and intensive agricultural production (Batelja-Lodeta et al. 2011). The goal is to produce food without the use of mineral fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, pesticides and numerous other chemical preparations, which are widely used in conventional cultivation. In this way, long-term positive effects are achieved, in terms of improving and preserving soil fertility, preserving natural resources, preserving

ecosystems, biodiversity and reducing all forms of pollution (Delić-Jović et al. 2017). The share of areas under organic production in the region is still quite low, and the last place is occupied by Bosnia and Herzegovina, where this type of production is extremely low, although these areas are rich in unused and unpolluted natural resources suitable for organic farming. The aim of this paper is to look at the state of organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compare it with the situation in the region and give conclusions on whether this type of production can contribute to the development of rural areas and rural tourism in the observed region.

The methods used in this paper are methods of analysis and synthesis, and methods of deduction and comparison with the collection of graphical and tabular presentation of data from relevant available literature and relevant databases.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The need for food is considered to be the primary physiological need, and its satisfaction is the basic condition for the biological survival of an individual (Leko-Šimić 2002). The basic principles of organic agriculture on which the development of this production is based according to the International Federation of Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) are:

*Principle of health* - according to which organic agriculture should not endanger the health of land, flora and fauna and human population;

*The principle of ecology* - implies compliance with environmental standards and regulations, in terms of proper and harmless management of organic waste. According to this principle, the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or products derived from, or using GMOs, is not permitted;

*Principle of justice* - organic agriculture is based on a fair relationship with nature and the environment. It is forbidden to add any means that may mislead consumers as to the validity of the organic product;

*The principle of nurturing and caring* - means to produce sufficient quantities of high quality food, to maintain and increase long-term fertility and biological activity of the soil, and to support the establishment of a comprehensive production, processing and distribution chain, which is socially just, environmentally responsible and so on. (Ninić et al. 2015).

### **2.1. Organic production in the world**

According to (Cifrić 2003), when we talk about organic production, it is not only about technical aspects, but also about the anthropological relationship of man to the Earth. Organic agriculture developed during the 20th century, parallel, in several European countries (Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Great Britain, France) and the United States. There have been internationally accepted systems of regulations and controls for organic agriculture in the world for many years, adopted and developed according to IFOAM

standards from 1980 (IFOAM Organics International, 1980) and Codex Alimentarius guidelines.

The European Union legally regulated organic agriculture by adopting regulations on organic agriculture and food production back in the year 1991 (European Commission, Regulation 1991/2092/EC of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1991 on organic production and labelling of organic products). The result of the adoption of this Regulation of the European Commission was the rapid development of organic agriculture in all European countries, and especially in the Member States of the European Union.

According to 2010 data, 1.4 million producers in 154 countries were involved in organic or ecological farming (Willer and Kilcher 2010). Conventional agriculture, unlike organic, largely contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, about 14% of total annual emissions, of which mineral fertilizers are about 38%, and animal production (livestock) about 31% (Schutter 2010). The data of the World Health Organization show that about 3 million people are poisoned with pesticides per year (Motik and Šimleša 2007). According to Puđak and Bokan (2011), conventionally grown food has less nutritional value than organically produced food. Therefore, there are serious reasons for the growing development of organic agriculture at the global level. Consumer awareness of the use of organic products, as well as the high living standard of the population of the European Union has led to the fact that, despite higher prices of organic products compared to conventionally produced, in EU countries there is still greater demand than supply on the market. According to European regulations, in order for a product to be declared organic, it must contain at least 95% organic ingredients and meet the provisions of EU regulations (European Commission, Regulation 1991/2092/EC of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1991 on organic production and labelling of organic products). There are differences in the labelling of organic products among the countries of the European Union, but in order to maintain the credibility of organic agriculture, all countries must adhere to the rules related to the control of organic food products (Šamota et al. 2005).

### **3. RESULTS WITH DISCUSSION**

Organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina is beginning to develop significantly in the last decade. These areas are rich in unused natural resources, which are not largely degraded, and are very suitable for organic agricultural production. There are all other prerequisites for dealing with this production, such as the diversity of areas favourable for the growth of different agricultural crops (Delić-Jović et al. 2017).

#### **3.1. The state of organic agricultural production in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Different cultural characteristics and technologies of production and processing are present in different parts of the country, which is a good prerequisite for the production of different food products. Fragmented land holdings are not desirable for conventional agriculture, nor for large-scale production. In a way, fragmented land holdings in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in favour of organic production, because it can produce a larger number of individual farmers, which fits into the concept of organic food production, because it requires a lot of manual work on smaller areas. Organic or ecological

production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in comparison with the surrounding countries, which also did not significantly develop this production, is in last place. It is believed that the poor condition is due to insufficient education of staff and producers in the field of ecological or organic agricultural production, and so the awareness of the population about this production is low. However, the underdeveloped and unregulated market and the lack of strategic projects are a bigger problem for the development of this branch of the economy. This production in Bosnia and Herzegovina began to develop in the 1990s. At that time, the first activities related to the promotion, application of organic production methods, control and certification, begin to appear (Ninić et al. 2015).

The impeller and initiator of the development of organic production in BH was the Bosnian Environmental Technologies Association (BETA). This development initiative dates back to year 2001. The association "Organic Control" or "OK", which aimed to support the development of organic agriculture in BH, and which today deals with the certification of organic products (is the first certification body), was founded in 2003. There are several other certification bodies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All certification programs should be based on IFOAM standards (IFOAM Organics International, 2017). In order for products from Bosnia and Herzegovina to be exported to European Union countries, the legislation must be harmonized with the EU legislation on organic food production. In this way, local producers become visible in the European market. In terms of exports, it is also important that the product is obtained under conditions that are identical or very close to those applied in EU production.

Bosnia and Herzegovina for a long time had no legislation on organic production at the national level, the Law on Organic Agricultural Production was adopted in 2016 (Law on Organic Agricultural Production, "Official Gazette" of the Federation of BH, No. 72/16). This law prescribes the goals and principles of organic production, production rules for organic agricultural production, labelling of organic products, control system, register of entities in organic production, administrative and inspection supervision, import, export and placing on the market of organic products, as well as violations and other issues relevant to organic production. For more serious development of organic agricultural products, it is necessary to adopt and implement a series of regulations and harmonize measures and policies implemented at the entity level within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of special importance is the close cooperation and joint action of competent institutions at all levels (Delić-Jović et al. 2017). It is important to emphasize that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is still no singular and precise register and thus no relevant statistics on the state of organic production. Therefore, the analysis for this period is given in Table 1.

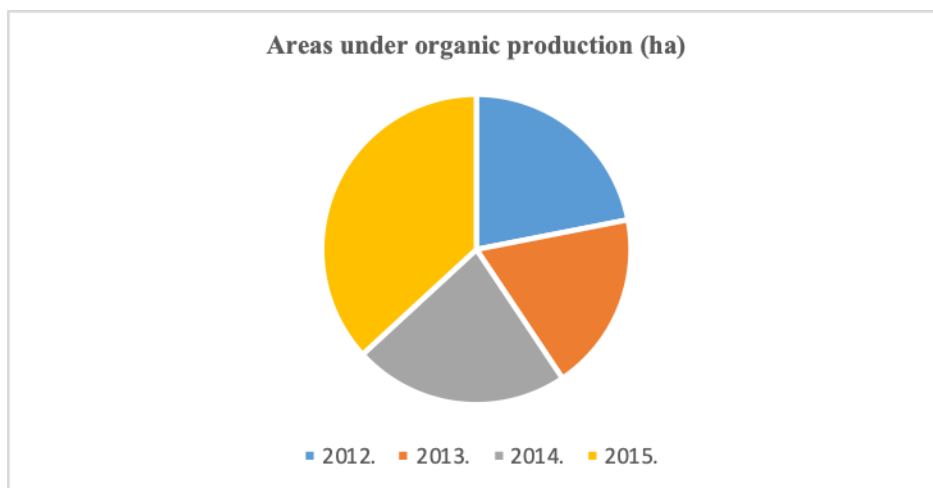
**Table 1. Areas under organic production in hectares (ha) for the period 2012-2015**

Year	Areas under organic production (ha)
2012	343
2013	292
2014	353
2015	576

Source: The world of organic production, Statistics and emergine trends FIBL&IFOAM-Organics internationals



**Chart 1. Display of areas under organic production (ha) in Bosnia and Herzegovina**



Source: The world of organic production, Statistics and emerging trends FIBL & IFOAM-Organics internationals, edited by the author

The review of Table 1 and Chart 1 shows that the areas according to available (probably incomplete data) in Bosnia and Herzegovina are at a very modest level, but that a slight increase is evident from 2013 to 2015. Certainly, this type of production is not at a satisfactory level and as such cannot serve as a measure of rural development in the analysed area.

Based on the data of the Organic Control (OK), in 2017 there were 65 certified organic producers and 58 in the year 2018. Currently, most of them are certified in the field of medicinal plants and berries. Ecocert Balkan data have a similar structure for 37 producers (data for year 2017). Of the other production, but significantly less, the production of fruits, vegetables, mushrooms and cereals is also represented.

Table 2 presents the SWOT analysis of the state of the organic products market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the most significant identified internal and external factors of this analysis. From the given analysis it can be concluded that the proposed strategy, which is common in making such an analysis could be according to the known matrix Maxi-Maxi, which would mean using power to take advantage of opportunities, but also Maxi-Mini, in a way that uses power in order to face the identified threats on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Table 2. SWOT analysis of the organic products market in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% of unused agricultural land</li> <li>• Combined production (low need for external inputs)</li> <li>• Education and motivation of producers</li> <li>• Preserved environment</li> <li>• Rich biodiversity</li> <li>• Rich cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age structure of the population in rural areas</li> <li>• Labor shortages in rural areas</li> <li>• Traditional production-extensive approach to organic production</li> <li>• Fragmentation of property possession</li> <li>• Insufficient knowledge transfer</li> </ul>
<b>CHANCES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market growth (trends - healthy lifestyle)</li> <li>• Numerous European funds</li> <li>• Strengthening regional tourism</li> <li>• Educated staff in the field</li> <li>• Development of the food industry</li> <li>• Development of the region's infrastructure</li> <li>• New agricultural policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of legal acts and their implementation</li> <li>• Underdeveloped market</li> <li>• Underdeveloped infrastructure in rural areas</li> <li>• Lack of development and strategic projects</li> </ul>

Source: (Čengić-Džomba, et al. 2014), adapted by the author

### 3.2. Organic production in the Republic of Croatia

In relation to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organic production in Croatia is in a better position. However, Croatia is considered to be one of the few European countries where ecologic or organic production is still underdeveloped. Natural resources for development, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, exist, but there are also many unfavorable factors. Legislation was passed in 2001, with the first Law on Organic Production of Agricultural and Food Products (Law on Organic Production of Agricultural and Food Products, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 139/10). The new Act on Organic Agriculture and Labeling of Organic Products was adopted in 2010 (Act on Organic Agriculture and Labeling of Organic Products, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 139/10). According to Grahovac (2005), three periods of development of organic production in Croatia are identified: 1) the period up to 1991, which is considered as the beginning of development; 2) the period from 1991 to 2001, in which the first specialized stores for "healthy food" appeared on the market, which contributed to bringing organic products closer to consumers. This is the period of promotion of organic agriculture by organizing numerous seminars and fairs on this topic, and (Štefanić et al. 2001) believe that it was in this period that Croatia began the development of the market for organic products and 3) the period from 2001 to 2012, in which the institutional and legislative framework of production developed.

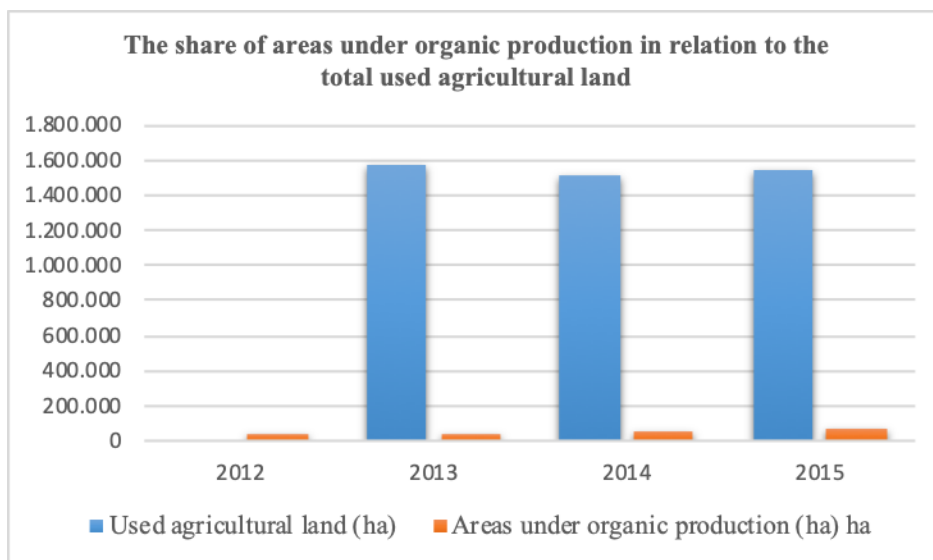
After that period, there is a significant development of ecological or organic production. Table 3 shows the area under organic production in the total used agricultural land, for the period from 2012 to 2015.

**Table 3. Share of organic production (area) in relation to the total used agricultural land for the period 2012-2015.**

Year	Used agricultural land	Areas under organic production	Share of areas under organic production in total used agricultural land
	ha	ha	%
2012	1.330.973	31.904	2,40
2013	1.568.881	40.660	2,59
2014	1.508.885	50.054	3,32
2015	1.537.629	75.883	4,94

Source: Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia, 2012-2015, edited by author

**Chart 2. Share of areas under organic production in relation to total agricultural land for the period 2012-2015**



Source: Author

By the overview of Table 3 and Chart 2 can be concluded, that the area under organic production in a total of Croatia's agricultural areas increased by 2.54% in four years. This situation is still not considered satisfactory, but slight growth of the production is evident.

### 3.3. The state of organic agriculture in the Republic of Serbia

In Serbia, the production and processing of organic food began to develop about 20 years ago, however, it is still considered insufficiently developed. The first law on organic production in Serbia was the Law on Organic Production adopted in 2000 (Law on Organic Production, Official Gazette of FRY, No. 28/00). After that, a new law was passed in 2006, called the Law on Organic Production and Organic Products (Law on Organic Production and Organic Products, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 62/06). The European Union adopted new regulations, which refer to the field of organic production in 2010, and the need for changes in legal legislation in Serbia re-emerged. Thus, the Law on Organic Production from 2010 was passed (Law on Organic Production, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 30/10).

Compared to other countries, the concentration of retail facilities in Serbia is still very underrepresented. A large percentage of organic products that can be found on the Serbian market are imported, and only certain quantities of fresh products: vegetables, cereals, slightly less fruit and processed products: flour, pasta, juices and jams, oils, winter stores are of domestic origin. Eggs and honey can be found on the market from certified animal products, and since 2013, the first dairy products: fresh milk, yogurt and sour cream. Organic baby food products are imported, and the same products of domestic origin are intended for export and are not available on the domestic market. Growth is recorded in the number and representation of certified cosmetic products. The most favorable destination for the placement of organic products from Serbia is considered to be Germany, which occupies 31% of the total European organic food market, followed by France with 17%, Great Britain with 10% and Italy with 8% share (Kalentić et al. 2014).

Table 4 shows the areas under organic production in total used agricultural land of Serbia, for the period from 2012 to 2015.

Table 4. Percentage of areas under organic production for the period 2012-2015

Year	Areas under organic production (ha)	Share of areas under organic production in total used agricultural land (%)
2012	6.340	0,18
2013	8.228	0,23
2014	9.547,8	0,28
2015	15.298	0,44

Source: (Simić 2017), adapted by the author

The overview of the table shows an increase in the area under organic production in the total used agricultural land of Serbia, for a period of four years. That increase is modest and can in no way be called satisfactory. Compared to Croatia, Serbia has a very small percentage of agricultural land under organic production. Thus, from the overview of Tables 3 and 4, we see that in 2015 in Croatia this percentage was 4.95%, while in Serbia it was 0.44%.

### 3.4. Agrotourism as a measure of rural development

The demographic picture shows the migratory movements of the working age population, in our country and the region, which are going in the direction of leaving rural households and concentrating in large cities. Uneven rural development is a significant problem affecting both developed and underdeveloped countries. Such phenomena are especially pronounced in underdeveloped or transition countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. When it comes to the chances for the development of underdeveloped municipalities, tourism is imposed as one of the priority directions of development. Each of these municipalities has natural-geographical, cultural-historical, hunting-fishing and other capacities, which represent a favourable basis for the development of tourism (Lošić and Novaković 2016). Natural resources and benefits offered to investors for potential investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina are numerous opportunities: agricultural land, forest complexes, hydro-climatic conditions, ore and mineral resources, and great tourist potentials. Observing the overall legislation, we can conclude that the existing laws at a satisfactory level regulate the functioning of tourism as an economic branch in terms of rural development of municipalities. However, the way of assistance for the development of rural tourism within the existing laws does not give enough space to underdeveloped and extremely underdeveloped municipalities to get adequate subsidies and incentives in terms of giving preference to this category of municipalities. On the other hand, the tax burden is the same for all legal entities engaged in this activity, regardless of the development of the municipality, which is a limiting factor. Lošić and Novaković (2016) point out that it is necessary to regulate incentive measures (as well as tax and other reliefs), based on the level of development of municipalities, in order to give a chance to development of rural areas and rural tourism and agrotourism together with organic food production. According to Pejanović and Vujović (2008), agritourism directs the entire agro-complex towards sustainable development, production of healthy food and its marketing. Indirectly through the concept of integrated development of agricultural production, which includes organic production, tourism meets a number of activities related to agribusiness, which could be a chance for the development of all these industries in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the impact of agritourism on regional development has not yet been sufficiently explored, the experience of rural and regional development within the EU shows that agritourism development provides benefits for a particular region, such as: stabilization of overall regional development, preservation of traditions and culture of rural communities, strengthening the competitiveness of the region and certain tourist destinations and many others.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the review and analysis of available and relevant data on the state of organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also from comparisons with countries in the region, it can be concluded that in all analyzed countries this production is underdeveloped, with Bosnia and Herzegovina in last place. Numerous problems accompany the development of this production. First of all, the legal regulations, which are difficult to harmonize with the regulations of the European Union, then unprotected and unregulated markets, lack of guaranteed purchase, partly underdeveloped awareness of producers about mandatory product certification, and thus visibility in potential markets. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the potential to develop in this direction, primarily due to the richness of natural resources, the existence of fragmented assets and the unsaturation of the European market for organic products. The production of organic food from Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also the surrounding countries can be their entry into the European market, if the existing problems related to organic agricultural production can be overcome. However, according to the available and processed data on the volume of production, it cannot be claimed that organic production can be a measure of the development of rural areas in general, including rural tourism. Significant work is needed to improve and manage rural development measures, so that more economically developed rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be expected, while respecting sustainability and environmental protection.

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## ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AS A MEASURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS

### Abstract

Organic agricultural production is one of the basic elements of the concept of sustainable development. It is based on the use of renewable resources and pure (natural), chemical-free food production. This concept could be a favorable measure for the development of rural areas in general, but also for rural tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of the paper was to look at the state of organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compare it with the situation in the region and give conclusions on whether this type of production can contribute to the development of rural areas and rural tourism in the observed region. The area under organic production in hectares (ha) ranged from 292 ha (2012) to 576 ha (2015). The recorded growth of production is the lowest in relation to the countries of the region, as well as the total organic production and can be considered still underdeveloped. For comparison purposes, there are shown the shares of areas under organic production in the Republic of Croatia ranging from 31 904 ha (2012) to 75 883 ha (2015), as well as in the Republic of Serbia ranging from 6 340 ha (2012) to 15 298 (2015). It can be concluded that it is necessary to intensify and mass this type of production, with the support of state measures and market regulation, but also with simultaneous development of agritourism, which would be a direct potential consumer of this production, while indirectly, through this concept, other related activities could benefit.

**Keywords:** organic production, rural development, agritourism.

**Mirjana Delić - Jović, PhD**  
Assistant Professor

Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, University of Business Studies  
Jovana Dučića 23a, 78 000 Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina  
E-mail: mdelicjovic@yahoo.com



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL TOURISM THROUGH ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS

**Morena Mičetić Fabić**  
**Irena Šker**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to determine the role of entrepreneurial support institutions (ESI) in the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism. The primary task of ESI is to create a favorable business environment and provide educational and information services for starting new, and the growth and development of existing entrepreneurs. However, research on entrepreneurship in rural tourism, as a significant potential for sustainable, tourism, social and economic development of rural areas, and its connection with ESIs as development support, remains scarce. A sample of 56 respondents was collected from ESIs in the Republic of Croatia, members of Business Organizations Network Development - BOND. Descriptive statistics and t-test were performed to analyze the basic indicators of ESI activities (participation in the application and implementation of EU and national projects, cooperation with external mentors, organization of educational activities...). The results indicate an insufficient focus of ESI on rural tourism and open the possibility for new focuses and business expansion. The applied contribution of the research is manifested in the improvement of the business of ESIs in rural areas, while the scientific contribution is generated through the multiple role of ESIs as a potential generator of innovative entrepreneurship development in rural tourism.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial support institutions, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship in rural tourism, rural tourism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The present study is being carried out in Croatia, which represents a developing country that in 2021 recorded a GDP growth of 10.4% (DZS, 2022) compared to 2020. Tourism greatly affects GDP development - due to its favourable climate and geographical position, Croatia is one of the most visited tourist destinations in Europe. In many Croatian tourist destinations, there is an expansion of tourist offers through specialized types of tourism - selective forms of tourism.

Entrepreneurship is a key source of economic revolution, job creation, and business development; hence, it is pivotal to attract the young and educated people to become entrepreneurs (Li et al. 2020). For this reason, national governments adopted special strategies to encourage entrepreneurship in order to achieve sustainable economic growth and development and strengthen the competitiveness of the economy at the international level.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs here lack the entrepreneurial skills and financial support needed to successfully conduct business in this globally competitive business environment (Zreen et al. 2019). As a way of guiding strong economic growth, the number of incubators around the world is increasing, so governments and other agencies

that support these incubators are paying more attention to assessing their performance (Lalkaka 2006). According to Lalkaka (2006), a clear understanding of the objectives of business incubator programs brings about the accurate and useful measures of providing entrepreneurs with the right services - appropriate expertise, tools, networking and capital for business startup. In this regard, the business incubator is not only a business tool, but also one that has its own scope of providing effective training for entrepreneurs to ensure that entrepreneurial ventures and technology transfers are successful in the business environment.

In addition to understanding the significant role of business incubators as incubators of change and encouraging the development of the entire economy, it is clear that they play a very important role in promoting tourism in rural areas. However, due to the mostly insufficiently specific role of entrepreneurial support institutions, they are focused on general services for new and existing entrepreneurs, while at the same time very little is dedicated to encouraging tourism in rural areas. Due to the large share of rural areas in the total territory of Croatia and the exceptional potential for development, it is important to encourage entrepreneurship in rural tourism. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial support institutions are insufficiently engaged in providing services aimed at the development of rural tourism.

The following sections of this article discuss literature review, followed by the research methods section, which provides detailed information about the research design, sampling, data collection tools, measurement scales, and analysis process and concludes with a description of the data analysis and results. In the conclusion section, the overall conclusions of the study are discussed, together with theoretical and practical implications of the research, limitations of the study and future research direction are highlighted.

## **2. SUPPORT TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL TOURISM**

Numerous studies in developed and developing countries are conducted on the topic of business incubation and the role of business incubators in economic development. However, the authors of this paper note the lack of research and papers on the role of business incubators and other forms of business support institutions in encouraging entrepreneurship in rural tourism. Although rural tourism represents a new trend and new opportunities for tourism development in underdeveloped areas, insufficient attention is paid to those institutions that can influence its development.

### **2.1. Types and roles of entrepreneurial support institutions in improving the business climate**

In the Republic of Croatia, the establishment and operation of entrepreneurial support institutions are regulated by the Entrepreneurship Infrastructure Improvement Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia Nos. 93/13, 114/13, 41/14, 57/18 and 138/21). In the narrower sense, entrepreneurial infrastructure is considered to be entrepreneurial zones and entrepreneurial support institutions. The goal and purpose of improving the entrepreneurial infrastructure and business environment is: to stimulate

economic growth by planning and timely construction of entrepreneurial infrastructure that is in the function of balanced regional development of the Republic of Croatia, faster entrepreneurship growth and increase investment and employment within the area where entrepreneurial infrastructure is planned. Entrepreneurial support institutions are divided into development agencies, local development agencies, county development agencies, development agencies for certain activities, business centers, digital innovation centers, business incubators, incubators for new technologies, business accelerators, business parks, science and technology parks and centers of competence. The priorities of the support system for the improvement of business activities of entrepreneurial zones and entrepreneurial support institutions are:

1. improving the conditions of entrepreneurial infrastructure for attracting investments
2. strengthening the competitiveness of entrepreneurship
3. development of technology-oriented and knowledge-based entrepreneurship
4. encouraging inventive entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial innovation
5. increase the employment of the number of economic entities
6. encouraging the internationalization of entrepreneurship.

The tasks performed by entrepreneurial support institutions are to inform and advise existing entrepreneurs on the possibilities of using incentive measures for economic development, and to help start-up entrepreneurs. They also coordinate and draft local and regional strategic documents, promote domestic entrepreneurs in international markets, attract foreign direct investment, conduct various trainings, prepare, apply for and implement projects financed from national and EU funds, and prepare and prepare investment studies, analysis and elaborates.

Many papers point to the importance of the active influence of ESIs, such as agencies that can and should have a much greater impact on the appearance, structure, quality and development of SMEs in the Republic of Croatia and their competitiveness in domestic and foreign markets (Koroman 2015).

The question is who provides constant support to entrepreneurial support institutions in the Republic of Croatia. Prior to the founding of Bond, all business support institutions operated separately and had different support for entrepreneurship, depending on their type, founder, source of funding, etc. This type of support is not uniform and permanent, the functioning of business support institutions is unclear. This is one of the reasons why entrepreneurial support institutions are more focused on providing those types of jobs that will make receipts faster and easier. In such conditions, they do not have enough space to introduce measures encouraging rural tourism, for the reasons already mentioned, such as a slower return on investment.

## **2.2. Entrepreneurship in rural tourism**

Rural space in the Republic of Croatia has not been the center of social and academic interest for a long time, while the European Union (EU) has been paying great attention to its overall development for decades, especially agriculture as a core activity supported by many funds (Ligović 2015).

Rural areas occupy the majority of the EU (90%) with over 56% of the rural population. In Croatia, this is even more pronounced where rural areas occupy the majority of the territory (97.5%) Inhabited by 78,9% of the population of the Republic of Croatia.

According to the OECD criteria for urban and rural areas and settlements, 14 counties in Croatia are classified as predominantly rural areas with a total of 46.5% of the country's population (Čagalj et al. 2021, 93).

Numerous authorities believe that rural economic development depends upon rural entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurship is defined as the creation of an organization that introduces a new product or service, creates a new market, or brings new technology to the rural environment (Marquardt and Schulz 1991).

Rural areas in the Republic of Croatia have a rich natural and cultural heritage and great potential for the development of rural tourism. However, rural tourism is characterized by an underdeveloped tourist offer, lack of accommodation capacity and general tourist infrastructure. Investments in tourism are less compared to tourist developed areas and one of the reasons is the longer return on investment. The development of rural tourism is also adversely affected by the sensitivity of tourism, which reacts very quickly to negative changes in the environment, such as the health crisis, war and the like. However, differences between tourist destinations still exist, given their success in applying for and implementing EU and nationally funded projects. They are more successful examples of active role and cooperation between the private and public sector at the local level, and successful implementation of EU funds in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism industry, development of new and innovative tourism products, diversification of supply, extension of the tourist season, preservation of jobs, new employment and growth and development of the tourism economy. There are many sources of EU and national funding for entrepreneurship development, so it is important to inform and train existing and potential entrepreneurs in a timely manner and train them to apply for and implement EU projects, so that they can ultimately decide to invest in rural tourism. This should, among other things, be the task of entrepreneurial support institutions in rural tourism.

### **2.3. The role of entrepreneurial supporting institutions in the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism**

Research aimed at determining the role of entrepreneurial support institutions in the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism are insufficient. Zedi and Hnis (2015) discussed the possibility of using business incubators to incubate tourism services, conditions for the development of microenterprise management within the incubator, opportunities to overcome business risk, the link between microincubation and tourism economy development through a case study. The paper offers suggested guidelines that can help micro-entrepreneurs in the process of incubating tourism services and developing their own organization management in practice.

However, there are papers that point to the importance of encouraging the strengthening of business support institutions such as development agencies specializing in tourism, which in addition to providing business support will help entrepreneurs in preparing

application documents for financing projects with EU funds. It is recommended to strengthen the incubation infrastructure for entrepreneurship in tourism, especially the development of business support institutions such as business centers, incubators and development agencies, whose task is to promote entrepreneurship, cooperation with the public sector, provide the necessary professional assistance and support in starting a business. beginners (Ligović 2015).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire for collecting primary data was developed based on an extensive literature review, consisting of 46 questions divided into five parts that measure basic entrepreneurial support institutions' data, entrepreneurship development, networking services, training programs and business start-up.

The study adopted a well-established scale and the items were modified as per the objective of the study. The entrepreneurship development was measured with five items, adopted from Ramar and Muthukumaran (2019), and Li et al. (2019). Five items for measuring networking services were adopted from Mahmood et al. (2016) and Li et al. (2019). In order to measure training programs, the study modified four items adopted from Mahmood et al. (2016). Business start-up was measured with four items, adopted from Li et al. (2019) and El Shoubaki et al. (2019). All items have been modified according to the area of rural tourism. Variables were measured with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" as 1, to "strongly agree" as 5.

Basic entrepreneurial support institutions' data consisted of demographical data, statements related to the type of entrepreneurial support institutions harmonized with the Act on Improving Entrepreneurial Infrastructure Republic of Croatia (NN 138/21), services provided by entrepreneurial support institutions adopted from Morić et al. (2021), founder modified from Tutubaand and Tundui (2022) and sources of funding, number of employees, national and EU projects, and rural tourism.

After designing the survey questionnaire, it was tested using a pilot survey on a sample of 6 entrepreneurial support institutions to analyze the psychometric characteristics of the questionnaire, as the scales were taken from previous surveys and translated into Croatian. After the pilot research, an analysis of the results related to the assessment of the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument was performed. Clarifications on the type of service and sources of funding for business support institutions are clarified in more detail. After checking the metric characteristics, the final version of the questionnaire was designed to collect data in the main survey.

Empirical data were collected by an electronic questionnaire prepared in the Google form during February 2022 and sent by e-mail to 91 entrepreneurial support institutions in the Republic of Croatia, members of BOND (Business Organizations Network Development). BOND unites 91 entrepreneurial support institutions from all counties of the Republic of Croatia, and was created within the project "Development of a network of entrepreneurial support institutions through the Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovation and Investment (HAMAG-BICRO) with the aim of connecting

entrepreneurial support institutions in Croatia, quality of existing services and development of new services and equalization of availability and quality of services to entrepreneurs in all counties, in accordance with the guidelines of the Strategy for the Development of Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Croatia 2013-2020.

Data collection consisted of three phases. The first phase of data collection focused on sending a short text on the objectives of the research and a request to fill out a questionnaire to the e-mail address 91 of the entrepreneurial support institution by the head of coordination HAMAG-BICRO, BOND network management. The second phase consisted of resending an e-mail in the form of a reminder to complete a survey questionnaire. After compiling a list of entrepreneurial support institutions that did not fill in the survey questionnaire in the first two phases, the third phase was related to the individual sending of e-mails with a request to complete the survey questionnaire.

Data analysis was performed on the sample of 56 valid questionnaires and included descriptive and bivariate statistical analyses. The entrepreneurial support institutions' demographics as well as entrepreneurship development, networking services, training programs and business start-up were evaluated with descriptive statistics methods. The significance of differences in entrepreneurship development, networking services, training programs and business start-up considering entrepreneurial support institutions' geographical location and opportunity to create innovative business ideas of entrepreneurship in rural tourism were tested with independent samples t-test.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The sample consisted of 56 respondents, most of which were development agencies (local development agency, county development agency, development agency of a certain activity) (50%), as shown in Table 1. These are "young" ESIs, members of the BOND network, established after 2011 (61%) present in all Croatian counties. Most of the surveyed ESIs are located in Osječko-baranjska County (14.3%), followed by Bjelovarsko-bilogorska County (8.9%) and Vukovarsko-srijemska County (8.9%), located in the eastern part of the Republic of Croatia.

In as many as 71.4%, the founder of ESI is a municipality, city or county, while only 17.9% are private founders. In part, the consequence of public ownership is reflected in self-financing, and according to the data it can be seen that as many as 12 ESIs depend entirely on external funding, but we must point out that as many as 30.4% of ESIs are fully self-financed.

Table 1. Respondents' information

Respondents' characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Foundation year</b>	1994-1999	6	10,7
	2000-2005	7	12,5
	2006-2010	9	16,0
	2011-2015	17	30,4
	2016-2021	17	30,4
<b>County</b>	Bjelovarsko-bilogorska	5	8,9
	Brodsko-posavska	1	1,8
	Dubrovačko-neretvanska	2	3,6
	Grad Zagreb	4	7,1
	Istarska	3	5,4
	Karlovačka	1	1,8
	Koprivničko-križevačka	2	3,6
	Krapinsko-zagorska	1	1,8
	Ličko-senjska	1	1,8
	Međimurska	3	5,4
	Osječko-baranjska	8	14,3
	Požeško-slavonska	1	1,8
	Primorsko-goranska	4	7,1
	Sisačko-moslavačka	4	7,1
	Splitsko-dalmatinska	4	7,1
	Šibensko-kninska	1	1,8
	Varaždinska	2	3,6
	Virovitičko-podravska	1	1,8
	Vukovarsko-srijemska	5	8,9
Zadarska	2	3,6	
Zagrebačka	1	1,8	
<b>Type</b>	Competence center	1	1,8
	Entrepreneurial accelerator	3	5,4
	Entrepreneurship Center (Digital Innovation Center)	11	19,6
	Business incubator (business incubator, incubator for new technologies)	11	19,6
	Development agency (local development agency, county development agency, development agency of a certain activity)	28	50,0
	Development agency (local development agency, county development agency, development agency of a certain activity)	2	3,6
	Science and Technology Park		
<b>Founder</b>	Combination (eg public-private partnership)	1	1,8
	Non-governmental organization	2	3,6

	Municipality / City / County	40	71,4
	Private founder	10	17,9
	University	3	5,4
<b>Self-financing percentage</b>	0	12	21,4
	1-10	1	1,8
	11-20	2	3,6
	21-30	2	3,6
	31-40	2	3,6
	41-50	5	8,9
	51-60	0	0
	61-70	5	8,9
	71-80	3	5,4
	81-90	7	12,5
	91-99	0	0
	100	17	30,4

Source: Authors

Considering the activities of the ESIs in the field of rural tourism from Table 2, it can be seen that only 19.7% of employees in the ESIs refer to employees who are focused on encouraging entrepreneurship in rural tourism. Given the small number of ESIs staff focused on supporting entrepreneurship in rural tourism, 37.5% of ESIs have external mentors in the field of rural tourism.

In addition to the fact that one of the roles of ESI is to support entrepreneurs in starting and developing businesses, and development can be supported by involvement in various projects and obtaining funding through them, the following discusses the activities of application and implementation of EU and national projects. Of the total number of registered projects, only 6% of them relate to projects in rural tourism, while only 9.2% of the total number of projects in implementation relate to those in rural tourism. Analyzing the number of implemented ESI projects, only 8.5% of them refer to the implemented projects in rural tourism.

**Table 2. Comparison of certain indicators of ESIs activity in rural tourism**

				<b>Percentage</b>
Number of employees	514	Number of employees in rural tourism	101	19,7
Number of applied projects	9253	Number of applied projects in rural tourism	558	6,0
Number of projects in progress	687	Number of rural tourism projects in progress	63	9,2
Number of implemented projects	4253	Number of implemented projects in rural tourism	362	8,5

Source: Authors

Considering that within the Rural Development Program for the period 2014-2020. Were advertised calls aimed directly at encouraging entrepreneurship in rural tourism, one of the sections in the questionnaire addressed the question: "Have you participated in



encouraging entrepreneurship in rural tourism through at least one of the following calls (6.2.1. Support for investment in non-agricultural activities - tourism sector in rural areas, Sub-measure 6.2. Support for investment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas - tourism in rural areas; Sub-measure 6.4. Investments in the development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas - rural tourism)”. As many as 68% of ESIs participated in the promotion of rural tourism through these calls, mostly through individual consultations and writing project proposals.

Following these activities, it can be concluded that ESIs still do not have sufficient capacity to support the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism and therefore pay very little attention to this area.

In order to determine the importance of ESI activities in rural tourism in accordance with the variables entrepreneurship development, networking services, training services and business start-up services, ESIs are divided into two areas - urban and rural according to classification in the document Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2020. Given that the statements in the survey questionnaire focused on rural tourism, the same was done to find out whether there is a statistically significant difference in ratings between urban and rural ESIs.

As presented in Table 3, urban ESIs evaluated ESIs` elements with mean scores ranging from 3.87 to 4.24. With the lowest score were rated two elements „ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism“ and „ESIs provide mentoring and coaching sessions to help the entrepreneurs in rural tourism to get quickly and follow the right track to start a new business” while the highest score was given to the element „ESIs help in improving business management skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.“

**Table 3. Comparison of scores of activity variables of urban and rural ESIs**

Variables	Mean		SD		T-value
	urban	rural	urban	rural	
<b>ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT</b>					
ESIs provide a wonderful professional environment that boosts the motivation and productivity of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	4,03	4,61	0,915	0,698	-2,397*
ESIs provide an opportunity to create innovative business ideas of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	4,05	4,50	0,899	0,786	-1,808
ESIs help in enhancing a professional goal to become an entrepreneur in rural tourism.	4,05	4,39	0,928	1,037	-1,219
ESIs help in providing quality of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	3,92	4,00	0,912	1,328	-0,260

ESIs help entrepreneurs in rural tourism for survival and entrepreneurship development.	3,97	4,17	0,944	1,098	-0,678
<b>NETWORKING SERVICES</b>					
ESIs provide the latest information on exhibition regulations and specific sectors.	4,11	4,17	1,008	1,295	-0,194
ESIs help in networking with the business community, chambers, and associations in rural tourism.	4,16	4,33	0,945	0,907	-0,657
ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism.	3,87	3,83	0,906	1,098	0,126
Networking service give opportunities to the entrepreneurs to meet with the different parties that involved in the entrepreneurship ecosystem in rural tourism.	4,05	4,17	0,868	0,857	-0,461
To work at a commonplace with similar professionals help to solve the common problems, and to share each other`s networks and resources.	4,18	4,61	0,801	0,502	-2,072*
<b>TRAINING SERVICES</b>					
ESIs help in improving the capacity building skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	4,11	4,22	0,924	1,003	-0,430
ESIs help in improving product development skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	3,92	4,17	0,997	0,707	-0,938
ESIs help in improving business management skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	4,24	4,28	0,786	0,958	-0,169
ESIs help in improving marketing skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	4,00	4,33	0,870	0,686	-1,427
<b>BUSINESS START-UP SERVICES</b>					
ESIs provide mentoring and coaching sessions to help the entrepreneurs in rural tourism to get quickly and follow the right track to start a new business.	3,87	4,22	0,991	0,878	-1,292
Overall, the ESI is a good platform to start a new business by entrepreneurs/individuals and to promote entrepreneurship in rural tourism.	4,16	4,56	0,855	0,784	-1,668
ESIs support the development of start-ups by providing advisory and	4,21	4,44	0,777	0,922	-0,991

administrative support services to entrepreneurs in rural tourism.					
ESIs provide networking services has a positive impact on the opportunity to business start-up in rural tourism.	4,16	4,28	0,855	0,958	-0,471

Note: \* significant at 0.05

Source: Authors

Rural ESIs' mean scores ranged from 3.83 for the element „ ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism“ to 4,61 for two elements “ESIs provide a wonderful professional environment that boosts the motivation and productivity of entrepreneurs in rural tourism” and “To work at a commonplace with similar professionals help to solve the common problems, and to share each other's networks and resources.

Both urban and rural ESIs gave the lowest score to the element “ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism”, while the element with the highest score differs between urban and rural ESIs.

The table shows that rural ESIs gave higher scores than urban ESIs in almost all elements except one "ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism", which is the worst rated statement in both cases.

The results of the independent samples t-test revealed significant differences in two cases. Thus, rural ESI reported significantly more positive expressions than urban ESI with the following elements: “ESIs provide a wonderful professional environment that boosts the motivation and productivity of entrepreneurs in rural tourism” and “To work at a commonplace with similar professionals help to solve the common problems, and to share each other`s networks and resources.”

## 5. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship is a key source of economic revolution, job creation and business development; therefore, entrepreneurial support institutions are a key stakeholder that can play a significant role in this change. Looking at new trends and opportunities in the market, it opens up broader views of the possible business of ESIs and the impact on "new" areas of development. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to determine the role of entrepreneurship support institutions in the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism.

Although rural tourism represents a new trend and new opportunities for tourism development in underdeveloped areas, insufficient attention is paid to those institutions that can influence its development. This study expands knowledge about the role of ESIs, looking at broader frameworks and exploring the impact of ESIs on the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism.

The results of empirical research of 56 ESIs indicate that certain ESIs activities, which are reflected in the employment of rural tourism staff, hiring external mentors for rural tourism, application and implementation of projects in rural tourism, are aimed at encouraging the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism. Given that these activities are modest and represent only a small percentage of total activity, the area of encouraging entrepreneurship in rural tourism can certainly represent the potential for development, target group and expansion of ESIs business.

Secondly, the results of research on the importance of certain ESIs activities in rural tourism according to the variables entrepreneurship development, networking services, training services and business start-up services indicate differences in the responses of urban and rural ESIs.

Urban ESIs rated the statement "ESIs help in improving business management skills of entrepreneurs in rural tourism" the best, while rural ESIs rated the statements "ESIs provide a wonderful professional environment that boosts the motivation and productivity of entrepreneurs in rural tourism" and " To work at a commonplace with similar professionals help to solve common problems, and to share each other`s networks and resources. Both urban and rural ESIs gave the worst score to the statement "ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism". Rural ESIs gave higher scores than urban ESIs in almost all statements except one "ESIs provide the latest information on technological updates in rural tourism", which is also the worst rated statement in both cases.

The study results generate practical and academic implications in the rural tourism entrepreneurship context. The scientific contribution was generated through the multiple role of ESI as a potential generator of innovative entrepreneurship development in rural tourism. The results of the research expand the knowledge about the business of ESIs, which so far has been focused on fostering the entrepreneurial climate and environment in general, in the field of fostering entrepreneurship in rural tourism.

The applied contribution of the research is reflected in the recommendations to ESIs managers for improving and / or expanding ESI's business in rural areas, as well as policy makers and decision makers in considering the potential impact of rural tourism entrepreneurship through ESI.

There are limitations relating to the present study. Although the sample comprises the population's characteristics of 56 ESIs, members of the BOND network, it should be broadened for conducting more complex analyzes. This study divided ESIs into urban and rural, in considering the importance of certain activities, however, future research could consider the division with respect to some other characteristics of ESI such as the type of founders - public and private.

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## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL TOURISM THROUGH ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS**

**Morena Mičetić Fabić**  
**Irena Šker**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to determine the role of entrepreneurial support institutions (ESI) in the development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism. The primary task of ESI is to create a favorable business environment and provide educational and information services for starting new, and the growth and development of existing entrepreneurs. However, research on entrepreneurship in rural tourism, as a significant potential for sustainable, tourism, social and economic development of rural areas, and its connection with ESIs as development support, remains scarce. A sample of 56 respondents was collected from ESIs in the Republic of Croatia, members of Business Organizations Network Development - BOND. Descriptive statistics and t-test were performed to analyze the basic indicators of ESI activities (participation in the application and implementation of EU and national projects, cooperation with external mentors, organization of educational activities...). The results indicate an insufficient focus of ESI on rural tourism and open the possibility for new focuses and business expansion. The applied contribution of the research is manifested in the improvement of the business of ESIs in rural areas, while the scientific contribution is generated through the multiple role of ESIs as a potential generator of innovative entrepreneurship development in rural tourism.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial support institutions, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship in rural tourism, rural tourism

**Morena Mičetić Fabić, PhD**  
Entrepreneurial incubator Porec  
Obala m. Tita 5a, Poreč, Croatia  
E-mail: morena.micetic-fabic@porec.hr

**Irena Šker, MSc**  
Entrepreneurial incubator Porec  
Obala m. Tita 5a, Poreč, Hrvatska  
PhD student  
University of Rijeka,  
Faculty of tourism and hospitality management Opatija,  
Primorska 46, p.p. 97, Opatija, Croatia  
E-mail: irena.sker@porec.hr

## **DETERMINANTS OF RURAL TOURISTS' CONSUMPTION - THE CASE OF DUBROVNIK RURAL AREAS**

**Ivana Pavlič**  
**Ana Portolan**  
**Zrinka Golemac**

### **Abstract**

Economic benefits of different types of investment in the tourism in different areas have a positive effect where it can be applied. Benefits caused by tourism are mostly used from the local government of the urban places, while rural places are still fighting for their tourism market share. Tourism development in rural areas has different effects on economic development. Besides the income increasing and rational use of resources and facilities, the most important thing is the effect of preventing rural depopulation. Positive economic effects of rural tourism are based primarily on tourists' consumption. Tourists' consumption is driven factor of economy for many countries, especially for developing countries where economy development depends mostly on tourism. It has multiple economic implications, Therefore, the main aim of this paper was to analyse the main determinants of rural tourists' consumption in rural areas near Dubrovnik, Croatia. The research was carried out from June 2017 till January 2018. The sample of the rural tourists has consisted of 565 tourists. In the analysis were used descriptive statistics and multivariate regression analysis. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicated a respondent profile. Multiple regression analysis was performed in order to determine factors that affect their consumption. This research identifies the main rural tourists' consumption determinants and also provides an essential contribution to the local authority in stimulating an incensement of rural tourists' consumptions.

**Keywords:** rural tourists' consumption, determinants, rural areas

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has been the most resilient and fastest growing economic and social phenomenon of our time in recent decades. It is this dynamic that has turned tourism into a key driver of socio-economic progress. Thus, tourism has become one of the main factors in the international exchange of goods and services, one of the main sources of income for many developing countries, and at the same time directly and indirectly created millions of jobs. However, such tourism has often put pressure on the most visited destinations and disrupted the social life of the community. Therefore, tourism often seeks to revitalize rural areas and increase the quality of life in these areas, especially since the trends in tourist demand show increasing interest of tourists in specific forms of tourism, among which rural tourism occupies a high place (Smolčić Jurdana et al. 2018, 220).

Although rural tourism has been the subject of much debate in the literature of many experts around the world, a firm consensus in defining its concept has not yet been

reached (Bartoluci 2016, 143). Basically, rural tourism is a selective form of tourism in which the main motivation of tourists is expressed contact with the rural environment and today is an extremely important part of the tourism industry around the world. Rural tourism in the world is growing, both due to increased demand in the tourism market and due to public support for its development (Krajinović et al. 2011, 33). The importance and potential of rural tourism is reflected in stimulating local economic growth and social change, contributing to gross domestic product and job creation, and promoting the dispersion of time and territorial tourism demand and consumption. The importance of rural tourism as part of the tourist offer primarily depends on the recreational / tourist resources of each country, infrastructure, market availability and the presence of other types of tourist products (Petrić 2006, 146). However, the positive economic effects of rural tourism are based primarily on tourist spending.

However, due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, world tourism has faced the deepest crisis in history. Indeed, global tourism activity (measured by either foreign arrivals or overnight stays) has decreased by 70% in the first 8 months of 2020 compared to the same period the year before (Payne et al. 2021, 1). In these circumstances, it was rural tourism that offered tourists destinations, experiences and outdoor activities and showed resilience in dealing with the economic and social effects of the pandemic.

The authors believe that the consumption of tourists as a result of rural tourism will become a valorising potential for tourism development in the post-COVID-19 period. Therefore, the main reason for conducting this research is gap in the literature and necessity of understanding travel-related variables that determine the level of consumption of tourists staying in rural areas of Dubrovnik. The conducted research is original because the determinants of tourist consumption in rural areas of Dubrovnik were researched for the first time. This research has an academic and practical contribution, as it provides a better understanding of individual tourism segments in improving the economic development of rural areas. Furthermore, the research results are the basis for destination marketing and the sustainable development of rural tourism.

Therefore, the main goal of this paper was to analyse the main determinants of rural tourist consumption in rural areas near Dubrovnik, Republic of Croatia. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the factors influencing their consumption. This research identifies the main determinants of rural tourist spending and also makes a significant contribution to local authorities in encouraging an increase in rural tourist spending.

The research is organized in such a way that the first part is an introductory part, the second part is a review of relevant literature dealing with the highlighted topic, the third part deals with the research area and selected research methodology, and the fourth part presents research results. Finally, the conclusion of the research in the fifth part indicates the importance and limitations of the research itself, and suggests possible directions for future research.



## 2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Rural tourism, as a basis for preserving the cultural and historical identity, customs and traditions of countryside areas, has recently emerged as a distance from the mass, standardized and unsustainable tourism which has arose as a result of industrialization and urbanization. Industrialization has led to the relocation of the population from rural areas to cities resulting in depopulation and deterioration of rural areas, and intensive urbanization increased tourist demand for them.

The potential of rural tourism is reflected in year-round business, reducing the seasonality of coastal destinations and releasing the urban area that was overloaded with tourists (Pavlič et al. 2021). Rural tourism also enables consumers to return to the natural environment and release from the stress of everyday life in urban areas (Ružić 2009) and offers the possibility to re-engage in an easier and more peaceful way of spending free time through rest and relaxation (Irshad 2010). According to Okech et al. (2012) tourism, to be defined as rural, should have rural area characteristics including small settlements, low population density, family farms and traditional societies. Back in 1994, the OECD defined rural tourism as tourism located in rural areas and primarily in the function of agriculture; it is firmly based on the agricultural area with special features of open space, contact with nature, rural heritage and society; it must be in unity with the environment and the community in which it is located and which has less than 10,000 inhabitants; it includes farms within the area of operation; it aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of life in the region and is a force for preserving rurality and not a force for urbanization (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1994).

Rural tourism supports small farms that cannot compete with the sceneries forced by market globalization (Goebel et al. 2012) and reduces people's exposure to economic fluctuations by creating employment opportunities and increasing incomes (Ashley and Maxwell 2001; Sharpley 2002; Lo et al. 2013; Kheiri and Nasihatkon 2016; Grgić et al. 2017). Sharpley (2002) defined the potential of rural tourism in: economic growth, diversification and stabilization through employment in new and existing businesses related to tourism and in trade and crafts; placing agricultural products on new markets; socio-cultural development which includes the repopulation of rural areas, the maintenance and improvement of public services, the revitalization of local crafts, customs and cultural identities, and increased opportunities for social contact and exchange; protect and improve the natural and built environment and infrastructure.

Leisure and relaxation based on rurality are more favoured comparing to seeking novelty that is usually the exclusive needs of tourists with special interests. Rural stayers pay more attention to the needs for socialisation relating to general-interest and special-interest tourists (Cheng et al. 2020).

In recent years' tourism demand for rural destination recorded an upward trend indicating the need to analyse the main initiator of tourism destination economic growth – tourist consumption. Tourist consumption and its determinants, especially in rural area, have been rarely investigated (Wang et al. 2006). According Wang et al. (2006) there is limited empirical support that demographic, socio-economic and trip-related characteristics have been influential in predicting visitors' willingness to spend money on vacations. An older researches have mostly used income as the most important predictor of tourist

consumption while recent researches also use other predictors like socio-demographic and trip-related characteristics as well as psychographic variables (Alegre and Pou 2004; Wang et al. 2006; Alegre et al. 2009)

### **3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research area**

Rural areas of Dubrovnik (Dubrovnik littoral, island Mljet and island Korčula)<sup>1</sup> belong to the Dubrovnik-Neretva County, Republic of Croatia. In Dubrovnik littoral area tourists' arrivals have doubled in 2018 in compare to 2009 (28893), while the numbers of overnights have grown by average year rate of 4.4% (152613). It has the lowest population density (11 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>) and realises 1.5 % of County tourism traffic. Population density in the Island Korčula is 56 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. The numbers of tourism arrivals and overnights have increased from 2009 to 2017 (tourism arrivals from 32400 to 72178 and overnights from 335836 to 465543) by average year rate of 9.3% for arrivals and 3.7% for overnights<sup>2</sup>. It realises 3.8% of County arrivals and 6.0% of total County overnight stays in its rural areas (without settlement of Korčula). Island Mljet is very lightly populated with density of 10.5 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. National park Mljet attracts lots of visitors. From 2009 to 2017 the number of tourism arrivals has increased from 15085 to 30637 by average year growth rate of 8%. The number of overnights stays has doubled in the same period by the average year growth rate of 7.5%. The island Mljet realises 1.6% of County arrivals and 1.7% in overnight stays (Croatia Bureau of Statistics 2017).

#### **3.2. Sampling, questionnaire design and analytical procedure**

Empirical research was made using convenience purposive sample of 600 tourists visiting rural areas around Dubrovnik, Croatia to achieve the main aim of the paper. The research was carried out from June 2017 to January 2018. Of the initial sample, 565 questionnaires were fulfilled correctly. The sample profile is shown in Table 1.

Data has collected through a highly structured questionnaire. The questionnaire has structured into six main parts. The questions in the questionnaire were based on the literature review (Wang et al. 2006; Fredman 2008; Brida and Scuderi 2013; García-Sánchez et al. 2013; Smolčić Jurdana and Soldić Frleta 2017). The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the questions about socio-demographic characteristics of rural tourists and the items regarding travelling partners, length of stay, type of accommodation used and source of information used. The second part of the questionnaire included 29 statements were tourists have been asked to rate their level of satisfaction with each item on the five-point Likert scale (1=totally unsatisfied; 5=completely satisfied). The final question in the second part is a statement regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Area of research is the part of the project "Rural educational, cultural and ethnographic tourist attraction" coordinated by Ministry of regional development and EU funds related to operative programme "Competition and Cohesion 2014 – 2020".

<sup>2</sup> In 2009. Čara, Pupnat and Račišće were considered as a part of town of Korčula and therefore couldn't be included in the total number of arrivals and overnights in rural areas

overall satisfaction with destination on 5 point Likert scale (1= Disappointing; 5= Exceptional). The last part of the questionnaire is based on information about total travellers' expenditure and also about specific expenditure elements (accommodation, food and beverage in restaurants, food and beverage in the markets, souvenirs, local transport, culture, recreation, sport, excursions and other). In order to achieve a better model, fit, rural tourists were classified as daily expenditure.

Descriptive statistics have been applied in order to analyse the rural tourists' profile and to find out the information about total and daily rural tourists' expenditures and to analyse the structure of their expenditures. Reliability analysis, by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was also performed. Considering Peterson (1994) suggested that the value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.6 is criterion in use, all analysed factors are acceptably reliable. Finally, multiple regression analysis was applied in order to investigate the factors that influence the expenditure of rural tourists. Statistical procedures were applied using the SPSS 25.

#### 4. RESULTS

Regarding the age groups, one quarter of rural tourists are aged from 36 to 45 years and one fifth are between 46 55 years. Only 7.4% of are aged 66 and older and more than one third are young respondents. In regards to gender structure, the results indicate almost equal structure. The education structure showed that almost 85% have higher education. More than 50% of respondents have personal income between 1501 and 3000 euros and one fifth has between 3001 and above while one quarter has less than 1500 euros. Regarding the region of origin, 90% of respondents come from Europe, mostly from Central and Western part, 5.3% from Asia and 4.1% from Americas. Only 0.4% comes from Australia and Oceania.

Table 1. **Respondents' profile**

Demographic characteristics	TOURISTS	
	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-25	107	18.9
26-35	108	19.1
36-45	141	25.0
46-55	114	20.2
56-65	53	9.4
66 -	42	7.4
Gender		
Male	290	51.3
Female	275	48.7
Education		
Primary School	3	0.5
Secondary school	87	15.4
Undergraduate	200	35.4
Graduate	205	36.3

Postgraduate	70	12.4
Personal monthly income (in EUR)		
-500	53	9.4
501-1.500	94	16.6
1.501-2.000	117	20.7
2.001-2.500	89	15.8
2.501-3.000	95	16.8
3.001-3.500	47	8.3
3.501-4.000	35	6.2
4.001-	35	6.2
Region of origin		
Northern Europe	33	5.8
Western Europe	144	25.5
Central Europe	185	32.7
Southern Europe	100	17.7
Southeast Europe	35	6.2
Eastern Europe	13	2.3
North America	14	2.5
South America	9	1.6
Australia and Oceania	2	0.4
Asia	30	5.3

Source: Authors' research

The second part of the questionnaire included 29 statements where rural tourists have been asked to rate their level of satisfaction with each item on the five-point Likert scale (1=totally unsatisfied; 5=completely satisfied). Reliability for each factor was obtained using the calculation for Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Considering that Peterson suggested that the value of Cronbach's alpha of 0,6 is criterion in use and that all values were above 0,6, all analysed factors were included (Peterson, 1994). First group of questions in this part was focused on culture issues, where satisfaction was measured using three variables (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha=0.739$ ). Variables included in dimension of culture are: Good experiences with local culture, Cultural sites were accessible and Reasonable prices for cultural offer. Second group of questions were focused on environment, protection and safety with five items - Scenic and natural beauty, Environmental preservation, Cleanliness of the tourism destination, Good waste management and Security and safety (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha=0.789$ ). Third group of questions were focused on satisfaction with events, entertainment and shopping including six items - Nightlife and entertainment, Availability of recreational facilities, Reasonable prices for the entertainment, Possibilities for shopping, Availability of good local souvenirs and Reasonable prices in shops (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha=0.847$ ). Fourth group of questions were focused on level of satisfaction with food and beverage and was measured using three items - Enjoying local cuisine, Good quality of services in restaurants and Reasonable prices in restaurants (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha=0.699$ ) and level of satisfaction with local atmosphere was measured with five items - Peaceful atmosphere, Friendliness of local people, Relaxing atmosphere, Exciting atmosphere and Pleasant atmosphere (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha=0.768$ ).

Table 2 presents level of rural tourists' satisfaction. Generally, rural tourists are satisfied with rural tourism destinations. They are most satisfied with the environment, protection and safety that includes scenic and natural beauty, varied landscape, environmental preservation, level of noise, the cleanness, air quality, drinking water quality and security and safety. Also, they are very satisfied with atmosphere that includes: peaceful atmosphere, friendliness of local people, relaxing atmosphere, exciting atmosphere and pleasant atmosphere. Rural tourists are indifferent with the events, entertainment and shopping like variety of special events, reasonable prices for the entertainment, possibilities for the shopping, variety of shops, the availability of authentic local souvenirs and crafts and with the reasonable prices in shops.

**Table 2. Level of rural tourists' satisfaction with tourism destination**

Satisfaction	Tourists	
	Mean	Std. dev.
Culture	4.25	0.703
Environment, protection and safety	4.68	0.717
Events, entertainment and shopping	3.32	0.844
Food and beverage	4.13	0.743
Atmosphere	4.63	0.573
Value for money	4.24	0.891

Source: Author research

Average daily expenditure per person of rural tourists in destination, without travel expenses is 70.3 €. Rural tourists have average stay 7.7 days and comparing with tourists stay in Republic of Croatia it is 2.5 days more (Table 3).

**Table 3. Rural tourists' expenditure**

	Expenditure in €
Total average expenditure	1.614
Average number of persons	3
Average stay (days)	7.7
Average daily expenditure	70.3

Source: Author research

Rural tourists mostly spent their money for the accommodation costs - more than 40% daily expenditure and more than one quarter of total costs (19.3 €) for the foods and beverage. For the entertainment, sport and recreation they spend less than 8% of total expenditure while just 4.7% of total amount is spend for culture.

**Table 4. Structure of rural tourists' daily expenditure in rural destination**

Expenditure structure	Expenditure in €
Daily expenditure per person	70.3
Accommodation	30.4
Food and beverage	19.3

Culture	3.3
Entertainment, sport and recreation	6.0
Other	5.1

Source: Author research

The research found out that in rural destinations, tourists from the age of 26 and 35 with a university degree and who are extremely satisfied with the destination spend the most. On the other side, rural tourists from Croatia who stay in camps and who are dissatisfied with visiting the destination have the lowest expenditure in destination.

**Table 5. Multiple regression model for rural tourists' daily expenditure**

Independents variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Sig.
	Coefficient B	Std. Error	P
Constant	160.356	84.061	.000
Satisfaction with the culture	-5.444	12.225	.657
Satisfaction with the environment, protection and safety	7.507	10.106	.009***
Satisfaction with the events, entertainment and shopping	21.385	8.749	.015**
Satisfaction with food and beverage offer	25.074	10.944	.023**
Satisfaction with atmosphere	32.748	11.828	.006***
Gender	31.074	14.194	.030**
Age	-2.683	5.434	.622
Education	1.399	8.868	.875
Personal monthly income	10.232	4.820	.035**
Model diagnostic			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.671		
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	0.656		
F-statistics	13.657		0.000

a dependent variable - rural tourists' daily expenditure

\*\*\* p<0.00

\*\* p<0.01

\* p<0.05

Source: Author research

In order to research the factors that affect rural tourists' expenditure, multiple regression analysis was applied. The model that analyse rural tourists' daily expenditure explain 67.1% of the total variance in the individual expenditure levels. Independent variables explain 65.4% of the variation in the daily rural tourists' expenditures (R<sup>2</sup>=0.671; F(10;537)=13.657; p=0.000). The p value for F statistic is less than 0.05 and that means

that at least one independent variable are significant predictors of reading scores. Six variables are significant predictors.

Level of rural tourists' satisfaction is in relation to their expenditure in destination. Research presents that variables personal monthly income, gender and satisfaction with atmosphere, with the environment, protection and safety; with events, entertainment and shopping; and with food and beverage offer are significant predictor of daily expenditure in case of rural tourists.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Improving the effects of rural tourism requires appropriate data and tools to stimulate private sector supply and policy maker activity. In this context, it is crucial to monitor the determinants of consumption of rural consumer tourists through powerful analytical models. Econometrics offers valuable tools for studying the cause-and-effect relationships between tourism expenditure and consumer characteristics, often the empirical counterpart of economic theory of consumer behaviour. Finding and interpreting elements such as the most likely amount of consumption of average individuals with specific characteristics, provide valuable information to improve the economic effects of tourism.

This research was also launched with the intention of helping local tourism providers to adapt to the fierce tourism competition in the rural tourism segment. As a special feature of this research, it should be noted that the first such research, because until then no research has been conducted on the characteristics of demand in these destinations. The results of the research are extremely indicative, because based on the socio-demographic characteristics of visitors offer opportunities to improve existing rural tourism products and develop new products for younger visitors from Europe, most highly educated and whose monthly income is predominantly between 1,501 and 3,000 EUR.

The survey also found that rural tourists are generally satisfied with rural tourism destinations. They are most satisfied with the environment, protection and safety, which includes picturesque and natural beauties, diverse landscape, environmental protection, noise level, cleanliness, air quality, drinking water quality and safety and security. It should be noted that the average daily consumption per person of a rural tourist in the destination, excluding travel expenses is € 70.3. Rural tourists stay on average 7.7 days, and compared to tourists in the Republic of Croatia they stay 2.5 days more.

In order to research the factors that affect rural tourists' expenditure, multiple regression analysis was applied. The model that analyse rural tourists' daily expenditure explain 67.1% of the total variance in the individual expenditure levels. Research presents that variables personal monthly income, gender and satisfaction with atmosphere, with the environment, protection and safety; with events, entertainment and shopping; and with food and beverage offer are significant predictor of daily expenditure in case of rural tourists.

The main limitation of this research should be its implementation in the pre-pandemic period, which was marked by a strong growth of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Dubrovnik-Neretva County. Meanwhile, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an extreme drop in tourism demand and promoted rural tourism as a resilient tourism to emerging environmental circumstances. This was supported by data for the first eight months of tourism in 2021 in Dubrovnik-Neretva County, when rural destinations reached 55.60% of total arrivals and 69.40% of total overnight stays from a record 2019 (DSZ 2020, DSZ 2021 and the author's calculation), while at the same time urban destinations achieved only 24.70% of total arrivals and 31.0% of total overnight stays from a record 2019 (DSZ 2020, DSZ 2021 and the author's calculation) and it is clear that the survey results can serve as a solid basis for shaping rural development strategy tourism of Dubrovnik-Neretva County.

Despite the limitations, the fundamental scientific contribution of the research is the fact that this paper enriches the scarce empirical research on highlighted topics and offers a strong argument for changing the paradigm of tourism towards sustainability and local interests. Future scientific research on rural tourism should focus on detecting the effects of tourist spending on rural destinations and on micro and regional integrated tourist destinations. The effects of rural tourism in the non-pandemic period should also be detected, and chronological monitoring of tourist traffic in rural destinations over a longer period and according to identical statistical settings, and for reasons of comparability and easier setting of operational and strategic tourism goals.

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**DETERMINANTS OF RURAL TOURISTS' CONSUMPTION - THE CASE OF  
DUBROVNIK RURAL AREAS**

**Abstract**

Economic benefits of different types of investment in the tourism in different areas have a positive effect where it can be applied. Benefits caused by tourism are mostly used from the local government of the urban places, while rural places are still fighting for their tourism market share. Tourism development in rural areas has different effects on economic development. Besides the income increasing and rational use of resources and facilities, the most important thing is the effect of preventing rural depopulation. Positive economic effects of rural tourism are based primarily on tourists' consumption. Tourists' consumption is driven factor of economy for many countries, especially for developing countries where economy development depends mostly on tourism. It has multiple economic implications, Therefore, the main aim of this paper was to analyse the main determinants of rural tourists' consumption in rural areas near Dubrovnik, Croatia. The research was carried out from June 2017 till January 2018. The sample of the rural tourists has consisted of 565 tourists. In the analysis were used descriptive statistics and multivariate regression analysis. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicated a respondent profile. Multiple regression analysis was performed in order to determine factors that affect their consumption. This research identifies the main rural tourists' consumption determinants and also provides an essential contribution to the local authority in stimulating an incensement of rural tourists' consumptions.

**Keywords:** rural tourists' consumption, determinants, rural areas

**Ivana Pavlič, PhD**

Full professor  
University of Dubrovnik  
Department of Economics and Business Economics  
Lapadska obala 7  
20 000 Dubrovnik  
Croatia  
E-mail address: ipavlic@unidu.hr

**Ana Portolan, PhD**

Associate Professor  
University of Dubrovnik  
Department of Economics and Business Economics  
Lapadska obala 7  
20 000 Dubrovnik  
Croatia  
E-mail address: ana.portolan@unidu.hr

**Zrinka Golemac, MSc**

Lecturer  
University of Dubrovnik  
Department of Economics and Business Economics  
Lapadska obala 7  
20 000 Dubrovnik  
Croatia  
E-mail address: zrinka.golemac@unidu.hr

## CREATING AN ECO-TOURISM PRODUCT IN A RURAL AREAS BASED ON TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS

**Izidora Marković Vukadin**  
**Sara Melkić**  
**Damir Krešić**  
**Josip Mikulić**

### **Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of fundamental changes (shifts) in the global tourism market, one of most important being increased demand for different tourism activities in the rural areas. Consequently, rural areas are under increased pressure induced by growing tourism demand, and it is becoming more important to measure long term sustainability of tourism products being developed in order to preserve protected areas, as the most sensitive elements of rural areas. Within the DestiMED PLUS (Interreg MED) project, one of the main goals is to promote integrated coastal tourism planning in which regional policy makers will implement holistic policies that link tourism with conservation in practice. Simplified, through synergy and capacity building of local stakeholders, an ecotourism market-ready product has been developed, based on evaluation through given sets of indicators, which enable the improvement of the package itself. As part of the development of the package, as many as two impartial audits and two tests were conducted, during which indicators in the field of environmental sustainability, socio-economic sustainability, management, and conservation were continuously collected. In Croatia, the NATURA 2000 area of Cres-Lošinj (Marine Area) was selected as a pilot area. The project identified the need to strengthen governance frameworks in Croatia, but also throughout the Mediterranean, with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of NATURA 2000 protected areas to make eco-tourism based on a local approach a success. This can be achieved by strengthening cross-sectoral local and regional policies, providing integrated planning strategies (tourism and conservation) and providing stakeholders with effective training and tools for managing, measuring and promoting ecotourism.

**Keywords:** Conservation, ecotourism, indicators, NATURA 2000, sustainability

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in several fundamental changes (shifts) in the global tourism market, one of most important being increased demand for different tourism activities in the rural areas. Tourist traffic and interest in rural areas have increased significantly in those regions that are best positioned in the supply of rural accommodation and have experienced a stronger and more lasting recovery in domestic demand, partly due to national and regional closures (Seraphin and Dosquet 2020; Peixeira Marques, 2022). Consequently, rural areas are under increased pressure induced by growing tourism demand, and it is becoming more important to measure long term sustainability of tourism products being developed to preserve protected areas, as the most sensitive elements of rural areas. On the other hand, the response to pandemic all around the world has turned into national lockdowns, widespread travel restrictions and border closures, stifling every tourist activity and turning tourism-dependent

communities around the world into communities in crisis (Tsao and Ni 2016). Therefore, in the past two years, more and more thought has been given to potential directions for the transformation of existing tourist demand, and consequently supply, elaborating desirable sustainable tourism strategies, policies, and products of the new age (Nepal 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles 2020; Bae and Chang 2021). Furthermore, in the tourism literature two new tourism periods are being introduced and discussed, BC and AC as Before Corona and After Corona (Friedman 2020). Therefore, it is important for destinations to seize the opportunity and use COVID-19 crisis as a chance for positive tourism transformation. This crisis can be considered as a wake-up call event, an opportunity to reshape tourism into a model that is more sustainable, inclusive, and caring of the many stakeholders that rely on it (Cheer 2020).

Furthermore, in rural areas, it is certainly necessary to emphasize the value of protected areas. Therefore, ensuring sustainability remains a critical challenge of nature-based tourism planning and development (Marković Vukadin 2017). The sustainable coexistence of tourism and conservation in rural areas is of utmost importance worldwide, especially from the perspective of economic development, local community well-being, and environmental needs. As tourism development is gaining momentum in many vibrant PA's especially in COVID era, effective tourism development policies and management are of utmost importance. However, it is evident that planning and management within PAs often only superficially promotes the concepts of integrated management and sustainable development, while risks, including those related to excessive visitation, remain marginalised (Mandić and Marković Vukadin 2021).

Therefore, this paper gives an insight into case study of DestiMED PLUS (Interreg MED) project, as an attempt to show on a very clear example of the possibilities of transformation (or transition) of the tourist offer, based on monitoring the sustainability of tourism at the level of the wider destination, protected area, but also the tourist package itself. In Croatia, the NATURA 2000 area of Cres-Lošinj (Marine Area) was selected as a pilot area, and the package itself takes place on both islands over 6 days. In a creative sense, the product presents the autochthony of the Island of Lošinj through the senses (Taste Day, Scent Day, Sight Day, Touch Day).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Tourism in protected areas**

In recent years, there has been an increasing body of literature dealing with the complex and delicate relationship between protected areas (PAs) conservation goals, on the one hand, and the touristic valorisation of PAs in rural areas, on the other hand. On the one hand, establishing PAs in the form of a park or reserve is generally viewed as an effective way to preserve rural landscapes, biodiversity, and natural resources (e.g., Molina-Murillo et al., 2016; Mukul et al. 2017). On the other hand, tourism induced through PA-designations in and around PAs is regarded as an effective way to promote the development of local communities, while the economic gains induced through tourism activity can partly be back-transferred to furthering, even more, the set conservation goals (Bello, Carr, and Lovelock 2016). There is a rather unanimous view regarding tourism potentials in the literature, but some authors have also questioned them (e.g., Lemelin and Dawson 2014). Generally, since PAs are sensible ecosystems, a key

requirement for sustainable and successful PA-based tourism activity is management intervention to prevent undesirable environmental changes (Addison, de Bie, and Rumpff 2015), especially in PAs encompassing rural settlements. In practice, however, this is a very challenging task, as has been shown by, e.g., Job, Becken, and Lane (2017), who focused their analysis on all 229 natural World Heritage Sites (in 2015; there are 257 sites nowadays). They found problems at both the strategic and operational levels of tourism planning that required significant improvements. A key prerequisite for, but also still a main challenge in contemporary PA management, is the involvement of local communities in participatory management (e.g., Trimble, Araujo, and Seixas 2014). Generally, the success of participatory management systems in PAs primarily relies on (i) participation, (ii) financing, but also (iii) data generation and retrieval (Costa et al. 2018; Pivčević, Mikulić, and Krešić 2021). Accordingly, besides active involvement of respective stakeholders and financial backup, successful development, management, and marketing of PA-based tourism products largely depends on the quantity and quality of relevant data, involving, e.g., spatial data (Hennig, 2017), catalogued resources (Blanco-Salas et al. 2019), but also feedback from locals and park staff (Allen et al. 2018). Within this context, Job et al. (2017) highlighted the general need for more consistent monitoring systems in rural PAs.

## **2.2. Tourism product development in PAs: Stakeholder involvement and monitoring**

As mentioned previously, stakeholder collaboration and quality input data are frequently mentioned to be key requirements for successful and sustainable tourism-product development in rural PAs. However, there are considerably few case studies that document the implementation of these principles in practice. In a case study of geological attractions in Mauritius, Newsome and Johnson (2013) voiced the general need for stronger data backup when developing tourism plans as a prerequisite for developing new tourist products and for enhancing existing ones. Using a participative action research approach, Osorio-García and Domínguez Estrada (2019) report the experiences of developing tourism products in ten communities in the Mexican Nevado de Toluca national park area, which is famous for its snow-capped volcano. These authors conclude that, besides social capital and tourism potentials, the collaboration of all stakeholders, in particular local communities, is key to leveraging synergistic effects.

## **3. CASE STUDY**

### **3.1. DestiMED PLUS project framework**

One of the best current examples of creating an eco-tourism product in a rural area based on tourism sustainability indicators is the European DestiMED PLUS project (Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community Program). It is entitled as 'Ecotourism in Mediterranean Destinations: From Monitoring and Planning to Promotion and Policy Support' (Priority Axis 3: Protecting and promoting Mediterranean natural and cultural resources, 3.1. To enhance the development of a sustainable and responsible coastal and maritime tourism in the MED Area). The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund during the period 2019 – 2022 and led by 12 diverse and

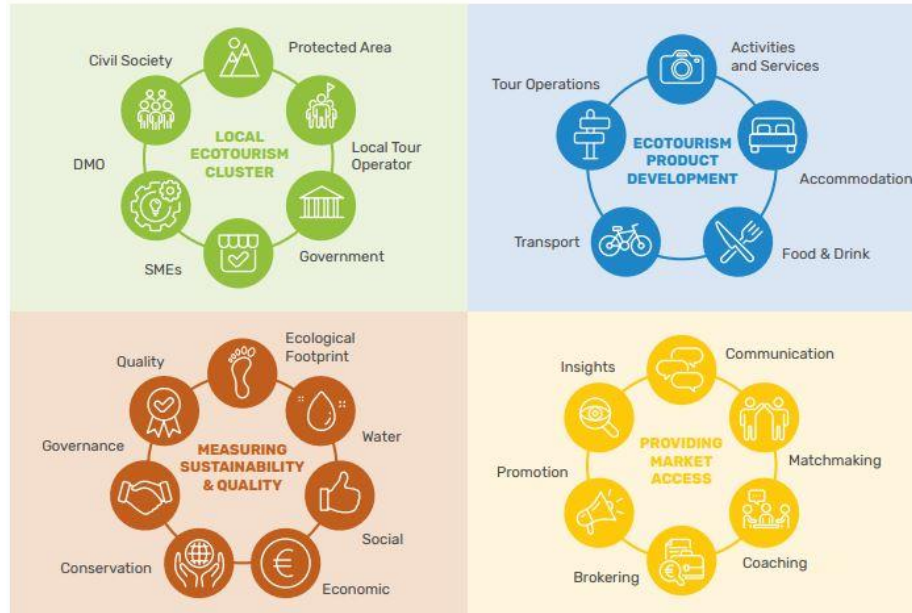
eminent partners from Albania, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, and Spain. The lead partner is Region Lazio and the project development gained great contribution from the IUCN, CPMR and WWF Mediterranean (Interreg MED).

DestiMED PLUS builds on the successes of market-centric, holistic public-private approach of the MEET and previous DestiMED projects and aims to improve levels of integration between regional tourism and conservation policies and to strengthen ecotourism standard. This is achieved by assessing the ecological deficit using Footprint calculators with an upscale indicators base on all 3 sustainability components within monitoring dashboard in and around Mediterranean Protected Areas (PAs). Considering conservation, competitiveness, governance, ecological footprint, and socio-economic impacts, common gaps and challenges have been recognized in order to create an ideal tourism model for PAs and rural areas. A sustainable tourism model designed by the *Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism Network* (abbr., MEET Network with developed MEET Standard) is being used as an eco-solution to support the 9 PA pilot destinations to design, develop, test, measure and improve high-quality experience and its impact through innovative ecotourism packages. Those benefits through conservation and local communities strengthening has been achieved in over 30 MEET-branded PAs that have implemented the MEET Model to date (Noll et al 2019).

It represents the next step on a journey to promote integrated participative sustainable planning where regional or national policymakers (e.g., PA managers, DMOs, ITOs, governing bodies, SMEs, Civil Society etc.) apply harmonized policies that link tourism with conservation. For ecotourism to thrive, governance and legislation frameworks must be strengthened across the whole Mediterranean area. This includes enhancing cross-sectoral local and regional rural policies, improving integrated planning, governance, and conservation strategies, and providing stakeholders with effective capacity building training modules and user-friendly tools to manage, measure, and promote ecotourism at all levels.

At local scale DestiMED PLUS supports the identified PAs and regions in achieving socio-economic and conservation goals as established in their management plans and regional policies through 4 step process (Fig.1). To strengthen the enabling conditions for ecotourism by engaging actors at larger scales, DestiMED PLUS applies integrated and coordinated planning and governance strategies and improves the stakeholders' capacities across entire Mediterranean. The governance mechanism that underpins it, consists of the Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC that ensures public-private collaboration and manages PAs) and the Regional Ecotourism Clusters (REC that oversees the administrative work of the LEC and creates ecotourism guidelines based on the standards and indicators). Their final aim is to join the active Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium (MEC), that fosters and exchanges best transnational tourism and conservation practices through monitoring database and commonly advocates for an integrated policies and agendas through the synthesized Ecotourism Roadmap).

**Figure 1. Process of developing ecotourism in Mediterranean Protected Areas**



Source. MEET network

By designing and capitalizing ecotourism packages, DestiMED PLUS region and local decision-makers are in the long-term transforming diverse rural areas, islands and sparsely populated PAs into viable ecotourism destinations which respect well-being while proving conservation incentives and operating off-season. Finally, DestiMED PLUS project in Croatia is managed by Institute for tourism in cooperation with local and regional stakeholders managing Natura 2000 site Cres-Lošinj, which is described below.

### 3.2. Cres –Lošinj NATURA 2000

Cres-Lošinj Natura 2000 area is large marine site located in the Kvarner area, around the sheltered coast and waters of the eastern part of the Lošinj and Cres archipelago. This archipelago is by most of its characteristics rural area (population density, rural landscape, people working in primary sector). It is one of the most important feeding and breeding areas for bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in the Eastern Adriatic. This area is also important for the Mediterranean population of loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), the Mediterranean endemic-seagrass *Posidonia* (*Posidonia oceanica*), coralligenous biocenoses and nesting of the sea crow (*Phalacrocorax Aristotelis*) (EEA 2021). During the research conducted in this area, 152 species of marine flora and 303 species of marine invertebrates (7 strictly protected and 9 protected) and 112 species of fish (19 of which are considered endangered in Croatia) were documented (Mackelworth and Jovanović 2011). This Natura 2000 site is based on probably the richest set of scientific data in Croatia. Research on bottlenose dolphins in the Lošinj area has been carried out systematically since 1990. Based on scientific research, the area of Lošinj aquatorium has become known as a well-documented and extremely important habitat

of a resident bottlenose dolphin community and very important site for dolphin watching tours.

During the ten-year period from 1992 to 2002, three variants of proposals for the protection of the marine area in the Cres-Lošinj aquatorium were prepared (Balenović et al. 1992; Bearzi 1995; Mackelworth et al. 2002). The primary argument for the protection of the area in each of the proposals was the presence of the bottlenose dolphin population, a priority protected species according to national and international regulations. Because of the great economic importance of the area in tourism and fisheries, in all variants it was proposed to protect the area as a multi-purpose area according to IUCN guidelines. Based on this request, in 2006, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia issued a Decision on preventive protection of part of the sea along the eastern coasts of the islands of Cres and Lošinj in the category of special reserves-marine reserves. But that decision was implemented without a public hearing. When preventive protection was declared in the Cres-Lošinj marine area, it was the largest single marine area placed under protection to preserve biological diversity in Croatia. With an area of 52,335 hectares, it has more than doubled the total area of protected marine areas in Croatia. Already at this stage of the interview with the local population, the absence of any clear development strategy for the island as a whole and the lack of information on marine protected areas were identified. Respondents pointed out the lack of confidence in the ability, capabilities and will of the state government to develop and establish a protected marine areas in a fair and transparent manner (Mackelworth et al. 2003).

The top-down designation of the Cres-Lošinj marine protected area, and a lack of communication with the local community, has created conservation resistance in the region. This has led the State Institute for Nature Protection to propose to downgrade the area from Special Reserve to Regional Park, thereby undermining the original biological conservation aim, that of the protection of the internationally protected bottlenose dolphins. Today this area is still only a Natura 2000 designated area, with very few restrictions in further development of tourism activities.

The conflict between local interests and nature conservation remains an unresolved issue that requires the decision-makers to either fully engage with the local community or face serious conflicts at local level and censure at international level (Mackelworth and Jovanović, 2011). Excessive and uncontrolled growth of tourism has been identified as a major threat in this area (Grofelnik 2020), in particular the increase in the use of high-speed vessels such as speedboats, scooters and motor yachts. Noise disturbance and physical disturbance of dolphins are particularly pronounced in the summer months (Mackelworth et al. 2003). To try to tackle this challenges DestiMED PLUS project has started tourism package development with aim of conservation od marine sites and sustainable development of rural areas.

### **3.3. Package development**

The focus of the DestiMED PLUS project is the development of an innovative ecotourism package in each of the pilot PAs (parks), which is created, tested, and improved through iterative processes and adapted to market needs and the MEET Standards. The main aim is measuring product quality and the ecological, socio-



economic, governance and conservation indicators, in order to minimize the negative tourism impacts they produce on the environment, economy, and community. As a new, green, and sustainable tourism product, ecotourism packages are created in participatory public-private cooperation in cycles through learning, managing, consulting, and monitoring between the key local, regional, and national tourism, conservation, research, and policy stakeholders. However, each ecotourism package is carried out by the local ITO (DMC) and PA (park) management, and as well revised through the audit by the regional and technical project partners and through the full test by the independent international testers, mostly tourism and conservation professionals.

The final ecotourism packages are improved and refined after each test and they represent the opportunity for each project pilot site to do a trial run of the ecotourism experience to be commercially viable, whilst retaining MEET Network's values of conservation, community, connection, and compassion. By the MEET Standard, these park-led ecotourism packages are unique, locally-crafted, rural based, immersive nature-based and cultural (heritage) travel experiences created by experienced, professional, and environmentally conscious communities. They are made for the experiential travellers who enjoy a high-quality, VFM, engaging travel activities with the knowledge that their tour has been vetted, exhibits a high level of sustainability, and recognizes and measures environmental impact. In order to be certified as MEET product and to be included in its catalogue, all ecotourism products must meet these standards. They imply an integral part of the methodology and an extensive list of criteria referenced in product development to ensure long-term sustainability, quality, and benefits to the local communities.

To design a market-ready eco-experience for a small group (max. 12 pax) under the MEET brand, the all-inclusive ecotourism package must contain genuine, easy-going experiences, activities, and services by the locally-owned SMEs; authentic, comfortable, mid-range, energy efficient or eco-certified accommodation; healthy, local, organic well-served food and homemade drinks; low-impact transport; and locally based tour operations and guiding. These low season itinerary in iconic PA should present the true essence of the rural Mediterranean through soft-adventure, cultural, nature and conservation activities based on 'wow' effects and emotions, storytelling and interpretation, authenticity, tangible, intangible elements, and cultural exchange.

As a new pilot of the new ecotourism experience development is chosen the green destination – the Island of Lošinj as an integral part of the Marine Protected Area Cres – Lošinj (NATURA 2000 Network) which is a leader of sustainable tourism development in Croatia. Supported by 11 local and regional partners, the ecotourism package is created under the name 'Rhythm of the Senses – 'Island of Lošinj' with a desire to introduce tourists to the true island rhythm that Lošinj breathes and lives during the rest of the non-peak-season year. The rhythm of the senses alludes to all the variety of daily activities of the package that can arouse and activate all the senses of tourists in the island rhythm – through sight (Sight Day), hearing (Sound Day), smell and taste (Taste Day) and touch (Touch Day). 6-days all-inclusive innovative itinerary is created for the 6-12 experienced, well-educated, active, tech savvy, solvent, environmentally-responsible and adventurous middle-aged travellers. This product was designed for those who enjoy a combination of outdoor activities and psychophysical vacation, local gastronomy,

unique nature or heritage, long tradition, and interaction with local population through various creative workshops, experiences, and field visits. These are very pleasant, grateful, and simple guests who love and seek sustainable, more remote, Mediterranean exotic destinations, who choose comfort over luxury and quality over price.

Some of the 12 activities the itinerary consists of are: cooking class in the family-run restaurant; visit of the Apoxyomenos Museum and tasting the Apoxyomenos' ancient dishes; herbal tour in Aromatic Garden, picking local species, herbarium art workshop with local herbs, tasting room; kayaking and diving on the Island of Orjule; sunset session at Providenca viewpoint with local bites, lecture at the Blue World Institute of Marine Research and Conservation and dolphin watching by boat, promenade walk on the Path of Vitality, picnic along the coast; talking with a local fisherman etc. Most of these activities are carefully chosen and interpreted since they do not depend on weather conditions and seasonality of attractions and SMEs.

By extending the season and through participating in conservation activities, responsible behaviour, and consumption within the PA, designed meaningful local experience presents an immersive green, eco practice in the rural area which supports Mediterranean parks and its biodiversity.

#### **3.4. Monitoring sustainability of the package**

Within the DestiMED PLUS iterative process, data collection and analysis, testing and monitoring were carried out in order to provide insights into the current gaps and challenges between market-based outcomes and more sustainable and inclusive target results, as well as to enable better decision making at all levels in the improvement processes. More precisely, comprehensive testing process consists of package definition (with the 1<sup>st</sup> test/audit), package assessment (with the 2<sup>nd</sup> full test and assessment process), package continuous improvement (after each assessment), final assessment (with final on-the-spot check during the familiarization trip) and integration in the MEET Catalogue. In parallel, data collection follows MEET and extended DestiMED PLUS methodology which helps the testing process to complete with the package sustainability assessment (accurate data-driven final mark of the itinerary).

While the package should be aligned with the MEET brand and product line, data collection follows the upgraded standards (expanded indicators baseline) by calculating ecological footprint, water footprint, and analysing social, economic, conservation and governance indicators, quality of the products and quality of the guest experience. To be compared with other regions and countries, all PAs and data collectors follow the proposed methodology based on integrated coastal zone management approach.

While conservation, governance and product consistency data are collected before the test through the self-assessment indicators grids filled by the PA and the LEC, product quality is measured at the end of the full test through the questionnaires (surveys) filled by the testers (package customers). The only research limitation at the Med scale is non-existence of coordinated regional approach (e.g., inequality and differences among NUTS regions) towards the integration of ecotourism, so the gaps in data and methodologies rarely allow for a view of holistic tourism impacts beyond economic

considerations. Therefore, as the methodology and policy support to overcome the issues and to improve the overall monitoring procedures and indicators, some regional networks are involved in the process directly (CPMR) or indirectly (MEET/ MedPAN/ NecsTOUR). Although all the partners are included in the monitoring process from the beginning until the end, evaluation and monitoring of project implementation (with the 1<sup>st</sup> test/audit) is mainly based on internal controls and procedures set up and agreed at inception phase. On the other hand, quantitatively evaluation of project progress (with the 2<sup>nd</sup> test/audit) is assisted by the monitoring committee who meets periodically and conducted by the external evaluators who are in charge of data collection and testing. All corrections are made in collaboration with the service providers and the LEC members.

The final aim of the monitoring sustainability of the package is the MEET Ecotourism Calculator within online upgraded Sustainability Monitoring Platform where the results and progress of obtained data can be uploaded, saved, downloaded, and virtually compared with the other applied PAs. This user-friendly calculator is using the Global Footprint Network methodology and it is upgraded with socio-economic impacts. The dashboard tool measures the EF impact from the various elements of a tour package – accommodation, food and drinks, mobility and transfers, services and activities, and it shows trends. The results reach beyond a standard carbon emissions calculator and show the “bio productive land areas needed to produce the renewable resources and ecological services used to support the activities offered to tourists during the course of the package.”

#### **3.4.1.1<sup>st</sup> monitoring phase**

In the PA Cres-Lošinj (NATURA 2000), right after the 1<sup>st</sup> data collection one regional and one technical auditor have carried out the 1<sup>st</sup> test (audit) following the DestiMED PLUS methodology. After finishing on-the-spot sample check (quick revision) of the itinerary, face-to-face interviews with service providers and the LEC, general conclusion based on the reports was that the main improvements are needed in terms of conservation travel experience and policies, governance performance, branding, USP, ECO accommodation, mobility and transfers in the PA.

The SE Footprint results (Workers, Local Community, Value Chain, Customer) that are carried in the 1<sup>st</sup> test showed that transparency and local employments are not ideal, but in general other performances are very positive.

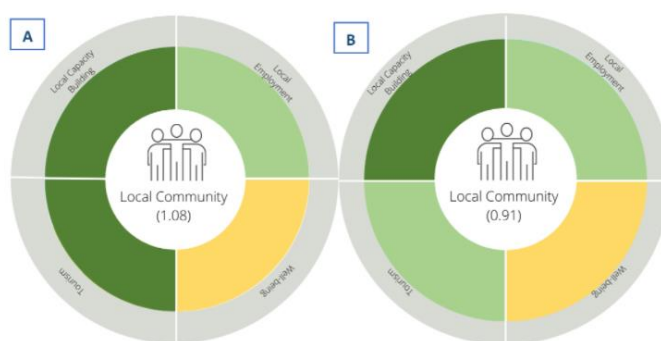
The overall EF Footprint results that are carried out in the 1<sup>st</sup> test showed intermediate positive performance of the ecotourism package in which the most negative impact have food selection and quantity of food (67% of the total EF), accommodation with a lack of eco practices (24% of the total EF), mobility and transfers. After the 1<sup>st</sup> test, the ecotourism package was mostly redesigned in mobility and transfers in the PA, local food consumption, storytelling interpretation, timing of the activities, conservation travel experiences, partly in governance performance, food menus and food quantity.

#### **3.4.2.2<sup>nd</sup> monitoring phase**

In the PA Cres-Lošinj (NATURA 2000), right after the 2<sup>nd</sup> data collection 6 independent, international testers, who have been preselected by the DestiMED PLUS Standard and whose task was to fill out the comprehensive satisfaction questionnaire, have carried out the 2<sup>nd</sup> test (full test) following their instructions. After experiencing the whole redesigned ecotourism package, general conclusion based on the reports was that the main improvements are needed in terms of conservation conditions and policies (visitor management plan), partly in governance performance, pre-arrival communication, general knowledge about PA among all stakeholders, food quantity, finalizing accommodation and timing of activities.

The SE Footprint results (Workers, Local Community, Value Chain, Customer) that are carried in the 2<sup>nd</sup> test showed that they represent an intermediate positive performance that means performance beyond compliance with legislation and basic requirements (Fig.2). It is important to point out that during the testing process, many product components were adjusted, which ultimately resulted in an improvement in the value of almost all sustainability indicators.

Figure 2. Selected results of the 2<sup>nd</sup> test SE results compared with the 1<sup>st</sup> test: PA Cres-Lošinj (NATURA 2000) (A – the results after the 1<sup>st</sup> monitoring phase, B – the results after the 2<sup>nd</sup> monitoring phase)



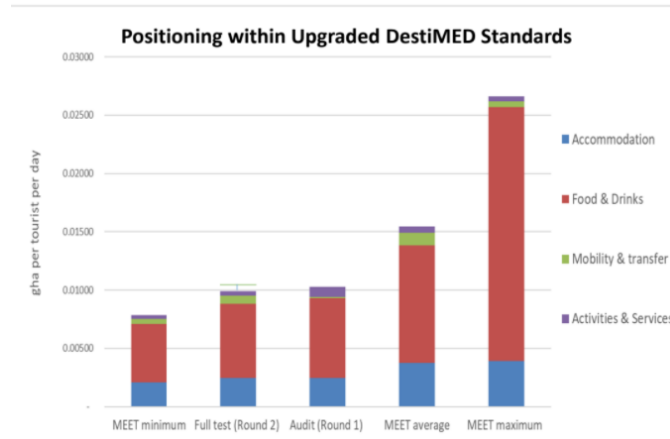


Source: Global Footprint Network.

While the Mobility and Transfers category Footprint increased 574% of the total EF (what is 27% less from the phase 1), Food and Drinks category Footprint decreased by 7% in between the two phases, but it still represents the main footprint driver of the package. The overall EF Footprint results that are carried out after the 2<sup>nd</sup> test showed again intermediate positive performance of the ecotourism package in which the most negative impact have food quantity and positive impact activities and accommodation (Fig.3):

- Ecotourism package RESULTS R2 vs. R1: Food and Drinks -7%, Accommodation 0%, Mobility and Transfers +574%, Activities and Services -53%.
- Comparison with DestiMED averages: Food and Drinks -37%, Accommodation -35%, Mobility and Transfers -36%, Activities and Services -28%.

Figure 3. Sustainability of package after audit and test compared to MEET standards



Source: Global Footprint Network.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> test, the ecotourism package was almost completely redesigned in local food consumption, quantity and menus, timing of the activities, pre-arrival communication and general knowledge about PA among all stakeholders, partly in governance performance and conservation conditions and policies. Few issues couldn't be improved in both phases since the PA doesn't have advanced eco accommodation, alternative vehicles or it cannot change the distance between the Airport and PA. Still, more than 60% of the ecotourism package is revised and improved.

Simplified, through a dynamic system of improving the indicator-based package, significant progress has been made in its finalization. It is important to note that progress at this level is made in small steps, with the necessary reductions (amounts of food, use of traffic within the destination, etc.) to achieve such out-of-series results. It is important to point out that out of 9 pilot areas, Cres-Lošinj package achieved the best results. The issue of carbon footprint as a consequence of transport always remains, but the difficult accessibility of the island does not allow for improvements in this segment.

#### 4. CHALLENGES ADDRESSED AND ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The situation with establishment of the Cres-Lošinj marine protected area illustrates problems faced world-wide related to balancing international commitments with local development desires. Therefore, efforts like those in the DestiMED PLUS project are extremely important, as they address the needs of conservation and protection, as well as the needs of the local community for tourism-based economic development. An additional benefit is the use of exclusively local products, which minimizes the carbon footprint of the product.

Some of the challenges identified through the audits themselves are:

- the necessity of educating the local community and service providers to live in a rural area that is at the same time a protected area, which makes their responsibility towards the environment even greater

- establishment of a public transport system on the island based on electric vehicles
- the need to integrate local production (primarily food) with supply in order to reduce the carbon footprint.

Finally, it is necessary to raise awareness that protected natural areas are not isolated parts of nature, but also rural areas with the function of housing, agriculture, tourism, and other economic activities. Therefore, it is important to create new values in tourism offer through which the value of the environment will be improved, with an emphasis on sensitive elements (in this case dolphins), as well as the wellbeing of community.

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## CREATING AN ECO-TOURISM PRODUCT IN A RURAL AREAS BASED ON TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS

### **Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of fundamental changes (shifts) in the global tourism market, one of most important being increased demand for different tourism activities in the rural areas. Consequently, rural areas are under increased pressure induced by growing tourism demand, and it is becoming more important to measure long term sustainability of tourism products being developed in order to preserve protected areas, as the most sensitive elements of rural areas.

Within the DestiMED PLUS (Interreg MED) project, one of the main goals is to promote integrated coastal tourism planning in which regional policy makers will implement holistic policies that link tourism with conservation in practice. Simplified, through synergy and capacity building of local stakeholders, an ecotourism market-ready product has been developed, based on evaluation through given sets of indicators, which enable the improvement of the package itself. As part of the development of the package, as many as two impartial audits and two tests were conducted, during which indicators in the field of environmental sustainability, socio-economic sustainability, management, and conservation were continuously collected. In Croatia, the NATURA 2000 area of Cres-Lošinj (Marine Area) was selected as a pilot area. The project identified the need to strengthen governance frameworks in Croatia, but also throughout the Mediterranean, with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of NATURA 2000 protected areas to make eco-tourism based on a local approach a success. This can be achieved by strengthening cross-sectoral local and regional policies, providing integrated planning strategies (tourism and conservation) and providing stakeholders with effective training and tools for managing, measuring and promoting ecotourism.

**Keywords:** Conservation, ecotourism, indicators, NATURA 2000, sustainability

**Izidora Marković Vukadin**

PhD, science associate

Institute for Tourism

E-mail: izidora.markovic@iztztg.hr

**Sara Melkić, MA**

Assistant

Institute for Tourism

E-mail: sara.melkic@iztztg.hr

**Damir Krešić, PhD**

Senior research associate, assistant professor

Institute for Tourism

E-mail: damir.kresic@iztztg.hr

**Josip Mikulić, PhD**

Senior research associate, associate professor

The Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb

E-mail: jmikulic@net.efzg.hr

## UNIVERSITY EDUCATION OF ARCHITECTS FOR TOURISM PLANNING IN RURAL SPACE

**Jasenka Kranjčević**  
**Zlata Dolaček-Alduk**  
**Dina Stober**

### **Abstract**

In 2018, slightly less than a third of the population lived in rural areas of the EU. The trend of population increase in rural areas of the EU from 2010 until today can only be seen as a possible indication of a future trend. Numerous challenges and needs of rural areas require a careful, interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach. The aim of this paper is to point out the necessity for an interdisciplinary education system for rural tourism planning through the education of architects and urban planners as well as the exchange of knowledge among students for such a system. In accordance with this idea, the undergraduate university study of architecture and urbanism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek teaches *Rurism* with the aim of introducing students to modern trends in rural areas and adopting a methodology for creating spatial solutions, including the function of tourism. The paper presents the vertical integration of the learning outcomes of the course *Rurism* with the learning outcomes of other subjects and the outcomes of the study program. The methodology of work on the subject *Rurism* is explained and the results of student work in the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, presented in the context of the learning outcome matrix. An overview of the workflow, semester results and cooperation with other stakeholders indicate that the implementation of an interdisciplinary approach in the university education system for rural planning, tourism, entrepreneurship and sustainable development requires the involvement of architecture and urban studies and external stakeholders in order to ensure added quality and new knowledge about space.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, rural planning, university education, architects and spatial planners, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 2018, slightly less than one-third of the population lived in rural areas (Eurostat 2017). Although the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and rural development programmes in Member States have recognised the need for a more integrated approach to rural development, there are still disparities between rural regions regarding the state of poverty and social integration, housing, healthcare, education, the labor market, and the digital divide due to historical circumstances. According to the data, the rural population has lower educational indicators compared to the urban population (Eurostat 2017). Education plays an important role in society: it determines life chances, improves the quality of life of an individual and a community, has broader social benefits as it increases the overall level of education and leads to a more productive workforce, which in turn can boost economic growth.

Unlike the most developed EU member states, Croatia is still facing a strong process of urbanization and depopulation of rural areas, and thus rural settlements, as indicated by the 2011 and 2021 census data (Bureau of Statistics; Kranjčević, Stober 2022).<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to emphasize the role of interdisciplinary education in planning the sustainable development of rural areas, in which students of architecture should be involved. In the article, in two parts, it is indicated that in the context of the education of architects there is a place for knowledge and skills serving the planning of rural areas. The first part of the paper presents a report on the past experience of the university education system in Croatia in the field of rural space planning. The second part of the paper indicates a current example of education for rural planning with an integrated theme of tourism, by presenting the goals and learning outcomes of *Rurism*, taught in the 3rd year of undergraduate study of Architecture and Urbanism at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek. The paper presents the correlation between the outcome of the course and the outcomes of the study program as well as the needs of the profession and labor market defined by the Act on Spatial Planning and Construction (OG 78/15, 118/18, 110/19) and the Regulation on issuing consent to perform professional affairs of spatial planning (OG 136/15).

## 2. RURAL SPACE, ARCHITECTS AND TOURISM

The interest of local architects in rural architecture can be identified at the end of the 19th century, when Kolar (1885) under the influence of Heimat style in "*News of the Society of Engineers and Architects*" asks the question "How do the Croatian people build? How do they live?" Doljak (1885) in the article *Croatian building forms*, in addition to the text in which he described and listed many "national terms of building parts" gives quality depictions of floor plans and drawings of wooden houses from the vicinity of Sisak. Janko Holjac and Martin Pilar published *Croatian Building Forms* 1904 - 1909. Martin Pilar published in Dresden in 1911 *Das Bauernhaus in Kroatien, Village house in Croatia*, and in Zagreb *Health and our village house*.<sup>2</sup>

After the Second World War in Croatia, encouraged by world trends, but also by the rich architectural heritage of rural settlements, architects indicated the need to consider its regional architectural characteristics. A stronger spatial transformation of rural settlements along the Croatian Adriatic coast began after World War II under the influence of urbanization and tourism development. Mihletić (1962) then pointed out that tourism should have been linked to agriculture, and Ensminger (1970) was of the opinion that the planned development of tourism was a basis for the urbanization of many rural settlements along the coast. Freudenreich in 1972 and Salopek in 1971 and 1974 stand out among them. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century rural tourism was increasingly viewed in a European context (Kušen 2006, Jelinčić 2007;

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Statistical Office of Croatia in 2001 there were 105 abandoned settlements, 150 in 2011, 190 in 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Academician Martin Pilar, Biographies, in: University in Zagreb Faculty of Architecture 1919/1920-1999/2000, p. 210.

Demonja and Ružić 2010). With a stronger change of functions in rural areas, Lukić (2000) is of the view that rural tourism can be a factor in the integrated development of rural areas. At the beginning of the 21st century, when rural areas are becoming more and more a subject of tourism, the Ministry of Tourism initiated the development of several manuals for architectural and architectural renovation (Salopek et al. 2006, Lončar-Vicković and Stober 2011, Živković 2015). Kušen (2007) prepared a manual, *How to host tourists on your property*, with elements of architectural house design of on a rural estate.

On a global scale, rural space in tourism is becoming increasingly important. Thus, the UNWTO launched *Best Tourism Villages* initiative. Pilot projects have been launched at the EU level promoting specific aspects of tourism in villages, such as, smart villages, charming villages, slow trips etc. (European Network for Rural Development). These initiatives set trends for tourism in rural areas and multidisciplinary observation of rural areas with an emphasis on some sectoral aspects.

### **3. RURAL DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN CROATIA**

Authors Smolčić Jurdana and Milohnić (2018) point out that rural areas are often planned with an insufficient development approach. The thesis of an incomplete approach can be added to this, as evidenced by the consequences of inappropriate expansion of rural settlements along roads, occupation of the quality agricultural land due to building, illegal construction, non-recognition and non-use of regional architectural features etc. The authors presented an overview of educational institutions in Croatia that implement courses with an integrated theme and objectives in the field of rural tourism (Smolčić Jurdana and Milohnić 2018). University programs are dynamic and according to the new review, the course *Destination Management on Rural Tourism*, which is taught at the University of Economics in Križevci, can be added to the existing list. The correlation with rural tourism can also be found with the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, the Department of Geography, which teaches the *Rural Geography* undergraduate studies, and at the graduate study *Restructuring of Rural Areas and Heritage and Tourism in Rural Areas*. (Department of Geography, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics 2022). Rural Sociology is taught at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb. The Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb teaches *Sociology of Villages*, and the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek has joined with the education of architects in rural areas and rural architecture by introducing the subject *Rurism* at the undergraduate university study of Architecture and Urbanism since the academic year 2015/2016.

#### **3.1. Rurism**

The dichotomy of town and village is often discussed in the Croatian scientific and professional arena (Zlatić 1993, Štambuk et al. 2002, Lukić 2010). To emphasize the diversity in solving spatial problems between the village and the city, some experts refer

to the activity of planning space for rural areas as *Rurism*<sup>3</sup>. In order to emphasize that this is a rural area, architects and spatial planners used different names for rural development plans: rural plans, regulatory basis of the village, structural basis of the village, rural development plans etc.<sup>4</sup>

Teaching the subject *Rurism* is not uncommon in Croatia. At the Technical Faculty in Zagreb from 1945 to 1951 *Rurism I* and *Rurism II* were taught, as well as *Practice lessons on the construction of villages I and II* and *Practice lessons Rurism*<sup>5</sup> with the aim of building more humane and healthy housing and restoring partially or completely destroyed rural settlements. In addition to *Rurism*, students listened to the course *Economic Building* (which included the design of industrial and agricultural buildings), and it was taught by the architect Pavao Jušić<sup>6</sup>, who also taught the course at the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (Barišić 2000). It is interesting that the Faculty of Architecture abolished this course probably under the pressure of the process of urbanization, industrialization, but also the process of ownership transition.<sup>7</sup> The attempt to re-establish the subject *Rurism* at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb lasted two academic years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 as an elective subject within 15 hours of lectures. From the academic year 2019/2020 at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek, the subject *Rurism* has regularly been taught in the range of 15 lectures.

In Slovenia, at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Ljubljana, the course *Rurism in Rural Architecture* is held in the scope of 15 lectures, 15 hours of practice lessons and 60 hours of independent work, with the aim of sensitizing future architects to rural areas with an understanding and acquaintance with modern processes, trends and changes in functions in space, that include tourism. This course is taught in 3rd, 4th and 5th year of the integrated study of Architecture.

### 3.2. Rurism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek

According to the program of the undergraduate university study of Architecture and Urbanism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek, the aim of the course *Rurism* is to acquaint students with the spatial, functional, and social characteristics of rural settlements. Students get acquainted with different physical patterns of rural settlements and the causes and consequences of modern changes on examples from the regional scope. During 15 lectures students inspect the following content: explanation of the concept of rural planning in the context of spatial planning,

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the discussions about Rurism after the Second World War are written by Branislav Kojić.

<sup>4</sup> A more detailed analysis of the use of terms was reviewed by Prof. Ph.D. Ante Marinović-Uzelac. See in: Marinović-Uzelac, A. (2001), *Spatial planning*, Zagreb, Dom i svijet.

<sup>5</sup> In the academic year 1946/47, The Faculty consisted of 39 institutes, 2 seminars and 12 cabinets. Among other things, a cabinet for the construction of a village was created, headed by Dragan Boltar.

<sup>6</sup> Croatian Biographical Lexicon, Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute, I-Kal, book 6, Pavao Jušić, pp.665-666

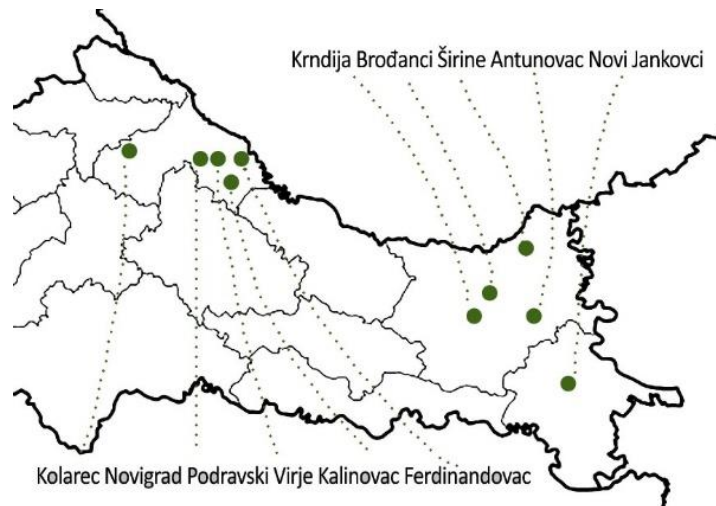
<sup>7</sup> The above means that agriculture after the Second World War was conditioned by a new social order and was divided into three main sectors: state, rural cooperative and rural -individual. The state and cooperative sectors represented the socialist sector and were the main bearers of the development of agriculture and production.

evaluation of cultural landscape, open spaces and rural settlements, functions in rural areas, the process of urbanization in rural areas, rural patterns - settlement, village, wasteland, rural economy - examples from the region, sectoral interests in rural areas: agriculture, forestry, water management, transport, tourism, and other modern trends in rural development, socio-economic, spatial, functional and visual changes and a modern rural house. This content should result in the achievement of the following learning outcomes:

- to identify the causes and consequences of modern changes in rural settlements,
- list and interpret the values of the rural cultural landscape,
- identify and describe various typologies of rural settlements,
- explain the principles of the organization of a rural settlement.

The generation of students for the academic year 2020/2021, a total of 41 students, was given a choice of 10 rural settlements, of which 5 rural settlements in Koprivnica-Križevci County, 4 in Osijek-Baranja County and 1 settlement in Vukovar-Srijem County (Figure 1). The assignment included the analysis of historical, demographic and spatial data, analysis of existing spatial plans, analysis of the use of construction and non-construction land, agricultural purposes, analysis of the agricultural landscape, so the students were supposed to make a synthesis of results in the form of SWOT analysis. Based on critical reflection, students proposed concepts of spatial development of rural settlements. During the work, students interpreted the values of the cultural landscape, identified and described the typology of rural settlements and the principles of organization of rural settlements, as well as identified the causes and consequences of modern changes in rural settlements.

**Figure 1. Map of settlements within the course Rurism 2021/2022 at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek**



Source: Authors

In the academic year 2021/2022 the course *Rurism* was attended by 32 students who were given the same settlements as an assignment, and a new feature regarding the assignment were the proposals of 4 development thematic scenarios (Figure 2). After a critical review of the observed area of the village with the arguments arising from the analysis, students chose one of the 4 proposed development scenarios<sup>8</sup> and created a concept of spatial development of a rural settlement.

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<sup>8</sup> Scenario 1 - settlement of rural areas by young dynamic environmentally conscious people not necessarily engaged in agriculture.

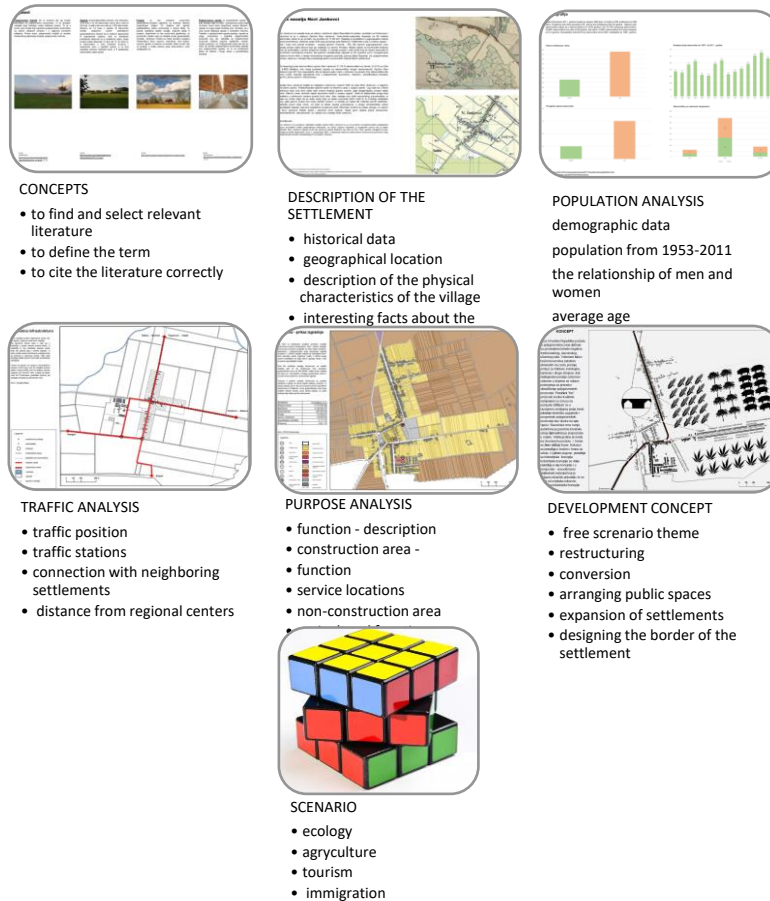
Scenario 2 - a rural settlement that will have a dominant agricultural production in the future.

Scenario 3 - a rural settlement that has a dominant tourist purpose in the future.

Scenario 4 - the existing sparsely populated rural settlement, inhabited by migrants who need to be included in the life and work of the rural settlement.



Figure 2. Assignment structure in the course *Rurism* at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek



Source: Extracts of students works

The methodology of the assignment is not identical to the methodology that students take in the planning courses *Urbanism I* and *Urbanism II*, in which the emphasis is on the planning of housing estates and the parameters for planning are given in more detail. In the assignment on the *Rurism* course, students study the whole of the settlement and additionally analyze demographic trends and the structure of the area around the settlement, looking for values in landscape patterns and agricultural and forestry forms. The challenge for students is to consider the sensibilities of rural space they need to recognize through spatial patterns and spatial relationships, as well as through the dynamics of economic activities and changes in rural areas. To consider the tourism scenario within the assignment, it was crucial to consider the synergy of rural destinations in the wider observed area as well as economic and spatial response to the vision of development (settlement border, scale, relationship with the center of the settlement, improving services for locals and tourists etc.).

**Table 1. Scheme of correlating the outcomes of the study program, the outcomes of the course, the tasks on the course, the regulated tasks of the profession and the results on the course Rurism**

<b>Course learning outcomes</b>	List and interpret the <b>values</b> of the rural cultural landscape	Identify and describe various <b>typologies</b> of rural settlements	Explain the principles of rural settlement <b>organization</b>	Identify the causes and consequences of modern <b>changes</b> in rural settlements
Participate in the development of architectural projects and urban plans	•	•	•	•
Independently create a conceptual design of the building				
Perform professional supervision as an associate				
Participate in the drafting of the spatial planning document	•	•	•	•
Understand the construction design and dimensioning				
Analyze world and national art with special emphasis on the history and theory of architecture	•	○	○	•
Adopt basic regulations in the field of architecture and spatial planning	•	•	•	•
Understand the perception of space and create spatial compositions using computer and traditional drawing techniques	○	○	•	•
Understand and analyze the physical properties of buildings, the use of building materials and the organization of the construction process				
Understand and analyze the impact of buildings on the environment	•	•	•	•
Use a foreign language in professional communication				

• the learning outcome of the course contributes to the realization of the learning outcome of the study program

○ the learning outcome of the course partially contributes to the realization of the learning outcome of the study program

Source: Authors

Achieving the outcome of the course through assignments was ensured by connecting the assignments directly with the outcomes of the course, which resulted from the outcomes of the study program. Covert outcomes are the knowledge and skills that assignments must provide in order for the legal definition of expertise to be met. Figure 3 shows how the outcomes of the study program of undergraduate university study Architecture and Urbanism are related to the outcomes of the course, how the tasks are achieved, and how the necessary professional knowledge required for the labor market is achieved in this process. (Act on Spatial Planning and Construction, OG 78/15, 118/18, 110/19) and the Regulation on the issuance of consent for the performance of professional spatial planning activities (OG 136/15). Professional spatial planning activities are regulated and include the following tasks:

- drafting proposals for all spatial plans and draft reports on the state of space at all levels
- performing work related to the preparation and adoption of all spatial plans and status reports in the space at all levels
- drafting proposals for urban development plans
- performing activities on the preparation and adoption of urban development plans.

In the academic year 2021/2022, the curriculum was upgraded with the participation of external stakeholders. The guest lecturer Nikša Božić was invited to give a lecture on “Spatial Planning for Rural Areas”. Thus, the participation of youth associations in the development of plans for settlements within the Koprivnica-Križevci County was accomplished. The experience of participation was significant given that students were confronted with different attitudes and demands from those they assumed. The participation simulation directed them to agree on interests and seek alternative solutions. Cooperation with vocational institutes was achieved through a public presentation of results to the representatives of the Institute of Physical Planning of Koprivnica-Križevci County through an online presentation and discussion and a presentation to the representatives of the Institute of Physical Planning of Osijek-Baranja County for associated settlements held live at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture. Expert reviews, comments and suggestions were very useful for simulating an expert discussion in the plan development process (Figure 4).

**Figure 3. Public presentation of students to the representatives of the Institute for Physical Planning of Osijek-Baranja County**



Source: Authors

#### 4. Conclusion

Activities leave a mark in space, leave material goods (buildings, infrastructure, change of landscape, change of resources, etc.), but also leave intangible effects creating new values in space, new identities, and impact on other activities. Tourism is an important economic sector for Croatia and should be planned in a sustainable way. How to sustainably think about the planning of rural settlements for tourism is one of the issues of this article, explained through the presentation of education for this assignment. Interdisciplinarity is necessary and without the contribution of more disciplines in planning, there is no proper and quality planning. In the updated review of educational subjects in the field of rural planning, with the integration of tourism (Smolčić Jurdana, Milohnić 2018) it was pointed out that the disciplines of geographers, sociologists, economists, tourism experts, tourism managers, agro-biotechnologists, winemakers, agronomists, and others gain knowledge about rural areas for its planning. In order for the plan for sustainable development of rural space and integration of tourism to be based on an interdisciplinary approach, it is necessary to anticipate the education of architects, urban planners and spatial planners for this task, which is also provided by the legislative framework. The review of education of architects showed that Croatia has a tradition in rural planning and that architects are educated at certain intervals to plan settlements in rural areas and that the current program of Rurism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek continues this tradition.

In the review of outcomes and assignments in the course Rurism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek, the results that students achieve through the preparation of a seminar paper are presented. Due to the correlation of the results of the curriculum, course results, subject assignments and professional regulatory tasks, students are educated for the labor market. The scenario method for the development of a rural settlement proved to be a successful method in the task in the academic year 2021/2022. Through the selection of the proposed scenario, students learn that not every rural settlement can have the same development goals because it has different development conditions. On the other hand, through such education methods, future architects get acquainted with the trends in rural areas and can get involved in interdisciplinary planning of sustainable development of rural areas through participation

in the drafting of various national documents. Simulations of the process of participation and vocational counseling have shown that the opening of education to external stakeholders and real actors in professional processes makes a contribution to achieving learning outcomes. Additional efforts should also be implemented by planning an interdisciplinary partnership that would bring the simulated process closer to the real one and allow students to gain additional knowledge.

Tourism is a strong activity that changes the built structures as well as the social structures in its environment. Rural tourism is one of the initiators of changes in rural areas. In a predominantly rural country, the clear task is to educate future experts in a number of disciplines on the area of rural settlements, on activities in rural areas, on values and changes. Every subject that deals with the field of rural development sensitizes young professionals that the rural area is sensitive, important and limited, so it needs to be carefully changed. In any case, in order to meet all modern requirements of the individual and the community regarding agriculture, housing, transport, space, environment, construction, tourism and other sectors, interdisciplinary education and planning a mutually harmonized system / concept of education is necessary<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Education can be viewed in several ways, through the education of various professions related to the planning or implementation of rural tourism or through the system of lifelong learning and thus maintaining various courses such as education for tourism on farms etc.

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## UNIVERSITY EDUCATION OF ARCHITECTS FOR TOURISM PLANNING IN RURAL SPACE

### Abstract

In 2018, slightly less than a third of the population lived in rural areas of the EU. The trend of population increase in rural areas of the EU from 2010 until today can only be seen as a possible indication of a future trend. Numerous challenges and needs of rural areas require a careful, interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach. The aim of this paper is to point out the necessity for an interdisciplinary education system for rural tourism planning through the education of architects and urban planners as well as the exchange of knowledge among students for such a system. In accordance with this idea, the undergraduate university study of architecture and urbanism at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek teaches *Rurism* with the aim of introducing students to modern trends in rural areas and adopting a methodology for creating spatial solutions, including the function of tourism. The paper presents the vertical integration of the learning outcomes of the course *Rurism* with the learning outcomes of other subjects and the outcomes of the study program. The methodology of work on the subject *Rurism* is explained and the results of student work in the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, presented in the context of the learning outcome matrix. An overview of the workflow, semester results and cooperation with other stakeholders indicate that the implementation of an interdisciplinary approach in the university education system for rural planning, tourism, entrepreneurship and sustainable development requires the involvement of architecture and urban studies and external stakeholders in order to ensure added quality and new knowledge about space.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, rural planning, university education, architects and spatial planners, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek

### Jasenska Kranjčević

Assistant Professor Ph.D.  
Institute of Tourism, Zagreb  
E-mail: Jasenska.Kranjcevic@iztztg.hr

### Zlata Dolaček-Alduk

Professor Ph.D.  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek, Osijek  
E-mail: zlatad@gfos.hr

### Dina Stober

Associate Professor Ph.D.  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek, Osijek  
E-mail: dstober@gfos.hr

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL DISTANCE TO ROMA COMMUNITY IN RURAL TOURISM

**Sandra Kantar**

### **Abstract**

The paper analyzes the social characteristics of the Roma community in Koprivnica-Križevci County from the of social distance point of view and the possibility of their employment in rural tourism, i.e. ecotourism. Through a survey of 209 respondents with experience in rural tourism and interviews with several representatives in the field of tourism and people working on the integration of Roma people into the community, a wide range of answers were obtained about the topic. Although elements of Roma's material and spiritual culture would be very attractive for the tourist offer of the County, the possibilities of Roma involvement in social and economic activities are very limited due to the social distance to the Roma, but also the lack of involvement of Roma in wider society.

**Keywords:** research, Roma, rural tourism, social distance

### **1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN KOPRIVNICA-KRIŽEVCI COUNTY**

Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe and one of the many minority groups in Croatian society, i.e. a group entitled to ethnic peculiarity. A more complete analysis of Roma is possible if Roma are viewed as members of a particular social community, that is, as a group of people (Abercombe et al. 2008) in a geographical area, with three elements most often present in sociological definition:

1. A community of people can be considered as gatherings of people with special social structures;
2. A sense of belonging or a community spirit;
3. All day-to-day community activities, related or unrelated to work, shall take place within a single geographical area is characteristic to the sense of community.

From this point of view, the Roma community means a set of individuals whose daily life, connected or unrelated to work obligations, takes place within a geographical area such as, on the example of this paper, the area of the Koprivnica-Križevci County in the Republic of Croatia. The Roma community is distinguished by socio-economic characteristics such as historical origin, abundance, religion, educational and employment status, and other components of Roma identity and culture. In these areas, Roma are mentioned for the first time in Međimurje county already in the 17th century, when the child of the Roma Duke Ivan was baptized. In the 18th century, Roma Koritari moved in the area, and during the 19th century a series of migrations of Roma to the territory of Međimurje and Podravina continued<sup>1</sup>. Roma speak Ijimba d' bjaš, one of the Romanian dialects (vlax dialects), and along with the already present Calderas and Lovar subgroups, they form the core of today's Roma population in Croatia. Roma on the territory of Croatia were first recognized as a national minority by the Constitution of 1974, and since then the Roma have been guaranteed all rights in accordance with the current legislation. The exact number of Roma living in the Republic of Croatia today and their territorial spread is difficult to determine for a number of reasons, including the decision of a number of Roma to declare themselves as members of another ethnic group<sup>2</sup> which is a consequence of negative experiences and distance of the majority population toward Roma,

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<sup>2</sup> Roma in Croatia most often declare themselves members of the Croatian



mainly based on stereotypes and prejudices. However, the first big survey of the Roma population (Kunac, Klasnic, Lalić 2018) showed, based on mapping of Roma settlements and populations, that nearly 25 000 Roma live in 15 Croatian counties. There are eight different Roma groups living in Croatia, and the indigenous Croatian Roma are Lovari. According to religion, the majority of Roma in Croatia are Catholics, then Muslims and Orthodox. The family is a fundamental element of the social structure of the Roma, with the specifics arising from the tradition of the emergence of tribal authority and the law. Roma households are predominantly young. In about 50% of households, all householders are under the age of 39. Women are subject of discrimination, which is reflected in the upbringing of children and young people. The living conditions of the Roma population in the Republic of Croatia are difficult, primarily due to the high unemployment rate, insufficient coverage of the education system, inadequate housing conditions and the (in)regulation of spaces inhabited by Roma. The modern position of the Roma is formed through two ways of coexistence. Roma communities that lived in relatively isolated and separate rural settlements have preserved their national and cultural self-awareness, but the result of this process are poverty and backwardness. On contrary, the living standards of the part of the Roma population that lived mixed with the majority population were significantly better, but losing the determinants of national identity (National Strategy for Roma Inclusion: 2013-2020:25). In Koprivnica-Križevci County, the first form of coexistence of the Roma community with the local population was observed. According to the last Census (2021) in Koprivnica-Križevci County, the Roma community is represented by only 0.1%. which represents a large numerical decrease compared to the Census Bureau (2011) when 0.8% of them were recorded, or a total of 925 Roma.

However, it is known from the current situation that there are significantly more members of this national minority. According to Škiljan and Babić (2014), the reasons for the increase in the number of Roma lie, except in the religious and national identification of Roma with dominant populations, in informing The Roma about their rights through Roma leaders and volunteers there and NGOs. Nevertheless, the integration of Roma into wider society through education and work is proceeding slowly and partially. There is a problem of going to school and motivation to continue primary school education, and the uncooperativeness of parents. There is a particular problem with female children leaving primary school up to the age of 15, and it is also linked to underage marriages and the disapproval of husbands for girls to complete or continue their education. Also, Roma are traditionally dependent on social assistance programme which guaranteed them a minimum benefit that often exceeds the amounts they would earn working. The employment of Roma in the real sector is on one hand impeded due to lack of qualifications and experience, and on the other hand, in those few who have gained adequate education and experience, there is, in their own estimation, highly prevalent discrimination on the basis of skin color and/or ethnicity. As it is mainly an unskilled workforce, Roma can perform low-paid jobs. The absence of a permanent employment obligation leaves them enough time for occasional forms of work in the sphere of the gray economy. The Roma Association Step by Step, the Roma Association Better Future and the Bajasi Association are trying to involve the Roma community in social and economic activities, and improve their socio-economic position in Koprivnica-Križevci County.

## **2. ROMA IN A SOCIOLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENT-STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE**

Several scientific studies explore the sociological position of Roma in the Republic of Croatia, among which are the most important: a survey by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (1982), the results of which were published under the title *Social Position of Roma in SR Croatia*; research by the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (1998), entitled as *Social and Developmental Position of Roma in Croatia*, research by the State Institute for Family, Maternity and Youth (2002) entitled as *Structure of Roma families* and

understanding of the content of parenting and research collected in the proceedings of *How Croatian Roma Live*, Ivo Pilar Institute, (published in 2005).

It should also be noted that strategic documents promote the rights and protection of the Roma national minority, such as: the 2003 *National Programme for Roma*, which defines strategies regarding the inclusion of Roma in social and political life, and the *National Strategy for Roma inclusion by 2013-2020*, which aims to achieve improved living conditions, the inclusion of Roma in the social life of the community and breaking of stereotypes by the majority population. In order to implement the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion more effectively, numerous databases on Roma were collected in a book entitled *Inclusion of Roma in Croatian Society: Database Research* (2018) by the Center for Peace Studies. Regarding Roma population in the area of Koprivnica-Križevci County, Roma in Podravina and Prigorje are the subject of an *Action Plan for social inclusion of Roma in the Koprivnica-Križevci County*, for the period from 2017-2020 and the *Report on the implementation of alternative monitoring of the implementation of the National strategy for the inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Croatia from 2013 to 2020*, and several scientific studies, such as: *Roma in Podravina and Međimurje and involvement in Croatian society: from prejudice and stigmatization to social distance and discrimination* (Škiljan and Babić 2014), *Possibilities of inclusion of Roma in ecotourism* (Kantar and Svržnjak 2018), *Roma in Pitomaca: between ethnomimicry and preservation of Roma identity* (Babić and Škiljan 2019) and *Autostereotyping of Roma in Croatia as an indicator of the development of minority identity* (Šlezak 2020). It can be concluded that Roma in Croatia are the subject of scientific research in which significant changes within the Roma community are analyzed. Special emphasis in research has been placed on the inclusion of Roma in wider society, through the implementation of strategic documents and action plans not only at the national level, but also at the county level.

### 3. SOCIAL DISTANCE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The social distance that is created among the actors refers to the perceived feelings of distance or distance between social groups. This term is usually used to indicate the degree of separation or closeness between members of different ethnic groups (Abercombie 2008). It measures our personal attitude toward members of other groups: national, religious, sexual, etc., that are groups that behave differently from the group to which we belong. Social distance or „social spacing“, explain how closer some groups are to us. Some authors (Hrvatić 2004) confirm the fact that the social distance towards Roma is extremely high compared to other national and ethnic groups, which may be the result of several factors: reduced contacts between the Roma and non-Roma population, the existence of prejudices against Roma (Roma as beggars and resellers) and poorer knowledge of Roma culture (slight representation in the media and curricula). Therefore, the main hypotheses of this paper are:

1. „Social distance towards Roma is the main obstacle to their employability“.
2. „Roma culture and tradition can be used as an attractive tourist products and services“

Based on the original data obtained by the survey conducted at the end of 2017, a randomly selected sample of 207 respondents under the Ecotop 2<sup>3</sup> International project sought to verify these assumptions.<sup>4</sup> The survey consist of a total of 23 questions organised in 3 units. Socio-demographic data on respondents, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> ECOTOP 2 is a project implemented under the interreg V-A Croatia- Hungary: Life long learning programmes for increased growth capacity in ecotourism, co-financed by the European Union through the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia cross-border programme 2014-2020.

<sup>4</sup> The ECOTOP project (which preceded the ECOTOP2 project) concluded that "Ecotourism can contribute to the preservation and improvement of natural areas and the sustainable development of the areas and communities of people living there, including the Koprivnica-Križevci County." The Roma community resides in ecotourism sites in Koprivnica-Križevci County and can be seen in the context of the development of ecotourism and rural tourism. More on literature citation No. 8.

unpublished data about social distance to the Roma community, were used for the purposes of this paper. To examine attitudes towards social distance to Roma community, the Likert scale was used which consist of a number of different claims about Roma, socio-economic aspects of their community and possible work engagement in rural tourism. Respondents were asked to express their position with a score of 1-5 with following ratings: 1-complete disagreement, 2-disagreement, 3-indecision, 4-agreement and 5-complete agreement. The data was analyzed and presented descriptively, using tables and charts. Although social distance is examined through the Bogardus scale (seven degrees of intensity), the continuum of degrees in the scale ranges from understanding (intimate and warm relationships), to indifferent and „hostile“ behaviour (Hrvatić 2004), pre-social and social relations with the Roma community, in this research the degrees of closeness were measured through the assessment of agreement with a particular statement. The research data obtained through the survey were completed by the testimonies of the respondents through a structured interview. Interviews about possibilities of Roma inclusion in rural tourism, i.e. ecotourism were conducted in early 2018 with people working in tourism and public representatives of Roma population. Respondents were selected based according to their knowledge about Roma. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. From the transcripts, the extraction method obtained statements related to social distance to the Roma community. After analyzing all the data, the results of quantitative and qualitative research were compared and justified in the conclusion of the paper.

#### **4. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ON SOCIAL DISTANCE TOWARDS ROMA IN KOPRIVNICA-KRIŽEVCI COUNTY**

Respondents from the survey in the largest number come from the Koprivnica-Križevci County and from the neighboring counties. In the total random sample there are slightly more women (53%) than men (47%) and the average age of the respondent is 36 years. According to the educational structure, the largest number of respondents has completed secondary vocational school (45%), undergraduate study, (29%) and university graduate study (17%). Respondents were asked to separate one between the six characteristics listed above, which, in their opinion, best describes the Roma<sup>5</sup> as a specific ethnic and social group, i.e. a characteristic that is essential for the description of Roma identity. The components of Roma identity (Mišetić 2005) are also formed (defined) through differences from others, with the most common elements of identity (or differences) such as skin color, origin, language, lifestyle and culture. The characteristics offered to respondents for evaluation in this study were singled out on the basis of traditional Roma culture, which includes folklore, typical crafts, customs and language, and the dominant socio-economic characteristic, namely poverty and family size. At the beginning of the survey respondents were asked: „What do you think that best describes the Roma community?“ (Chart 1). They respond that this Roma people are best described by the large number of family members, then poverty (material), unemployment, Roma language and folklore (music, dance), and at least there are all the typical craft or economic activity they are engaged in. It is interesting to note that when the same question was asked to the Roma population, in the survey on the sociocultural characteristics of the Roma population (Mišetić 2005), Roma predominantly perceive themselves through the poverty dimension. Therefore, it can be pointed out that not only has the socioeconomic aspect of identity suppressed its traditional sociocultural components, but that there is a difference between the perception of Roma by the local community and the autostereotyping of Roma as an indicator of the development of minority identity (Šlezak 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> When respondents were asking about general characteristics of the Roma community it was possible to mark more answers

Chart 1. General characteristic of the Roma community

Description of the Roma community	
Big family	117
Poverty	81
Unemployment	81
Roman language	63
Folclore (music, dance)	47
Typical crafts	8
TOTAL	397

Source: survey questionnaire administered within Ecotop2 project

More specifically, when respondents are asked to assess the degree of their own tolerance towards the Roma community with a score of 1-5, where the score of 1 indicates - I am not tolerant at all, 2 - mostly intolerant, 3 - neutral, 4 - mostly tolerant and 5 - I am very tolerant, respondents expressing their own tolerance with an average score of 3, that is a rating that expresses neutrality, disinterest and indifference towards the Roma. In other words, „neutral tolerance“ towards Roma denotes social indifference and indifference as a measure or description of social distancing.

According to respondents, Roma are most recognizable by a number of components of their identity (Chart 2), such as primarily, interest in dance and song. But in the context of their involvement in the wider community or society, interest in dance and song at the same time indicates an indifference to work, that is, a tendency to pastime, joy and fun. Furthermore, respondents believe that Roma should have the same rights as the rest of the population, because they are the same as all other people. At the same time, Roma people are largely responsible for the situation they are in, and the most obvious evidence of this is, for example, their attitude towards personal hygiene. Respondents are not exactly sure whether Roma as a people really have a rich culture, traditional products and food, whether they want to integrate into society and in general, whether they are trying to live better. Also, it is not certain whether Roma should be protected from all forms of discrimination in society, or whether it would be better for Roma to live in special, their settlements. But respondents largely express the view that Roma are not caring parents.

Chart 2. General characteristics of Roma people

GENERAL CLAIMS/ATTITUDES ABOUT ROMA	AVERAGE GRADE
Roma people are interested in song and dance	4,11
Roma people need to have the same rights as the rest of the population	3,69
Most Roma people have problems with personal hygiene	3,56
Roma people are to a largest extent responsible for the situation they are in	3,54
Roma people are by nature the same as all other people	3,54
Roma people have reach culture	3,41
Roma people should be protected from all types of discrimination	3,36
Roma people think that education is unimportant	3,35
Roma people have traditional products and food	3,10
Roma people want to be integrated into the society	3,06
Roma people are trying to have a better life	2,95
All Roma people should live in separate settlements	2,91
Roma people are carrying parents	2,24

Source: survey questionnaire administered within Ecotop2 project

On a personal level (Chart 3), respondents were asked to assess claims concerning their own experience with Roma. In this segment of the research it was important to determine whether the personal experience towards the Roma community overlaps with general attitudes towards Roma, or whether the social distance towards the Roma on a personal level correlates with social distance towards the Roma community, in general. The results of the research shows the following: if the statements about Roma include a personal connection with Roma, the respondents have sharper, more intolerant and more selective attitudes toward them, so they express a stronger social distance, and consequently express the degree of social separation, diversity and distance (Petz 1992). For example, respondents express social distance towards Roma to a greater extent when asked if Roma are reliable friends and good neighbours. A particularly great distance towards Roma is reflected in the claim *I have no problem with Roma being my boss at work* as well as other business-professional ties. The greatest social distance is noticeable in the expression of a potential love affair with Roma woman. At the same time, respondents disagree with the statement *It is not right for my child to go to class with Roma children*, which means that respondents as parents express personal social distance towards Roma, which at the same time excludes the possibility of their children showing social distance towards their peers. It can be concluded that, in addition to the relatively indifferent attitude towards the Roma as a whole, there is also a contradiction that Roma are at the same time as acceptable as neighbors, but on the other hand, respondents believe that Roma should live in special, isolated settlements (ghetto). According to Šučur (2000), the prevention of the ghettoization of Roma is a prerequisite for their social integration. From all of the above, it can be concluded that the personal social and spatial distance towards the Roma is quite pronounced.

Chart 3. Personal characteristics about Roma

PERSONAL CLAIMS/ATTITUDES ABOUT ROMA	AVERAGE GRADE
Roma people are equally reliable friends as anybody else	3,07
I am fine with having a Roma neighbour	2,92
I am fine with having a Romani boss at work	2,87
Roma are as professional at work as other people	2,85
I am interested in Roma way of life	2,83
I am familiar with Romani customs and tradition	2,61
It would be acceptable to me to have a serious relationship with Roma	2,32
I do not find it OK that my child goes to the same class with Roma children	2,23

Source: survey questionnaire administered within Ecotop2 project

Furthermore, respondents believe that, due to their traditional lifestyle, which includes, among other things, the production of baskets, troughs and objects of wood and wicker, collecting the fruits and the production and processing of aromatic and medicinal plants (especially lavender), Roma could be involved in those economic activities that, in addition, include the presentation of customs, traditional food and culture (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Perception of Roma working engagement

PERCEPTION OF ROMA WORK ENGAGEMENT	AVERAGE GRADE
I would like to see Roma people included into rural tourism/ecotourism	3,41
I would like to see products produced by Roma people	3,35
I would like to see services provided by Roma people	3,34
Roma are as professional at work as other people	2,85

Source: survey questionnaire administered within Ecotop2 project

By affirming their particularity in customs, culture and gastronomy, Roma could fit into rural tourism. For example, prophesying fate and reading from the palm of your hand (Chart 5) as a distinctive feature of the Roma culture and lifestyle for which Roma women are known in Croatia and the world would be an interesting tourist attraction, but the question is whether it could come to life in the rural-tourist offer. The author of the paper believes that the culture and tradition of Roma could be used as an offer in rural tourism facilities in areas where the Roma community is more numerous and organized into associations.

Chart 5. Possibilities of including Roma in rural tourism

POSSIBILITIES OF INCLUDING ROMA PEOPLE IN RURAL/ECO/TOURISM	AVERAGE GRADE
Music and music groups (e.g. Črne strele)	4,02
Dance/Belly dancing/songs (e.g. Gjelem, gjelem)	3,94
Manifestations (e.g. Gipsy ball)	3,91
Public works connected with development of R/E/tourism	3,78
Presentation of Roma customs	3,77
Collecting fruits from nature (e.g. chestnut, elder)	3,69
Autohtonuous food and drink (e.g. Romany cake)	3,57
Sale of souvenirs (e.g. baskets, wooden objects)	3,56
Opening Romani restaurant (social entrepreneurship)	3,56
Assistance labour force (waiters, cooks, assistance in kitchen)	3,52
Production and supply of agricultural products (e.g. lavender)	3,41
Fortune telling/Palm reading	2,93

Source: survey questionnaire administered within Ecotop2 project

In neighbouring Hungary and Slovenia, successful models of Roma economic inclusion have been developing for some time precisely through gastronomy and rural tourism. Here it is worth mentioning the Roma Ethno-House of Roma Lovari in the village of Maglenča in Bjelovar-Bilogora county. It is a unique tourist and cultural facility that at the same time offers an attractive and authentic tourist service of presentation of unknown Roma history, traditions, language and customs as an integral part of the rich Croatian heritage and many products for which Roma Lovari were recognizable.

That the Roma culture is really unique, although relatively unknown to the wider population, can be seen in events such as the Gypsy Ball, the Roma Wedding, Café Musicians Manifestation, the celebration of Djurdjevdan<sup>6</sup> and the World Roma Day<sup>7</sup> (Chart 6). Respondents heard about holding Roma weddings, celebrating World Roma Day and the Đurđevdan holiday, but did not hear about Roma events such as the Café Musicians Manifestation and the Gypsy Ball, which are celebrated in Baranja, for example. Here is noticeable the great potential of these manifestations in rural tourism.

## 5. TESTIMONIALS FROM INTERVIEWS ABOUT SOCIAL DISTANCE TOWARDS ROMA IN RURAL TOURISM AT KOPRIVNICA-KRIŽEVCI COUNTY

Furthermore, the interviews with the representatives of tourism authorities of Đurđevac, Koprivnica and Križevci, the owner of a well-known rural tourism facility close to Križevci, representative of vocational school from Đurđevac, representative of the Office for European affairs and social and tourism related projects in Koprivnica and representative of Roma house in Maglenča were carried out in January, February and March 2018. In the first question, respondents were asked to describe the possibilities of involving the

<sup>6</sup> In the folk customs of the Orthodox, Đurđevdan is a spring holiday of a revived nature, marked by ceremonies to encourage the fertility of cattle (in Catholic Jurjevo). The 23rd IV (i.e. the 6th of July) is celebrated, according to the Julian calendar).

<sup>7</sup> World Roma Day is celebrated in the largest number of countries where Roma have lived every April 8, since 1990. 199

Roma community in the development of tourism in Koprivnica-Križevci County. Respondents say the following:

*“Traditionally they participate in the Renaissance Festival where they present old crafts and thus actively participate in preserving the tradition and heritage of their culture and culture of the region. They are also involved in the planting of nettles, which are later used for the production of souvenirs that represent a unique tourist product for the development of tourism of the city and the County.”*

*“Although the Roma traditions and customs have been preserved and would be very interesting in the tourist offer, unfortunately there are no Roma manifestations in Koprivnica-Križevci County.”*

On the contrary to the testimonies of respondents who believe that Roma are involved in the tourist activities of the Koprivnica-Križevci County, Roma representative said:

*“Unfortunately, the Roma population is not involved in the development of tourism in Koprivnica-Križevci County, but they are willing to do it...we (Roma) are starting to get more involved in some jobs, ... and we are celebrating World Roma Day,<sup>8</sup> and we all rejoice and celebrate together...and at the celebration of World Roma Day, we invite the others, Croats.”*

*“Roma in (rural tourism or) ecotourism could participate as a workforce, working in various jobs in agriculture. Also when organizing Roma events, hiring Roma women to prepare traditional dishes, showing Roma customs, etc. would achieve greater integration of Roma into society through active engagement in tourism.”*

The following question was: What do you think Roma products and services could be offered by companies or economies? Here are some thoughts:

*“Primarily to present their traditional heritage. In our country there are Roma chertras and Roma basketers. It would be a good idea to try to animate the Roma population through some measure to make this indigenous product of their own and to market it as a souvenir.”*

*“One of the most effective products is surely the musical and gastronomic offer. With this, the Roma tradition would approach the visitors, preparing indigenous Roma dishes with local ingredients and entertaining visitors with traditional ethno music.”*

*“Roma would certainly be involved in the placement of such a product by actively participating either in the preparation of recipes or in the preparation of the dishes themselves and in the performance of the music program.”*

*“There are colourful Roma customs and the offer of various Roma specialties, from characteristic dances and music to delicacies such as peppers, stews that are cooked outdoors, scones and other specific dishes of this people.”*

*“There is still a lot of work to be done to make these products and for the Roma population to see interest in it. What they used to produce and sell were items of usable value..., but such products can possibly be like souvenirs and thus be marketed.”*

*“The whip products will be interesting for production which they were trained under the project - A step towards new life possibilities.”*

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<sup>8</sup> The First World Roma Congress was held in London on April 8th, 1971. where the name Roma was adopted, which means man in Roma language, and the flag and the anthem "Djelem, djelem" were selected as Roma identity.

*“Gastronomic offer, which (eco) family farms can include in their own offer. With this, the Roma tradition would approach the visitors, preparing indigenous Roma dishes with local ingredients (actively participating either in the preparation of recipes or in the preparation of the dishes themselves)”*

*“My Roma people are known as producing products of wood such as wooden troughs, cookers, bowls, whipping objects such as brooms, baskets and other things while other activities engaged in the Roma have slowly died down. I recommend these products because they are made by the Roma who lived in this area where we are today.”*

*“Nettle products would be interesting in our county<sup>9</sup>. For example, nettle pasta, nettle juice, cosmetics (shampoos, creams, nettle soaps), syrup, tea etc. I recommend these products because they are profitable, there is not much to do about it, the Roma would work and people would like us more”.*

*“The Roma of the Bilogora region were traditionally engaged in the breeding and trafficking of horses, while their women collected medicinal plants and made various preparations from it. It is a unique product that can be offered as a form for the inclusion of Roma and their products on the market. Lavender products such as-essential oil, fragrant bags and bombs made from dried lavender flower and " cofleki" made of wool are ready-made traditional products that are already offered as souvenirs from the Roma Ethno House and are products that could become part of a larger production in the future.”*

So, from the conducted interviews it can be concluded that respondents have a number of good ideas for the inclusion of Roma in (eco) rural tourism or economic activities, in general. Also, respondents explain the many challenges of including Roma products and services in terms of the interaction of Roma, businesses and tourists in rural tourism. They express the following challenges of involving Roma in rural tourism:

*“To make a kind of Melting pot...to adapt Roma much better socio-economically to the society. Of course, this is where the local population should be educated to eliminate a series of prejudices that are cultivated towards the Roma. Here we still have, of course, both sides of the problem, on our side prejudices and on their perhaps, insufficient engagement, insufficient education... Of course, there are examples where entire Roma families are high on the socio-economic position. However, it is not yet nearly enough to educate and try to involve the Roma population through projects.”*

Involving the Roma community in wider society through economic activities aimed at reducing social distance is a very challenging task for the wider community. Respondents taxonomically list the following challenges:

- Insufficient recognition of the culture and tradition of the Roma community
- Dose of distrust
- Insufficient education
- Non-engagement of Roma due to their ignorance or traditional lifestyle

*“The biggest challenges is to achieve the need for such products on the market, to market these products. I don't see much of a problem with that, but we just need to see what Roma products are interesting, explore the market and in my opinion I think a big market for those products will exist, as well.”*

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<sup>9</sup> The town of Koprivnica is named after the nettle.



*"The poor organisation of small producers, poor administration, a turbulent market situation and the generally poor economic situation, prejudices and in general, non-acceptance of Roma as entrepreneurs are obstacles to better inclusion of Roma as active stakeholders of the economy, including the tourism offer of the region."*

*"I must unfortunately say that discrimination is still very large not only to the level of the local community but also at the state level, as an example I would cite Roma children who have to go to practice during schooling, it is very difficult, almost impossible to find a company where they will do the practice, as soon as they see that the places for practice are already filled or there is no longer a need for practice for Roma children. Likewise, one part of the Roma who do not want to work is Roma who receive social assistance, i. e. guaranteed minimum amount of approx. 2,500.00 kn and I personally would not want to work if the state gives me 2,500.00 kn if I work or also 2,500.00 kn if I do not work. That's why people say the Roma don't want to work."*

*"Other people's prejudices about Roma are the biggest challenges."*

*"Most Roma still live in their communities isolated i.e. outside the village of the rest of the population. The settlements themselves are often in one part on private parcels and the objects as such cannot be legalized. The settlements are without electricity, drinking water, sewage, they do not have their own garden, the problem is going to school, going to the city, seeing a doctor. As long as the Roma are not separated from such backgrounds and allowed to come to civilization, because in Roma settlements they are far from civilization, I do not see a significant possibility of the inclusion of the Roma population in ecotourism."*

*"These prejudices against the Roma population and their way of life... They differ quite a lot in the way of life itself, depending on the location in which they live. There are Roma who have accepted certain aspects of life in better standard conditions, they have not strictly adhered to their culture and then that culture of theirs has kind of been lost. This autochthonousness has been lost over time, through adaptation. Of course, they also had to fight for survival and for their lives and then they had to adapt their products and everything else they did."*

Respondents who express their views on social distance are personally involved with Roma community. In accordance with the norms of the group to which they belong and the general understanding of the reputation of a national and ethnic group, the obtained results can be an indicator of the stereotypes and prejudices they have about them.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Based on the data obtained through qualitative and quantitative research, it can be concluded that in Koprivnica-Križevci County there is a social distance to the Roma community. Social distance towards Roma is largely influenced by the degree of their employability. The inclusion of Roma in the labour market is limited by prejudices about Roma as a labour inactive part of the population that is income-leaning on social transfers by the state and local self-government units. The social distance towards the Roma is the result of several factors: poor contacts between the Roma and non-Roma population, the existence of social prejudices towards Roma, insufficient knowledge of Roma culture, and other peculiarities that at the same time complicate and slow down the processes of integration into wider society. Social distance towards Roma puts at the forefront the disinterest in getting to know this community better, and therefore, the so-called social distance is becoming larger and larger. The data obtained by the survey show that the possibilities of Roma involvement in rural tourism or any of the other economic activities are very limited. The inclusion of Roma in rural tourism is possible mainly through elements of spiritual and material culture

such as songs, dances, whip handicrafts, traditional products made of natural materials, etc. The biggest problem is not knowing what Roma do, whether they have traditional products or customs that can be included in the region's tourist offer. The majority of population does not know or is insufficiently familiar with the traditions, language, art and other characteristics of the Roma. At the same time, the supply and demand for traditional "Roma" products is very insufficient. So, it is proposed that Roma products be produced within the framework of Roma associations, cooperatives or other organizations. This is important for the visibility and involvement of the Roma community in the local area. In this regard, another negative process should be noted. The constitution of the Roma community is still at the beginning, although Roma have long lived in the Koprivnica-Križevci County and Croatian society, in general. Roma occupy the lowest positions in the structure of society, so the question justifiably arises, whether Roma are even part of the social structure according to their socio-economic involvement? In addition, when we talk about the meaning of the Roma community, the community is characterized by the fact that it associates the daily activities of its members within the work. On the example of the Roma in Koprivnica-Križevci County, this cannot be confirmed. In conclusion, the socio-economic position of Roma in Koprivnica-Križevci County is not good and it is necessary to find new forms of inclusion of Roma in the community by affirming the identity that Roma predominantly build on folklore-cultural features within the closed community in which they live. Roma gastronomy, culture and tradition should be better explored, popularized and continuously maintained as a specific rural-tourist offer in the County. This can increase the market potential of rural tourism and strengthen multiculturalism in local communities. The basic assumptions of work on social distance towards Roma as the main obstacle to their involvement in rural tourism in terms of employment, but also the presentation of Roma culture and tradition as an attractive tourist product, have been confirmed. The role of social distance to Roma in rural tourism can be reduced by harnessing the potential of Roma tradition and culture and by strengthening the identity of the Roma community. However, both sides must participate in this process and be ready for change.

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## **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL DISTANCE TO ROMA COMMUNITY IN RURAL TOURISM**

### **Abstract**

The paper analyzes the social characteristics of the Roma community in Koprivnica-Križevci County from the of social distance point of view and the possibility of their employment in rural tourism, i.e. ecotourism. Through a survey of 209 respondents with experience in rural tourism and interviews with several representatives in the field of tourism and people working on the integration of Roma people into the community, a wide range of answers were obtained about the topic. Although elements of Roma's material and spiritual culture would be very attractive for the tourist offer of the County, the possibilities of Roma involvement in social and economic activities are very limited due to the social distance to the Roma, but also the lack of involvement of Roma in wider society.

**Keywords:** research, Roma, rural tourism, social distance

**Sandra Kantar**, PhD

College professor

Križevci College of Agriculture

Milislava Demerca 1, 48260 Križevci, Croatia

E-mail: skantar@vguk.hr

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF WINEMAKING: 18TH-CENTURY WINE CELLARS ON MANORIAL ESTATES IN THE CROATIAN DANUBE REGION

**Margareta Turkalj Podmanicki**  
**Petar Puhmajer**  
**Dina Stober**

### **Abstract**

*Vallis aurea*, *Mons aureus* or *Mother of Wine* are some of the historical names used for the wine-growing areas in the eastern Croatian regions of Slavonia, Baranja and Syrmia. Today, some of the largest wineries in this area boast their wine heritage dating back to the first half of the 18th century when the wine growing and production first began on manorial estates. Aristocracy from different parts of Europe (prince Eugene of Savoy, the Odescalchi, the Eltz, etc.) were rewarded with the Slavonian estates for war merits after centuries-long Austro-Turkish wars and the annexation of Slavonia to the Habsburg Monarchy. The estates comprised of manor houses or castles with various utility buildings including those for winemaking. Although the vaulted basements of the castles were often used for this purpose, wine cellars were also constructed as detached buildings, the history of which is very little known in Croatia. The aim of this paper is to explore the contribution of the nobility in the development of winemaking, to map the wine cellars of the Slavonian feudal estates in the 18th century (today's wine subregion of Croatian Danube), as well as to determine their architectural characteristics.

**Keywords:** Croatian Danube Region, heritage buildings, wine cellars, manorial estates, 18th century.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The history of viticulture and winemaking as one of the oldest economic branches has been treated in the literature from different perspectives, territorial and time volumes. Two scientific conferences on this topic have been held recently (Đakovo 2016, Erdut and Slavonski Brod 2017). At the same time, the long history and contribution of the owners of secular and ecclesiastical estates of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Croatian Danube region has been well addressed in bibliography. In the context of the architectural heritage, so far attention has been paid mainly to the architecture of castles and manors as representative seats of manorial estates (Šćitaroci 1998). However, an integral part of these estates were farm buildings and wine cellars. As an architecture which is directly related to the production, aging and storage of wine, the question arises whether it is sufficiently known and used in the development of wine tourism, which is still in the beginnings. Historic wine cellars are witnesses to the long tradition of winemaking in the Eastern Slavonia, especially in the Danube region, and their historical ambience contributes to the attractiveness of this wine region. The aim of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to map locations, analyze the preserved historical buildings in service of wine production and explore their potential to integrate into the offer made to wine tourists.

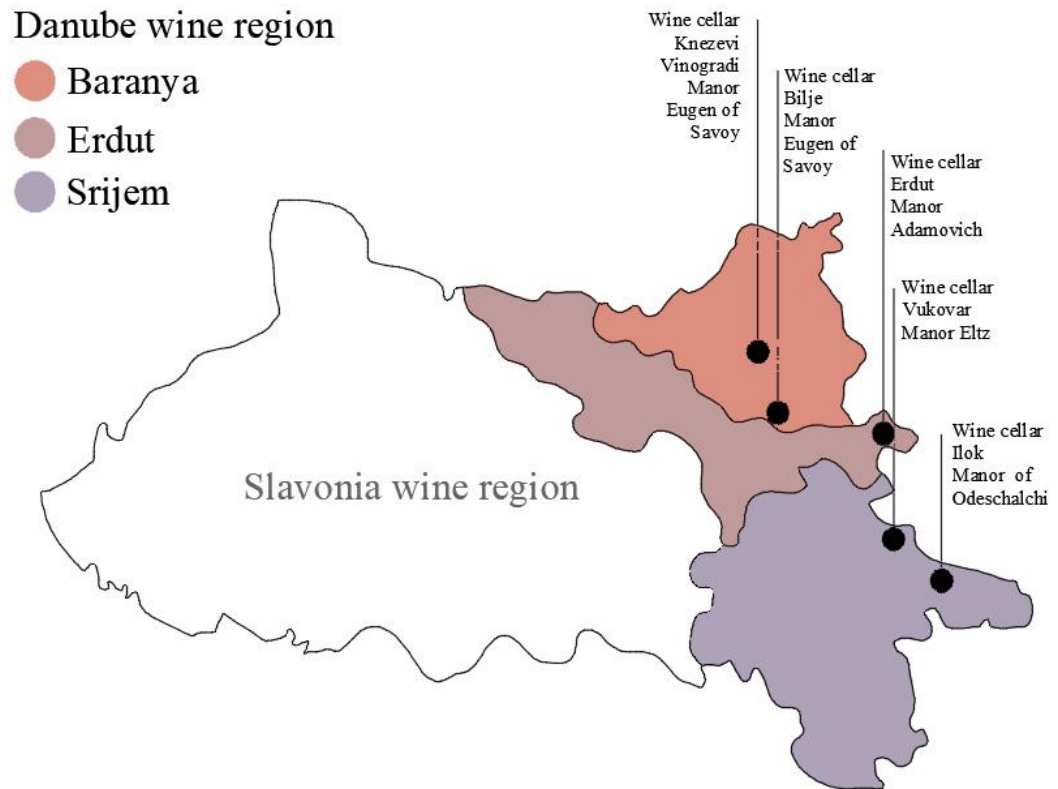
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## **2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Wine culture marked the Danube region since the Roman emperor Probus (276-282), who advanced it as a wine-growing area. The main bearer of winemaking in the Middle Ages was the church, primarily because of the place that wine holds in Christian symbolism and liturgy. The Ottomans recognized grapevine cultivation as a lucrative industry, but the religious ban on alcohol consumption and the absence of a wine culture meant a certain setback in the areas under their rule. It can be said that the new history of viticulture and winemaking began at the end of the 17th century, with the departure of the Ottomans and the establishment of Habsburg rule in the area of today's eastern Croatia. The military victories of Prince Eugene of Savoy over the Ottomans brought new territories to the Habsburg Monarchy. Slavonia, Baranja and Sirmia were owned by the Viennese court, which had them partitioned into large manorial estates and then sold or donated to prominent European families, most often as a reward for the military and financial assistance in the wars. Nobility, such as the Italian princely family Odescalchi, the Austrian military leader Prince Eugene of Savoy, or the German Counts of Eltz, came to the Danube area as landlords. Although the landowners used to build country manors and castles for occasional visits, and most of these properties were managed by superintendents and administrative personnel, they played an important role in the local economy. In the 18th century, wine production became a European trend, and wine cellars were being erected on the estates, which was a new beginning for the winemaking and cellaring history in these areas.

**Image 1. Map of Wine cellars in the Croatian Danube Region**



Source: Authors

### 3. 18TH-CENTURY WINE CELLARS ON MANORIAL ESTATES IN THE CROATIAN DANUBE REGION

#### 3.1. The Beje manorial estate

Image. 2. Kneževi Vinogradi, wine cellar building



Source: photo Dina Stober

Grape growing and wine production are a tradition in the Baranja region. It is believed that the name Baranja comes from the Hungarian word *borany* meaning “mother of wine”. (Sršan 2002, 104) Due to wine growing on the slopes of BANSKO BRDO around Popovac, the Romans called it Zlatno Brdo (*Mons aureus*) or the ‘Golden Hill’.<sup>2</sup> In the time of the Belje manorial estate (1698-1918), the German settlers continued to use it in the Germanized version as *Goldberg*. Although vineyards continued to be cultivated even in the Ottoman period, a new rise came in the late 17th century, when the Belje estate with 29 villages was granted to Prince Eugene of Savoy in 1698. The prince established the administration seat of the estate in the village of Bilje, where he built a small baroque manor. After his death in 1736, the estate was managed by the Aulic Chamber, until 1780 when Empress Maria Theresa granted the estate to her daughter Maria Christina, married to the prince Albrecht of Saxony. In their time, vineyards were expanded, and the quality of wine has been deemed exceptional. The *Goldberg* wine was served at the court of Empress Maria Theresa. (Predojević 2016)

The wine cellars of the Bilje estate were located within the Bilje manor of Prince Eugene of Savoy, which is 20 km away from the town of Kneževi Vinogradi, as well as in Villany in present-day Hungary. In the manor, the spacious cellar extends under all four wings of the building. The north wing has the most spacious cellar which has been in use since Prince’s time, as evidenced by the inventory of the manor made his death in 1736. The cellar is barrel-vaulted, and has small windows onto the facades, used for ventilation and lighting. The manor is currently in a state of disrepair and awaits for restoration, but the plan is to restore the original function of the wine cellar in the north wing (Haničar Buljan et al. 2013). According to the sources from 1713, the village of Kneževi Vinogradi had a number of outbuildings: a press room, a distillery, a cooper’s house and a large cellar. (Arbutina and Alfirević Arbutina 2009) A map from 1770 presents a large building near the parish church, and although it does not seem to be the present building, the remarkably preserved original features can certainly date it to the 18th century. The cellar

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<sup>2</sup> In the vicinity of ‘Golden Hill’, two ancient Roman altars were found dedicated to Liber, who is identified with Bacchus, the god of wine.



is a two-storey building, oriented towards a local road, with a larger 20<sup>th</sup> century extension on its side (Arbutina and Alfirević Arbutina 2009). The front facade has a large door in the lower level and a series of seven arcades on the upper level, with the middle arch wider to accentuate the central axe. The upper level is partly dug into a hill on the rear side of the building. The floor plan is simple, designed with long rooms parallel to the road, laid axially symmetrical to the entrance axis and connected centrally, in the entrance zone and at the end of the wings, forming a continuous space of circular movement. The lower level is of considerable height which emphasizes its monumentality, also evident in the simple and clean barrel vault construction. The vault is made of brick and contains large vents and openings with the remains of the wooden consoles used for lifting and manipulating barrels. The upper floor containing vintage wine area, is built and formed by loess sediment digging, a cellar building technique immanent to the Baranja area.

Image. 3. **Kneževi Vinogradi, wine cellar interior**



Source: photo Dina Stober

**Image 4. Kneževi Vinogradi, wine cellar interior**



Source: photo Dina Stober

**Image 5. Kneževi Vinogradi, wine cellar interior**



Source: photo Dina Stober

### 3.2. The Ilok manorial estate

Ilok's historic wine cellars are part of the Ilok manor house, which was built gradually from the 15th to the 19th century. The earliest known wine cellar is located within the palace of the Duke Nicholas of Ilok, built in the 15th century. And while the palace was destroyed during the Ottoman rule (1526 - 1688), the cellar has been preserved to this day (Šimičić et al. 2001, 31). In 1697, the Ilok estate was granted to the Odescalchi family, who retained it for more than two and a half centuries. The first owner was Livio Odescalchi, a nephew of Pope Innocent XI, who helped the Austrian emperor win the war against the Turks and was honored the title of the Prince of Syrmium. The estate economy was focused on viticulture,<sup>3</sup> winemaking and plum brandy production, and they also had well-known horse stables. (Šćitaroci 1998, 174) In the 18th century, he built a new castle on the ruins of the Nicholas's palace, maintaining some of its walls, including those of the cellar. From the very beginning, Odescalchi recognized the benefits of the climate and soil of the Fruška Gora area for wine growing. The wines of Srijem were also praised by many travelers from the end of the 17th and throughout the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> Since winemaking was of great importance, Odescalchi invested in building new cellars, one northeast of the castle, which was later demolished (Tomičić 2007), and the other west of the castle, in the continuity of the medieval castle cellar. They also built service buildings and houses for wine employees (Batorović 1988). The basement complex was expanded in the 19th century west of the granary, with the so-called "Small cellar", the ground floor of which was used for grape processing.<sup>5</sup>

The basements of the manors and castles have historically been adapted for wine production and technology, so the cellar of Ilok was upgraded in the time of the Odescalchi in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> It presently consists of three parts, which differ in vaulting proportions, showing the cellar has been upgraded on at least two occasions. A grand front made of bricks, typical of the end of the 19th century, is at the yard level. It leads to a hillside cellar with a barrel vault, while further east, there is a change in the vault height, indicating a new section of the cellar, probably built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an annex to the cellar underneath the castle. The latter mentioned is the oldest part of the cellar dating to the 15th century. Today it is divided into two areas, both used for storing vintage wine. The rooms are ventilated through the vents in the vault.

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<sup>3</sup> There were 36 villages within the Ilok estate in 1714. In the first half of the 18th century, it occupied an area of roughly 15,000 hectares.

<sup>4</sup> This excellent wine was exported to Banat, Hungary and the surrounding counties. Significant income to the estate came from wine on tapp which the landowner sold to the inns on the estate. Grapes collected from wine tithe were processed in distilleries. They planted new vineyards, and it is believed that in 1710 they began growing Traminer, the wine Ilok became famous for. They built new wine cellars, modernized the production and sale, especially by filling bottles on the property, which guaranteed the quality of wine for sale (Mušura, 50).

<sup>5</sup> Along the entire cellar, there are rails used for transporting barrels by special wagons. The oldest part of the cellar contains vintage wine in brick masonry shelves, and in the easternmost part there are four concrete wine containers.

<sup>6</sup> The documentation is courtesy of the Conservation department in Vukovar.

**Image 6. Ilok, hillside wine cellar**



Source: photo Dina Stober

**Image 7. Ilok, wine cellar interior**





Source: photo:Dina Stober

### **3.3. The Vukovar manorial estate**

**Image 8. Vukovar, Eltz palace, wine cellar**



Source: photo Dina Stober

One of the most propulsive estates in Croatia was owned by the Eltz family who came from Germany in 1736. (Šćitaroci 1998, 342-343.) The palace complex in the town of Vukovar, was built in several phases, from the mid-18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, when it attained its present outlook designed by the Viennese architect Viktor Siedek. The Eltz family owned the estate for more than two centuries, and among the economic produce on the estate, wine had a prominent place (Šćitaroci 1998, 343). The old cellars of the Vukovar estate are located below the Eltz palace and the four houses located opposite the palace which were in use as superintendents' quarters.<sup>7</sup> The castle cellar has two parts; the older, eastern part was constructed in the middle of the 18th century (1749-1757), and consists of a two-nave space divided by massive, brick masonry columns that support the barrel vaults with lunettes containing air vents. During the extension of the castle in 1824, a smaller, western part of the basement was added. (Šimičić and Požar 2008) The walls, vaulting and floors are made of brick and are unplastered. At the beginning of the 20th century, a barrel-vaulted passage was dug in to connect the castle cellar with the cellars of the superintendents' houses on its southern side. The cellars of these houses are interconnected by barrel-vaulted corridors, and each has a separate entrance from its own courtyard (Hrvatski restauratorski zavod 2014)<sup>8</sup> The cellar of first house on the east side follows the ground floor plan and is barrel vaulted with arched thrusts, while the corner part has sail vault, and the southern part, added in

<sup>7</sup> We would like to thank our colleagues from the Conservation Department in Vukovar for providing us with the documentation, as well as the VUPIK d.o.o. company who gave us access to the cellars.

<sup>8</sup> Superintendents houses are built in second half of the 18th century.

the 19th century, has a barrel vault. The cellar of the second house is of small trapezoidal form that extends just below the street wing of the building, and the space is asymmetrically divided into two parts by columns bearing sail vaults. The cellar of the third house is an elongated barrel-vaulted room, while the basement of the fourth house was not connected to the others and seems to have not been in use as wine cellar.

**Image 9. Vukovar, superintendent's house no. 1, cellar entry**



Source: Dina Stober

**Image 10. Vukovar, superintendent's house no. 2, cellar**





Source: Dina Stober

### 3.4. The Erdut manorial estate

Image 11. Erdut, wine cellar, front



Source: photo Dina Stober



The village of Erdut was the seat of the estate owned by the Adamović family starting from 1778, who built a simple manor house by the 1781-1783 (Pavić 2021, 42), which was later redesigned to its present appearance. (Šćitaroci 1998, 150-151.) Erdut was surrounded by many vineyards, judging by the map of the province of Slavonia from 1781-1783, so it is not surprising that winemaking has been its major economic activity. Opposite the front of the manor house stands an old wine cellar, probably built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although we cannot completely rule out the possibility that part of it was built in 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup> (Pavić 2021, 45-46). The cellar has an L-shaped floor plan, with two wings, one shorter and containing an entrance overtopped with a roof gable, while the long wing has a long, half-dug vaulted hall. The hall has pairs of domed vaults supported by a series of pillars along the longitudinal axe, one of which is now occupied by concrete barrels made in Rostock & Hoffetner company from Klosterneuburg. The hall continues eastwards but changes to barrel vaulting, which means that the building was subsequently extended. In the design of this cellar, as well as on the manor house itself, we recognize the characteristic features of the 19th century, while the vaulted interior was quite common in both periods and could have been built in either the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Image 12. Erdut, wine cellar, interior**

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<sup>9</sup> The greatest rise of viticulture on the Erdut manorial estate was in the second half of the 19th century when the owner was Ervin Cseh, during whose time the manor gained its present appearance. According to Pavić, the volume of the cellar increased from 47,761 liter in 1853 to 146,903,8 liter in 1880, which could indicate the period when the cellar was extended.



Source: photo Dina Stober

#### **4. THE ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WINE CELLARS IN THE CROATIA DANUBE REGION**

During the 18th century, several types of wine cellars appeared in the Croatian Danube Region, which we can be distinguished based on their physical location. The first and the oldest type (1) represents the wine cellars in the underground of the manors and castles. They can be traced back to the Middle Ages, and one significant has been preserved in the destroyed palace of Duke Nicholas of Ilok from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18th century, the basements of noble houses were often used for storing wine. The Eltz manor complex in Vukovar had cellars located under the palace but also in other neighboring buildings which housed the manorial administration. Interestingly, the basements of these houses were connected by tunnels. The Belje estate cellar also belongs to this group. The second type (2) refers to the cellars that have structures dug or half-dug into a hillside or rather form a green hill that has an entrance, while its interior is built in masonry. An example of this can be found again in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Ilok, where a cellar was built as an extension of the existing medieval cellar below the castle. The third type (3) are the cellars built as independent structures. This type occurred in the 18th century, especially on the large wine estates. Such cellars can have two stories, the lower one dug or half-dug to hold barrels of wine, while the upper floor is used for wine processing or as a distillery. The Belje wine cellar in Kneževi Vinogradi is an outstanding two-story building; the lower part has a centrally positioned entrance and a side window, and the

upper floor is articulated as a porch with seven arches, while the entire building is surmounted by a hipped roof. Part of the cellar is dug into a hillside. Erdut, on the other hand, is a long, two-winged building with small shuttered windows and an entrance in the shorter wing.

The cellar interiors are fairly uniform. They usually have brick structures with barrel, cross or sail vaults. An elongated hall can have a continuous barrel vault, especially in the earlier period, or can be divided into smaller bays of sail vaults, which is typical of the second half of the 18th and the entire 19th century. Wider halls could have been vaulted with pairs of bays of either cross or sail vaults, supported by a central row of massive pillars that gave the space a robust appearance. In the vaults and walls there were vents or portholes for occasional ventilation.

The wine cellar structures were typically built using techniques common in the 18th century in Slavonia and Central Europe, with brickwork and lime mortar. In design and construction, the inner spaces had firm masonry, with very little light and fresh air to be able to maintain constant temperature. The exteriors were simple, devoid of decoration, or could have been plainly articulated if the building contained other utilities.

The architecture of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century wine cellars is simple and conformed primarily to its utilitarian purpose. Along with other types of utility buildings, it has undergone subsequent changes and repairs, so very few original wine-making structures have been preserved. The Croatia Danube Region experienced its greatest economic growth during the time of the large manorial estates in the 18th century, mostly based on viticulture, and while this period left abundant traces in the arts and architecture, wine cellars are an extraordinarily rare segment of Croatia's both material and the intangible heritage.

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**THE ARCHITECTURE OF WINEMAKING:  
18TH-CENTURY WINE CELLARS ON MANORIAL ESTATES IN THE CROATIAN  
DANUBE REGION**

**Abstract**

*Vallis aurea*, *Mons aureus* or *Mother of Wine* are some of the historical names used for the wine-growing areas in the eastern Croatian regions of Slavonia, Baranja and Sirmia. Today, some of the largest wineries in this area boast their wine heritage dating back to the first half of the 18th century when the wine growing and production first began on manorial estates. Aristocracy from different parts of Europe (prince Eugene of Savoy, the Odiscalchi, the Eltz, etc.) were rewarded with the Slavonian estates for war merits after centuries-long Austro-Turkish wars and the annexation of Slavonia to the Habsburg Monarchy. The estates comprised of manor houses or castles with various utility buildings including those for winemaking. Although the vaulted basements of the castles were often used for this purpose, wine cellars were also constructed as detached buildings, the history of which is very little known in Croatia. The aim of this paper is to explore the contribution of the nobility in the development of winemaking, to map the wine cellars of the Slavonian feudal estates in the 18th century (today's wine subregion of Croatian Danube), as well as to determine their architectural characteristics.

**Keywords:** Croatian Danube Region, heritage buildings, wine cellars, manorial estates, 18th century.

**Margareta Turkalj Podmanicki, PhD**

Associate Professor at Academy of Arts and Culture Osijek  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, 31000 Osijek, Croatia  
E-mail: margareta.turkalj@uaos.hr

**Petar Puhmajer, PhD**

Conservator Advisor at Croatian Conservation Institute  
Grškovićeve 23, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
E-mail: ppuhmajer@hrz.hr

**Dina Stober, PhD**

Associate Professor at Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Vladimira Preloga 3, 31000 Osijek, Croatia  
E-mail: dstober@gfos.hr

## **NEW FORM OF TRANSFORMATIVE TOURISM – PHILOThERAPY AS A RESOURCE BASE IN THE POST-CORONA CRISIS**

**Romana Lekić**  
**Tea Golja**  
**Krešimir Dabo**

### **Abstract**

Contemporary philosophical practice as a renewal of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, among other things, deals with issues of happiness, satisfaction, life as a work of art that should be organized in the best possible way. The old philosophical schools possessed great knowledge of the human heart, of its motivations, conscious and unconscious, of its deep aspirations, and played a significant role in spiritually guiding man. Philosophical dialogues and discussions were a kind of remedy for restoring the health of the soul, whether through encouragement, rebuke, consolation, or instruction. We are witnessing a new philosophical practice, thematically different "philosophical cafes" and "philosophical theaters" and inspired by this form of group "philotherapy" for this post-crown crisis period, presented is a new form of transformative tourism that can be developed in some parts of Croatia that have a strong resource base for this and that can be combined with other, different forms of tourism. Through new activities and contents, encouraged by philosophical thought, activities can be offered that help solve problems or point to methods that can significantly enrich the content of life, and in combination with organic food and preserved nature, become an attractive place for rest. The authors propose the destination of Križevci as a pilot destination in which the development of transformative tourism can be planned. By coordinating the development process of this form of tourism through destination management and through the involvement of local stakeholders, a step forward in the development of tourism can be achieved, which can become a transformative and healing experience. The same is especially significant during the (post) corona crisis characterized by great fear, uncertainty, worries, and insecurity. The paper uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Surveys, focus groups and field research were conducted with interviews with local stakeholders. The scientific contribution of this paper lies in the creative connection of tourism and philosophy through transformative tourism, but also through other forms of cultural tourism and the importance of destination management in the process of directing the sustainable development of tourism.

**Keywords:** philotherapy, transformative tourism, Križevci, Franjo Marković, post-corona crisis, destination management

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The global conception of sustainable development and the lack of awareness of sustainable development are important areas of reflection and action in many areas of life and the change to the paradigmatic worldview is especially significant in the relationship between man and his environment. The destruction of nature due to the growing need for energy, raw materials and living space goes hand in hand with the exploitation of man. Technology did not liberate man, but rather made him a replaceable

part of the machine. From these characteristics, we can see the causes of the modern ecological crisis.

The aim of this paper is to propose a model for the development of transformative tourism in the Continental Croatia tourist destination, more specifically in Križevci, all in order to encourage key stakeholders in tourism to think about the possibilities of developing a different tourism that can become a transformative and healing experience.

In order to achieve the set goal, it was necessary to examine the attitudes of key stakeholders in tourism about the importance of cultural heritage, created and support resources of Križevci, as well as the current level of satisfaction with their valorisation for sustainable tourism. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used in the paper in order to obtain more reliable results and conclusions. The frequency of offered answers on the valorisation and importance of cultural heritage, selected created resources and supporting factors was obtained by using the survey method. By organizing a focus group and a group discussion on the topic of the tourism development potential in Križevci, the respondents' views on the current valorisation of resources and the possibilities of the further desired development of sustainable forms of tourist experiences, and thus transformative tourism, were obtained.

We can notice the movement of change in the new philosophical practice, thematically different "philosophical cafes" and "philosophical theatres", and inspired by this form of group "philotherapy" for this post-corona crisis period, presented is a new form of transformative tourism that can be developed in some parts of Croatia that have a strong resource base for this and that can be combined with other different forms of tourism. Through new activities and contents, encouraged by philosophical thought, activities can be offered that help solve problems or point to methods that can significantly enrich the content of life, and in combination with organic food and preserved nature, become an attractive place for rest. Therein lies the scientific contribution of this paper, through the creative connection of tourism and philosophy through transformative tourism, but also through other forms of cultural tourism and the importance of creative involvement of the local community in the development of sustainable tourism.

The popularization of philosophy as a kind of challenge and inspiration in the application of philosophical principles in everyday life opened the possibility to design a whole range of activities and contents that have been taken over from ancient philosophy,<sup>1</sup> as well as from contemporary philosophical thought. An additional argument was the planetary popularity and success of Wolfram Eilenberger's book "Time of the Magicians: Philosophy's Great Decade - 1919-1929", in which she writes about four philosophical greats: Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, as well as the period in which they lived and created their famous philosophical works. The systemic, holistic view now actualizes more than ever Fromm's (1986) famous "To Have or to Be". Philosophy with its fundamental questions about the battle and meaning of life and life's real purpose shifts the focus from artificially created

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<sup>1</sup> A return to Socrates' method of searching for truth - maieutics (a kind of birth discipline that helps to give birth to knowledge) and Socrates' dialogical method (Zorić, 2008). Plato, as Socrates' student, was a teacher of the great Aristotle who, with his *Metaphysics*, established the scientific approach with the first principles and causes of things (*Metafizika/Aristotel*, Tomislav Ladan, Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1992)



needs imposed by consumerist society and media with the glorification of *celebrities* and mass culture to different values, and places man as creator at the centre of the system. Aspects of to have and to be can now be viewed in a different way, through the prism of security and insecurity. The industrial age brought progress, the use of mechanical and atomic energy, replacing the use of animal and human energy, which was used up until then. Computers and artificial intelligence have replaced the human mind - all of which have reinforced the feeling that man is superior and that we can rule nature. As stated in the Croatian encyclopaedia (Enciklopedija.hr), Descartes explains that nature is nothing but moving matter, and that movement happens according to precisely defined rules and laws, in other words, nature is a machine. "The division into spirit and matter led to the understanding of the universe as a mechanical system composed of separate objects that were reduced one after another to the basic building blocks whose properties and interactions were considered to completely determine all natural phenomena" (Capra 1986: 40- 41). Newton used mathematics to express natural laws that are eternal, thus creating the image of man as the master of nature, in this manner, mechanicism could be applied in real life (Hrvatska enciklopedija 2015). Growth and accumulation were forced and development was put in the background. The hermetic principle "As above, so below; as below, so above", where man is a creator and his thoughts and actions affect his life, but also the lives of others in the community and nature and other living beings has received its scientific confirmation in the new scientific discipline Epigenetics<sup>2</sup>. The importance of man and the reach of human potential, seen mainly through the materialist postmodern worldview, can grow into a different approach to tourism, where tourism can become a healing transformative force based on more humane values, togetherness and awareness, which are all part of a whole. If the "development paradigm" is characterized as external to internal, from top to bottom, and is an inorganic paradigm and the vision of revitalization can be considered as an alternative. Wallace (1956) also spoke about the "revitalization" movement and stated that it was "a deliberately organized, conscious effort of society to build a more satisfied culture!". This is a special "phenomenon of change" (Wallace 1956, 265-267) resulting from cultural contact and change due to the influence of external society, which is driven by society's desire to restore ideal cultural values. In the revitalization movement, individuals perceive their culture as a system that was once functional, but now does not function satisfactorily (Wallace 1956, 265), is not linear and evolutionarily progressive on the world stage, but has a seasonal life cycle. Tourism can trigger cyclical intensification, the occasional injection of new energy into everyday existence that may not now function optimally, thus injecting new life (Wallace 1956, 268) due to the influence of people outside their social boundaries. This includes extreme pressures related to acculturation (or

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<sup>2</sup> Epigenetics (from the Greek *epi-* over, above, outside) is a scientific discipline that studies the influence of external factors on the change and expression of genes, where man himself has a great influence on his genes. This gives the human being the opportunity to change for the better at any time because genes behave according to the habits and beliefs of Epigenetics, reveals the importance of perception and/or interpretation of the environment and its direct impact on gene activity. Until now, the nucleus of a cell (where the genes are located) was thought to be its "brain". It has been shown, however, that the cell membrane, in its interaction with the environment, controls the activity of the nucleus. Information from the environment is transmitted to the nucleus via the cell membrane, which affects gene activity. By changing perceptions or beliefs, we can send messages to our cells and thus cause a reprogramming of their form of expression. (Aberle, N. Suradnja medicine i teologije// *Interdisciplinary Scientific Symposium "Crkva i medicina pred izazovom alternativnih i iscjeliteljskih tehnika"*, Zagreb, Croatia, 2009)

globalization), changes in the environment or economic problems - all of which are present right now, at this moment.

## 2. TOURISM AS A PROCESS OF RENEWAL

Travel (and tourism in general) touches everyone and leaves no one indifferent as everyone faces emotions, memories, in short, intimacy. Everyone carries within them the emotions they experienced during their trip, they enrich and define them. Most efforts to expand the circle of knowledge through tourist travel, to get to know nature, society, the way of life in other regions and countries, to learn a certain work technique or to be able to perform a certain sport or skill within a tourist program are an expression of man's desire to know himself, his possibilities and limits. As Korstanje (2007) emphasizes, tourism, which is characterized by physical movement, allows people to temporarily interrupt their daily obligations, with the proviso that they will dedicate themselves to them again as soon as they return. Korstanje (2012) compared this form of modern tourism to the rite of confession or purification of the soul. The guilt, which comes from the father's repression in the Freudian sense, requires sacrifice in order to be able to move on after forgiveness. Thus, "rest" cleanses the sins (obligations) that oppress people at work, and after atonement for their deeds, they can return to their social environment. The renovation process is quite important for understanding what a healing effect tourist sites have. Tourism as a phenomenon operates within given limits in time and space (Korstanje and Busby 2010). When returning from a trip, the traveller will return to the same status they had before the trip, however, changed for the experience they had, whether positive or negative. After a period of work, tourists want, through rest, recreation and relaxation, to satisfy those desires that they cannot in their place of residence, i.e. if they do not have the possibility to do so due to work and other obligations. Authors Eliade (1968), Turner (1967) and Van Gennep (1960) also talk about the archetypal and mythical basis of each trip, so we can conclude that travel is a kind of renewal process where tourist places become places of personal development. They also highlight the moment of self-discovery of personality that emerges as a need and endeavour of a large number of people embarking on a journey, not only to see and experience the new and unknown, but also to understand their purpose in life. Referring to various sources such as Reisinger, Ross, Lean, Kottler and Pollock, the authors Dukić, Ateljević and Tomljenović (2018, 49-69) describe what transformative journeys are<sup>3</sup>. In their explanation, the mentioned authors connect the experience of travel with the process of healing through working on oneself, where a tourist destination becomes a place of personal development. Especially emphasized is how important it is to meet the

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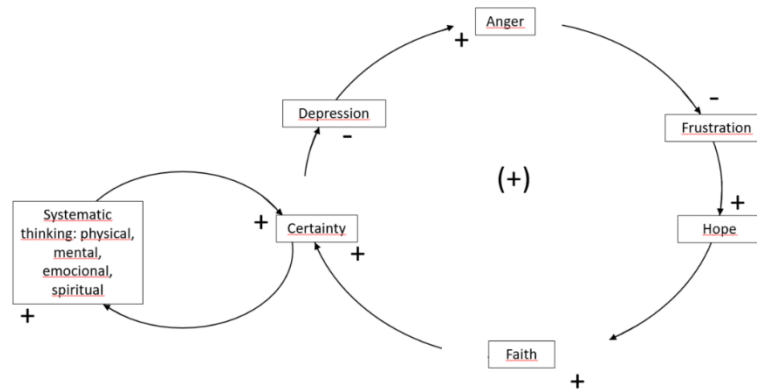
<sup>3</sup> Transtourism is a unique scientific project funded by the Croatian Science Foundation and implemented by the Institute of Tourism for four years, from 2015 to 2019. The project questions the ways in which tourism, as a major economic and social force, can contribute to creating a vision of a sustainable world that includes personal well-being, social justice and care for the environment. The project gathered and analysed examples from practice that very plastically illustrate how transformational practices can be integrated into the modern tourist offer, thus putting tourism in the function of promoting a new, sustainable paradigm of the 21st century. Source: <https://www.zicer.hr/Novosti/Integrirani-pristup-proucavanju-transformacijske-uloge-turizma-u-21.-stoljecu>

"other", where tourism is viewed from an anthropological perspective, because looking at the "other" we can discover a lot about ourselves, especially through the confrontation of identities. The transformation thus "takes place" in the tourist destination itself, which becomes a kind of "stage", as Pine and Gilmore (1999) point out, because true experience means going through something and that experience is associated with the transformative experience that occurs on an individual level.

### 3. SYSTEMS THEORY AND SYSTEMIC THINKING IN THE PROCESS OF TOURISM TRANSFORMATION

The new theory of the system as presented by the relevant authors (Churchman 1968, Senge 1995, Capra 1996, Carr 2016, Jere-Lazanski 2009) is a good basis for the development of a revitalizing ecological paradigm. The view that we are all connected and that we are all part of one great whole was especially emphasized by Ken Wilber in his works. He has written thirty books, two of which have been translated into Croatian: *A Brief History of Everything* and *A Theory of Everything*. In his book *Integralna teorija Kena Wilbera* (2012), Borš provides an overview of Wilber's work and Integral Theory, and we can consider him a pioneer of Integral Theory in Croatia. Integral theory is also called AQAL (abbreviation of "All Quadrants, All Levels") map, which represents a kind of map of consciousness, the cosmos and human development, at every level and in every dimension that represents itself (Wilber, Patten, Leonard, & Morelli, 2008). According to Integral Theory, the world consists of *holons*, and such a form of organized hierarchy is called *holarchy* (Borš 2012). Every living, conscious, *holon* (from man to animal to plant) possesses four dimensions of being that cannot be reduced to one. The paradigm shift is particularly important to understand, through integral theory and systemic thinking, that there is a difference between linear and manifested space: a linear representation of space is closed and separated from the invisible level, while manifested space is associated with the multidimensional. By concentrating on only one closed world, the so-called three-dimensional space that is actually one-dimensional, other, intangible dimensions of space are overlooked (remain in a "blind spot"). Specifically, if the consciousness of tourism managers and tourism policy makers is one-dimensional and materialistic, they automatically overlook other, intangible dimensions of space and "do not see", i.e. are "blind" to a whole range of new possibilities. Transformational tourism offers opportunities for change where the local community becomes an important actor and creator in shaping a different sustainable tourism through its identity resource base, while local and social entrepreneurship through networking and partnerships becomes a potent force. The figure below shows the process of transformation towards a higher level of consciousness that an individual goes through, which can be described as systemic consciousness.

Figure 1. The process of transformation



Source: Jere Lazanski, 2009

In our country, a series of earthquakes in Zagreb and in Banovina in 2020 further deepened the state of existential fears and loss that was exacerbated by isolation and lack of close social contact. As soon as individuals recognize their emotions and their system, they begin to look at the situation in a systemic way, by observing the whole (Jere Lazanski 2009). The picture above clearly shows that if a person is depressed, they cannot just skip anger, frustration, hope and faith to attain a certain emotion. Through a slow movement from one emotion to another, an individual recognizes patterns and structures (deeper meaning) of depression, anger, and frustration. This leads to personal and spiritual growth in the direction of hope, faith and safety. This transformation is possible through travel and certain contents and activities in the destination where an ecologically sustainable tourist destination with a clean environment and rich natural heritage is an ideal place to relax. Human beings are also natural systems according to this systems theory, and the role of specially trained mentors who are kinds of therapists in a tourist destination is in line with this paradigm shift to be not only educators and moderators, but also a kind of healers so travel can be an opportunity for transformation. Certain contents and activities in the destination become activators for the process of transformation and a kind of alchemy. Systemic thinking represents the awareness that we are part of a whole, a part of the planet where people are interconnected in a common creative process. Aware of this, man follows the natural path of evolution and his views on freedom, beauty, harmony and trust improve (Lazanski 2009). With this understanding of himself and the world, he becomes detached from the uncertain outside world, but still positively influences it with his inner peace.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The chapter presents the results of the conducted research by means of a focus group and an online survey. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used in the paper in order to obtain more reliable results and conclusions.

Basic research questions from which to start:

- What does Križevci offer today?
- What emotional benefits does Križevci offer - nostalgia, joy, boredom, routine?
- How should the people of Križevci present themselves?
- What is the destination DNA - the spirit and soul of the people of Križevci?

The focus group was selected as the qualitative research method because it provides a more detailed and deeper insight into attitudes through moderated discussion. This research method was chosen because it is a research method that is easily applicable in different cases, especially if it is accompanied by the survey method (Skoko and Benković 2009), which is what was done in this research. Goodyear (1998) referred similarly, finding that the focus group enjoys instrumental value because of the possibility of agreement between focus group method data and data collected by other methods. Several researchers comparing the results of the focus group and the survey reported that these two different methods provide very similar results. In three different studies, Bertrand et al. (1991) compared surveys and focus groups. Their comparison was a qualitative assessment of the similarity between the focus group results and the survey. They found similarity in 28% of results and differences in 12% of results. Of these, 42% of the results are similar but indicate that focus groups provide more information, while 17% of results are similar, but indicate that questionnaires provide more information. The focus group was conducted at the Križevci Development Centre and Technology Park on 22 November 2019, and 24 people, who filled out questionnaires in groups, participated in the survey. Following the completed questionnaires, a discussion with those present was encouraged regarding their answers. This resulted in a constructive and concrete exchange of views and ideas. The main goal of including this method was to stimulate an in-depth discussion in order to explore the attitudes and values of participants - stakeholders in the city's tourism about the future development of tourism. In this way, stakeholders were activated in the process of tourism development through deeper and more detailed thinking about their habits, beliefs and opinions related to existing resources and the current tourist offer. With an introductory lecture, the moderator inspired and motivated the stakeholders to penetrate deeper and clearer into the possibilities of the tourist offer that the city of Križevci and the surrounding area offers. Destination competitiveness is measured by defined attributes, therefore, in this research, we applied the approach to measuring destination competitiveness according to models developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2000), Heath (2002), Dwyer and Kim (2003), Ormerzel Gomezelj & Mihalić (2008). The frequency of offered answers on the valorisation and importance of cultural heritage, selected created resources and supporting factors was obtained by using the survey method. A Likert scale of 1 - 5 was used, where 1 indicates absolute dissatisfaction/absolutely unimportant, and 5 absolute satisfaction/importance. The survey questionnaire was distributed during April and May 2020. The questionnaire was distributed in such a way that the invitation was published on the website of the City of Križevci, the Tourist Board of the City of Križevci and was sent directly to all focus group participants with whom a special survey was conducted to analyse the competitiveness of the tourist destination (23 participants). The survey questionnaire was also available on the social networks of these organizations. By mid-May, a total of 155 responses had been collected. Thus, the

processing of the collected results on the mentioned sample was started. The combination of these two methods provides guidelines for what needs to be created and offered in the tourism market, which will differentiate Križevci and its surroundings from the competition, but at the same time adequately fit into the offer of the wider region, to the satisfaction of tourism stakeholders and local communities.

The results of the research, focus group and online survey are presented below.

#### **4.1. Focus group results**

The key views and opinions of the present focus group participants will be presented below, as answers to the basic and starting research questions.

*The first question was focused on the identification of the current offer in Križevci.*

Focus group participants pointed out that the main attractions that visitors can visit are the following: The cathedral, churches, other sacral buildings, the old town, the city museum, the Women's Guard, Čoko bar, the wine roads and bike trails. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of visiting events, guided tours of the city, walking in parks, tasting local gastronomic and oenological offerings, horseback riding, cycling, spiritual exercises, etc. From the answers of stakeholders, it is evident that they perceive similar attractions and/or services as the main factors of competitiveness of the destination of Križevci in terms of the current tourism offer. Respondents also agreed that Križevci's historical figures and rich historical heritage are a valuable potential attraction that is insufficiently valorised. *The questioning continued with the emotional benefits that this destination offers to visitors, with an emphasis on certain keywords and emotions: nostalgia, joy, happiness, boredom and routine.*

Since tourism as a phenomenon consists of the experience economy and the creation of added value by arousing emotions in the guest, stakeholders were asked about the emotional benefits that the destination of Križevci can offer to its potential guests. The most common answers given by the respondents include the following emotions or feelings in relation to the destination: nostalgia for the past, *stress-free* destination, a small town with a big soul, peace and quiet, safety, interculturality in terms of religious connections, openness, hospitality of people in the city, joy during the St. Martin celebrations and Križevci Statutes, etc. "Nostalgia" and "peace" appear as an emotion in several stakeholders in the form of their response or attitude.

*The moderator continued with the next question, which aimed to obtain an answer to how the respondents would like Križevci to be presented to the public, specifically in the tourist market.*

There is an extremely high level of agreement between the views and thoughts of all present on this issue. The answers are as follows: a small town with a big soul, a small town with a big heart, a lovely town full of good emotions, a town that is beautiful and pleasant to live in, a peaceful and safe town, Križevci - the gate of Prigorje, Križevci - a cultural and historical centre, etc. It is interesting that the vast majority of respondents agree that the ideal description of Križevci as a destination should imply and include emotions and their strength. The notion of soul, peace, and heart ran through most of the

answers. The answers to this question also indicate that the thinking of the local community is more oriented towards special interest tourism that creates sustainable added value, experiences and experiential learning.

*In the end, the moderator aroused the interest of the participants to identify the destination's spirit and soul.*

When asked what in their opinion creates the destination's DNA, the stakeholders answered the following: Križevci Statutes, Spravišće, city history, cultural heritage, celebrities, the spirit of the past, hardworking and hospitable hosts. Destination DNA is an important development of the identity of the tourist destination as a prerequisite for development and branding, based on the image towards the target groups<sup>4</sup>. It is a significant indicator that most stakeholders emphasized that the "spirit of the past" of the city of Križevci is one of the key elements that defines the destination DNA. It is also important that key stakeholders in the destination have recognized cultural intangible heritage as their tourist potential, in the form of famous people who are an integral part of the history and tradition of the city of Križevci.

#### **4.2. Survey results**

In its essence, comparative advantage is largely based on available and inherited resources (natural and cultural resources as inherited), while competitive advantage is based on the way these resources are managed and how they are added value in the tourism market (created and support resources along with destination management).

The inherited resources were thus given a high average rating of 3.98, and the manner they are used was given an average rating of 2.8. The deviation is negative and amounts to 1.18, which implies the need to transfer the "assets" of the inhabitants of Križevci into "tourist streams" in a responsible and sustainable manner. This means valorising natural and cultural resources, strengthening the economic environment, investing in human resources, improving and organizing institutional support and capacities.

The following are the results of the survey on added importance and satisfaction with the following resources that form the basis for achieving a competitive advantage:

- cultural resources
- support resources and
- created resources.

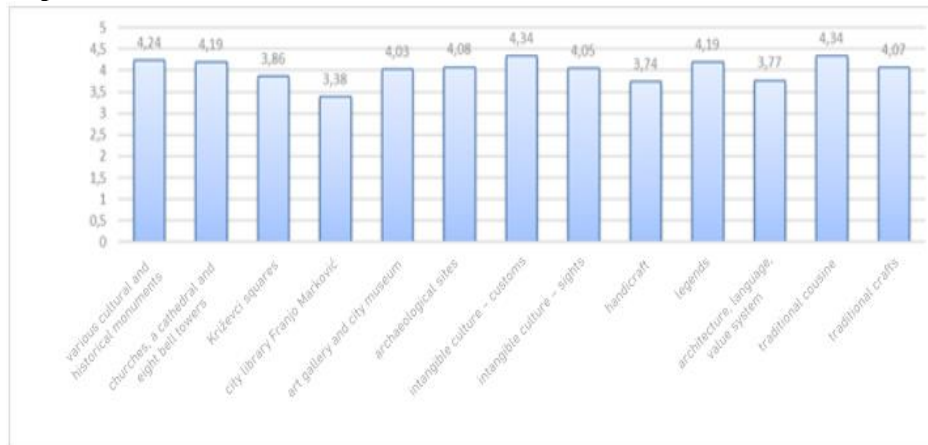
Natural resources are excluded from the research for the purposes of this paper because the focus was on the valorisation of cultural heritage.

On a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is absolutely important and 5 is absolutely unimportant, the respondents were supposed to mark their views on the importance of the cultural resources of the inhabitants of Križevci.

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<sup>4</sup> Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding. Spain: UNWTO p.91 states that the core of a brand consists of three to four key values that collectively represent the "destination DNA". It is usually described in a few simple words that can be visualized and "felt". The handbook further emphasizes that the destination brand personality is a way to describe its unique features.

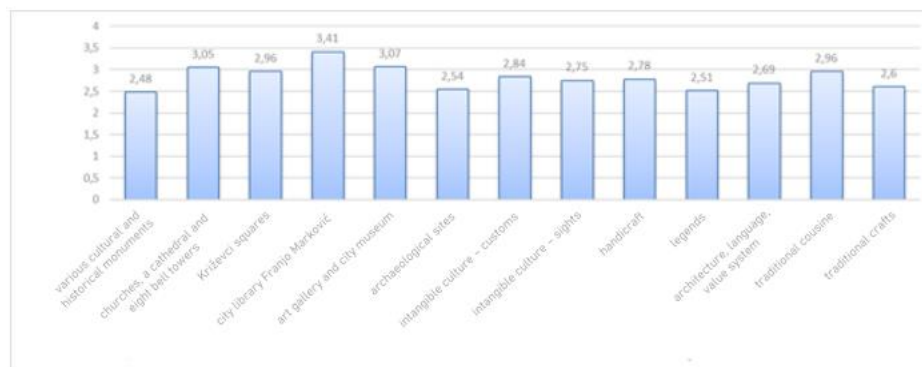
**Figure 2. Importance of the cultural resources of Križevci in the opinion of the respondents**



Source: authors

On a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents absolute dissatisfaction and 5 absolute satisfaction, the respondents had to mark their views on satisfaction with the current way of using the cultural resources that form the tourist offer of Križevci and its surroundings.

**Figure 3. Satisfaction with the current way of using the cultural resources of Križevci for tourist purposes**



Source: authors

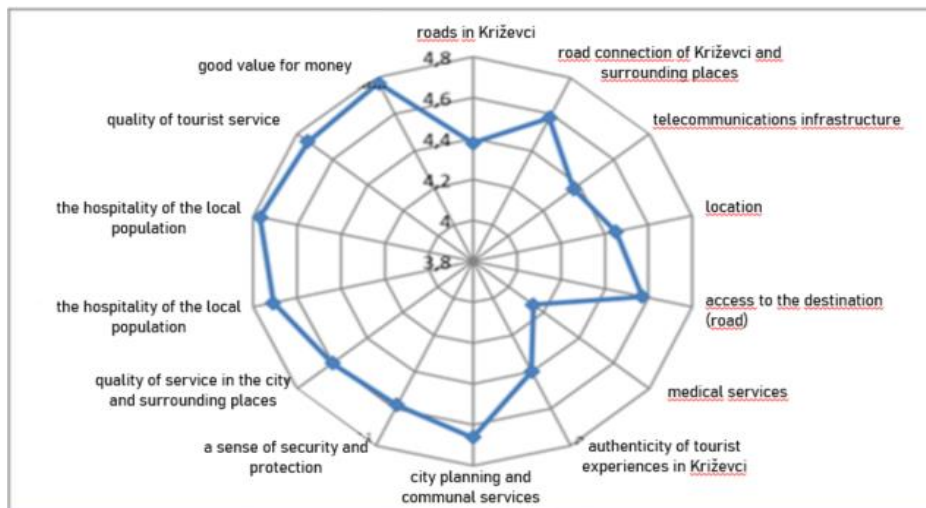
Respondents recognized the cultural resources of Križevci and the surrounding area as very important and gave them a high average rating - 4.02. On the other hand, when looking at satisfaction with inherited cultural resources, respondents gave the same a lower score - 2.82. A negative deviation was evident, indicating that inherited cultural resources are not used well enough for tourism purposes.

To ensure competitiveness, a system of support resources should be established. On a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is absolutely important and 5 is absolutely unimportant,



the respondents were supposed to mark their views on the importance of the support resources of the inhabitants of Križevci.

Graph 1. **Importance of the support resources of Križevci in the opinion of the respondents**



Source: authors

Respondents attach the greatest importance to:

- a good ratio of price and value paid and hospitality of employees in tourism (equal average weighted value)
- quality of tourist services and
- the hospitality of the local population.

When analysing satisfaction with the system of support resources, it was found that respondents were the least satisfied with:

- the authenticity of tourist experiences in Križevci
- the quality of tourist services and
- the organization of medical services

Research has shown that respondents rated very highly the importance of individual activators and supporting factors that ensure the competitiveness of the destination, with an average rating (weighted) of 4.35. At the same time, satisfaction with the way they are organized for the purpose of tourism and creating "opportunities" for tourism development is lower and was rated with an average rating (weighted) of 2.91.

Created resources were analyzed, especially those that are important for the development of cultural tourism products. Respondents gave an average rating of importance of the created resources of 4.2, thereby giving the highest importance to:

- quality of catering facilities (family farms and agrotourism)
- quality of accommodation capacities and
- promenades

When the satisfaction of the respondents with the way of using the created resources was analysed, a larger deviation was noticed. Thus, respondents allotted satisfaction an average rating of 2.49. The survey found that respondents were the least satisfied with:

- organization of transportation for tourists
- excursions offer and
- activities for visitors that are offered throughout the year.

The attractiveness of the tourist destination of Križevci can be based, in part, on inherited resources. They have the potential to attract tourists. However, the ability of Križevci to compete with other similar places, attract tourists and investors will largely depend on the ability to transform basic inherited resources into "assets" of more symbolic significance, which later transforms into significantly higher market values.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS OF NEW TOURIST EXPERIENCES OF TRANSFORMATIVE TOURISM**

The results of the research indicated high consistency with similar research aimed at determining the competitiveness of a tourist destination, which also showed that respondents very often perceive inherited resources as those that are given the greatest importance (more: Ormerzel Gomezelj and Mihalič 2008; Goffi 2013; Popescu and Pavlović 2013). It is the same in Križevci. By analysing accessible and available materials and literature, and based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the area of Križevci is rich in cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) and natural resources that form a good base on which to establish both a comparative and a competitive advantage of the destination. As the respondents agreed that historical figures are a valuable potential attraction that is insufficiently valorised, it can be concluded that the tourism of the city of Križevci can grow from the overall spiritual and traditional heritage. Through new forms of tourism that are innovative and creative, as well as supported by the local community, Križevci can become an authentic tourist destination. It is extremely important to emphasize that the sustainability of these special forms of tourism is closely linked to encouraging the development of micro-entrepreneurship and economic prosperity. The local population is the best connoisseur of its own culture and cultural history, which proves the high satisfaction of respondents with the cultural resource base (average rating of 4.02) and, therefore, an interdisciplinary approach in tourism management is necessary. That the city can be branded as a potent destination is evidenced by the most common answers given by respondents related to emotions or feelings in relation to their city, and relate to nostalgia for the past, a stress-free destination, a small town with a big soul, peace, safety, interculturality in terms of religious connections, openness and warmth of the people in the city.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIAL FORM OF TOURISM THROUGH PHILOOTHERAPY AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**

Philotherapy as a kind of "healing by philosophy" can be combined with the method of deconstruction<sup>5</sup>, where you should use a process approach that is actually working on materials, proposed by the participants-tourists themselves, choosing them because they have a strong problematic significance. Materials are elaborated through group interaction, so that the contents are transferred from the real (documented) to the fictitious (creative) plan. In this part of the activities, the artefacts that will be offered to the participants-tourists are important and they should offer the possibility for them to choose them according to the criteria of collective and personal importance. This means that the indicators should be locally characteristic, but at the same time have a stimulating effect on the imagination of the individual. The motifs to be offered<sup>6</sup> should be chosen by taking into account the local identity. Thus, lectures on famous and historical figures and events can be offered. Within the framework of transformative educational and ecotourism, the choice of motifs can be narrowed down to ecological issues. Starting from ideas, then elaborating them through workshops and debating their implications, tourists and the local community develop a "story", creating a new joint work, where each participant in the process incorporates both their thoughts and their experiences. In this way, a kind of dialogue playroom is created, where participants-tourists participate not only for fun and acquaintance with the intangible cultural heritage of the country and individual destinations, but also for personal development, thus leading to added value in tourism. Appearing here is the possibility of involving local cultural associations and their activities, so it is important to set up workshops as an open system where younger generations can be involved with their ideas and thoughts - thus becoming creators and active stakeholders in tourism development.

UNESCO has established World Philosophy Day, held in November of every year. In this way, attention is drawn to the need for critical thinking and a systematic view of problems, and it is also an opportunity to remember the great philosophers, their thoughts and deeds.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The French philosopher Jacques Derrida is the creator of deconstruction, which thus became a philosophical doctrine originating in the 1960s. Deconstruction as a way of reading deals with the meaning of a text, i.e. it penetrates into the ways in which the meaning is constructed by the author, but also by the recipient. A text or artefact is viewed as the result of conflicts within a particular cultural environment, where multiple opinions and meanings act simultaneously in mutual conflict and opposition. (Palić 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Within the tourist destination, a professional team should be educated, which should consist of psychotherapists, ethnologists, animators and andragogues who will organize and conduct these types of workshops and playrooms as their tourist product, and they should be specially educated and prepared.

<sup>7</sup> The event is conceived as a series of lectures on philosophy for the general public in order to better understand the profession and the place of philosophy in the modern world. Every year, the number of countries involved grows, and the first celebration in Croatia was held in Zadar in 2003. In addition to public lectures by experts on the integration of philosophy in social life, contemporary trends in applied philosophy (bioethics, philosophy of mind, philosophical counselling, philosophy for children, philosophy in nonviolent conflict resolution...), held are public workshops, philosophical cafés, and philosophical round tables. (<https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/philosophyday>)

The inspiration for philosophical contents and activities, and their inclusion in the new form of tourism comes from the life and work of Franjo Marković<sup>8</sup>. As a famous native of Križevci, he is a strong attraction base and resource, and that gives meaning and an identity link for the contents related to philotherapy as a transformative element in the new form of tourism. As Marotti (Matis.hr 2014) states in the afterword of Marković's book "Etika" (Ethics) "it could be said that Marković opened many paths, offered different approaches, and that he provided much more than his successors could or wanted to accept..."

All the new contents are harmonized and connected with the philosophy and way of thinking as an offer in the post-corona period. These are primarily philosophical *cafes* and philosophical theatre, philosophical groups and nature walks. The "Franjo Marković" Library, which is located in the very centre of the town, is also included. According to the library's website (knjižnica-križevci.hr), it is the oldest cultural institution in the city. It derives from the Illyrian reading room founded by Ljudevit Vukotinović in 1838, and is one of the oldest libraries and reading rooms in Croatia. In addition to this space, the Technology Park, which is located only a few minutes from the library, also possesses the technical conditions for meetings and workshops. In addition to these two spaces, there are also parks in the city and surrounding areas that can perfectly serve for "philosophical walks" led by philosophers-mentors. In addition to contents such as the philosophical *cafe* and theatre, it is also proposed to build a labyrinth of connections<sup>9</sup> in the city centre in one of the free green areas. The labyrinth is an attraction that fits perfectly into philotherapy content because the entrance and exit would be in the same place, so by moving from the direction of the entrance visitors move from the present moment to the past, and from the centre of the labyrinth from the past to the future, which provides a kind of symbolism and a possibility for meditation. These contents in nature can be combined with existing hiking and biking trails so that "philosophizing in the fresh air with recreation" becomes an original endeavour and added value to the entire region. Accommodation depending on age can be organized in private apartments, family farms and holiday homes in the city and its surroundings until a themed hostel is built for these educational purposes and a camp in the area that would

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<sup>8</sup> Franjo Marković is a Croatian philosopher, writer, philologist and literary and theatre critic. Franjo pl. Marković was born on 26 July 1845 in Križevci, in an aristocratic family. After graduating from secondary school, he went to Vienna where he studied classical philology, Slavic studies and philosophy (1862-1865). In Vienna, he was friends with Ivan Dežman, August Šeno and Tadija Smičiklas. In 1874, he took over the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (renewed), University of Zagreb, and was also the (first) dean of that faculty. He became a full member of the Academy in 1876, and in 1881, rector of the University. His work in *Matica hrvatska* (Matrix Croatica) is also of great importance, and he was also a Member of Parliament (he was elected three times: 1881, 1884 and 1887). (Matis.hr 2014)

<sup>9</sup> The labyrinth would consist of stones as symbols and interpretive tablets and certain symbols - cosmograms on which famous people and events would be chronologically listed, and they would have QR codes by which visitors would get a multimedia insight into the history of Križevci and the importance of these famous people for the history of the City, but also for all of Croatia. As water shapes the backwaters and initiates meandering, so by entering the labyrinth the visitor can use his energy to start a certain movement inside and outside himself, and through this act, we reach a universal principle, i.e. a philosophical hermetic principle "As above, so below; as inside, so outside".

be made according to the postulates of ecological construction and which would provide accommodation and nutrition for a larger group of motivated users<sup>10</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Depending on the needs and motivation of tourists/travellers, Križevci and its surroundings as a tourist destination, with its future products, may be a different tourist destination for each traveller/tourist because tourists have different expectations when going on a trip. The conducted research indicates the fact that the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourist destination of Križevci can be partly based on inherited resources. They have the potential to attract tourists. However, the ability of Križevci to compete with other similar places, attract tourists and investors will largely depend on the ability to transform basic inherited resources into "assets" of more symbolic significance, which later transforms into significantly higher market values. Therefore, it is necessary to take priority to improve the condition of the resources created in Križevci due to the largest negative discrepancy between the importance attached to them and satisfaction with the current situation. Furthermore, support resources need to be improved and, ultimately, cultural heritage managed sustainably.

Domestic travel is an area of tourism growth, as tourists seek to develop their own spirituality and discover spirituality in others. It is one of the fastest growing tourism segments according to the UNWTO (2019) and includes a wide range of motives, from traditional, religious to alternative medicine. Lekić (2017 according to Pine and Gilmore (1999) points out that, if we want the trip to be transformative, a special experience, it must contain elements that are educational, entertaining, taken into account should be the aesthetic quality and it should be different from what the tourist lives in their everyday lives. This experience should be, as stated by the same authors, conceived in such a way that it basically has a narrative that includes interactivity through all five senses and an individual approach. Križevci's opportunity is the development of tourism inspired by the famous people of Križevci, where Franjo Marković stands out for his importance, with philotherapeutic contents within the new form of tourism that the authors of this article called philotourism (philosophical tourism), which, according to its characteristics, belongs to the transformational form of tourism. By connecting different contents, philotherapy becomes an added value because it can be combined with staying in nature and clean air, without light pollution and noise. It is a platform for the development of a rich tourist offer, such as *retreats* for yoga, meditations, connecting with the phenomenon of "living water"<sup>11</sup> that springs in the Kalnik area and special *anti-stress* programs for managers. Trips called *healthness*<sup>12</sup> are also interesting, especially for women of all ages through specialized workshops on healthy food, workshops on

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<sup>10</sup> Through the Action plan for development according to strategic determinants (Strategic Plan for Tourism Development 2020), in 2021, a logistical basis will be created and funds will be raised for the construction of accommodation capacities.

<sup>11</sup> The case of the Austro-Hungarian soldier Martin Vrbanac, who, drinking Kalnik water, recovered from the unusual fever he contracted in 1809 in the war with the French (visitkrizevci.com ),

<sup>12</sup> The combination of active rest, wellness experience and raising awareness of one's own health with the aim of restoring balance and awakening one's body, mind and soul in the world is known as *healthness* (oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com)

herbal preparations for rejuvenation, workshops on traditional treatments and the like. The whole range of travel as a journey of personal development will be increasingly popular and necessary for the future of tourism, as seen by transmodern theorists (Ateljević 2009, Resinger 2006, Pollock 2016, Scharmer and Kaufer 2016, Korstanje 2007). In the post-corona crisis period, it is important to work on emotions, where the feeling and existence of fear and insecurity has become commonplace, while a holiday that provides healing, peace and "return one's balance" will certainly be one of the most common choices in the coming period.

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**NEW FORM OF TRANSFORMATIVE TOURISM – PHILOOTHERAPY AS A  
RESOURCE BASE IN THE POST-CORONA CRISIS**

**Abstract**

Contemporary philosophical practice as a renewal of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, among other things, deals with issues of happiness, satisfaction, life as a work of art that should be organized in the best possible way. The old philosophical schools possessed great knowledge of the human heart, of its motivations, conscious and unconscious, of its deep aspirations, and played a significant role in spiritually guiding man. Philosophical dialogues and discussions were a kind of remedy for restoring the health of the soul, whether through encouragement, rebuke, consolation, or instruction. We are witnessing a new philosophical practice, thematically different "philosophical cafes" and "philosophical theaters" and inspired by this form of group "philotherapy" for this post-crown crisis period, presented is a new form of transformative tourism that can be developed in some parts of Croatia that have a strong resource base for this and that can be combined with other, different forms of tourism. Through new activities and contents, encouraged by philosophical thought, activities can be offered that help solve problems or point to methods that can significantly enrich the content of life, and in combination with organic food and preserved nature, become an attractive place for rest. The authors propose the destination of Križevci as a pilot destination in which the development of transformative tourism can be planned. By coordinating the development process of this form of tourism through destination management and through the involvement of local stakeholders, a step forward in the development of tourism can be achieved, which can become a transformative and healing experience. The same is especially significant during the (post) corona crisis characterized by great fear, uncertainty, worries, and insecurity. The paper uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Surveys, focus groups and field research were conducted with interviews with local stakeholders. The scientific contribution of this paper lies in the creative connection of tourism and philosophy through transformative tourism, but also through other forms of cultural tourism and the importance of destination management in the process of directing the sustainable development of tourism.

**Keywords:** philotherapy, transformative tourism, Križevci, Franjo Marković, post-corona crisis, destination management

**Romana Lekić, PhD**  
College Professor,  
Edward Bernays University College,  
E-mail: romana.lekic@bernays.hr

**Tea Golja, PhD**  
Associate Professor,  
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula,  
E-mail: tea.golja@unipu.hr

**Krešimir Dabo, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer,  
Edward Bernays University College,  
E-mail: kresimir.dabo@bernays.hr



# THE IMPACT OF THE PARENZANA RAIL TRAIL IN ISTRIA ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

**Natalija Krošnjak**  
**Aleksandar Lukić**

## **Abstract**

Railway trails or greenways are a well-known phenomenon related to rural tourism development. The Parenzana Rail Trail, a famous pedestrian and bicycle trail, was created by converting a decommissioned historic railroad line that runs through Italy (13 km), Slovenia (32 km) and Croatia (78 km). Research objective of the paper is to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of Parenzana Rail Trail in the local rural context. The research methodology is primarily based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of tourist boards from Croatian and Slovenian Istria. In 2019, a total of 93,545 visitors were registered at four centres in Croatia, with monthly visitor numbers highest in the early and late tourist seasons. Businesses have been established to provide bicycle rental and repair services and other equipment, and dedicated accommodation facilities have opened. Parenzana has created links between the existing tourist products and supported the promotion and collaboration of municipalities. It also contributes to the improvement of local rural services, especially in the areas of leisure and transport. Furthermore, it supports the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of spatial identity, and the enhancement and maintenance of the environment along the route. Future prospects include reducing spatial disparities in development trajectories, the need for greater promotion, and improving the surface of Parenzana to suit more visitors.

**Keywords:** Cyclo-tourism, Heritage revitalization, Istria, Parenzana, Rural tourism, Rail trails

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Rail trails* are multipurpose trails lying along former railway lines, or that continuously run alongside active railway lines for most of their length (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy 2021). These trails are typically near flat, wide and with a hard surface, making them easily accessible and suitable for numerous activities outdoors, such as walking, cycling, rollerblading or horseback riding. The USA is considered the first country to establish a structured social movement to develop rail trails, and has the widest and longest network of rail trails in the world, with more than 2289 rail trails distributed over a length of more than 40,000 km (Reis and Jellum 2014; Rails-to-Trails Conservancy 2021). Since the 1990s, significant achievements have been made in Europe to develop similar multipurpose trails, such as the *Vías Verdes* in Spain, *Rèseau Autonome des Voies Lentes* (RAVeL) in Belgium, and the *Ecopistas* in Portugal (Oppido and Ragozino 2014). Germany has the largest network in Europe, with 795 trails covering a length of 5483 km (Bahnrassenradeln 2021). In Europe, these trails are often developed as part of greenways (Oppido and Ragozino 2014; European Greenway Association 2021).

Repurposing railway stations into hospitality facilities, info centres as additional offer, and facilities for bicycle rental and repair as new tourism facilities can largely spur employment, and drive the growth of tourism and socioeconomic growth (Di Ruocco et.

al. 2017). This contributes to the goal that is not only the transformation of the abandoned railway network, but the activation of the process of regeneration and local development, connecting local resources and increasing offer and services (Oppido and Ragozino 2014). When creating a new function for unused railway infrastructure, it is important to include the community that is already active in that area, creating opportunities for societies, small business owners and the residents themselves to become the main actors in the development process, with the adequate support of the institutional administrative structures. From the environmental perspective, rail trails have special significance in the sense of developing low-carbon tourism, such as cycling or walking as a recreational activity, and also in the sense of building the trails, as they imply the reuse of an existing resource (Willard and Beeton 2012). Walking and cycling trails have also become a pronounced tourism product in cross-border areas. Many advantages in developing tourism trails across administrative borders have been observed (Stoffelen 2018). Initiating cooperation and partnership between different local areas, regions, counties and even countries is viewed as an additional benefit from trail development (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004). In conclusion, the tourism impacts are often divided in economic, socio-cultural and environmental categories (Mason 2003; Mathieson and Wall 2006; Page 2009). An example of positive economic impact would be the creation of new jobs, and an example of negative would be additional destination management costs (Mason 2003). The sociocultural impacts of tourism are the ways in which tourism contributes to changes in quality of life and lifestyle, traditional values, and other components of society and culture (Mason 2003; Mathieson and Wall 2006). Environmental impact refers to tourism's relationship with the environment, as it is an important resource for tourism development. Thus, a relationship can be symbiotic when both parties benefit from each other, or conflictual when tourism harms the environment (Mathieson and Wall 2006).

The repurposing of railway corridors into cycling and walking trails in Croatia is still in its infancy. After the first trail, Parenzana in Istria in 2008, a European cross-border cooperation project between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was launched; from 2014–2016, the narrow track Gabela-Uskoplje-Zelenika was revitalized as part of the project “*Cycling through history – revitalization of the old narrow Ćiro track*”. Since 2021, the former railway line Kanfanar-Rovinj, covering a length of 20.6 km, has been in function, and converted into a rail trail with the symbolic name *Štrika Ferata* (Rovinj Tourist Board 2021). In their review paper, Kos et al. (2021) examined the methodologies of creating cyclo-tourism routes in the corridors of the abandoned railway lines Bjelovar-Garešnica in Bjelovar-Bilogora County, and also gave an overview of the definitions and development of greenways in the world and in Croatia. Modesto et al. (2021) conducted research on potential conversion and possibilities of including the railway line Kanfanar-Rovinj into the green infrastructure, from the perspective of landscape architecture.

Research objective of the paper is to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of Parenzana Rail Trail in the local rural context. The paper examines the positive and negative effects and the perspectives for further development of walking/cycling trail that was created from the conversion of the abandoned Parenzana railway line. Parenzana is a decommissioned historic railroad line that runs through Italy (13 km), Slovenia (32 km) and Croatia (78 km). The railway line was

opened in 1902, during the period of Austro-Hungarian rule, when the transportation system of Istria was greatly improved due to the interests Austria had in this area. Though it only ran through northwestern Istria for 33 years, it played an important role in the economic development of the area (Zupanc 2002; Parenzana 2021).

## 2. RESEARCH AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The research area of the study includes 10 local administrative units through which the Parenzana railway line runs in Croatia, and three local administrative units in Slovenia (Fig. 1). In Croatia, the Parenzana route runs through the northern and northwestern parts of the Istrian Peninsula, mostly through the small rural settlements in the Istrian inland (Fig. 2). The route in Croatia is nearly fully preserved, and has been maintained along its entire length as an unpaved recreational trail. The sections near the coast are most altered, trampled by urban expansion and new roads (Černicki 2012; Parenzana 2021). In Slovenia, the route runs through the Coastal-Karst region, at the very southwest of Slovenia, and the only region that touches on the Adriatic Sea, running mostly through the urban areas of Piran, Izola and Koper. In Slovenia, the route is paved and forms part of the network of bicycle trails on the D8 route. The sections near the coast are most altered, covered by new roads, urban areas and industrial plants (Černicki 2012).

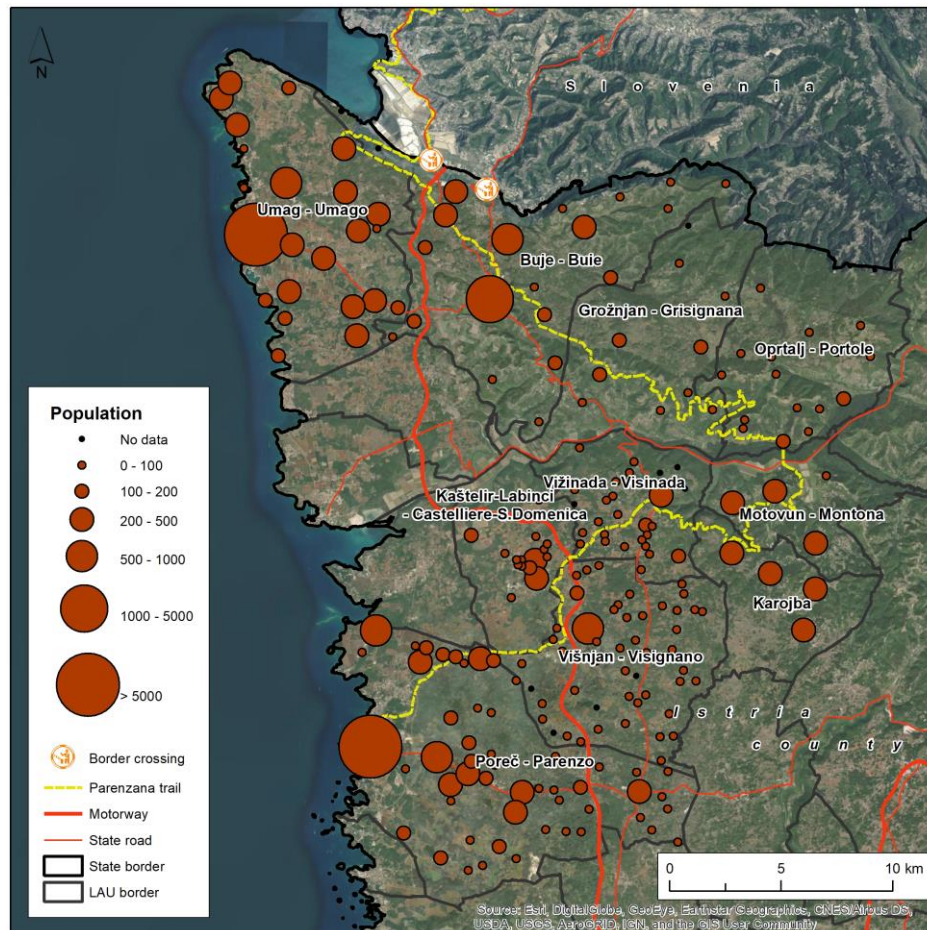
The paper is primarily based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of tourist boards of those municipalities or towns through which the Parenzana route runs. Interviews were developed using multidimensional approach since, as Page (2009) argues, the impacts of tourism are multiple and difficult to observe in a one-dimensional way because they are intertwined, both with each other and with other activities of economic development. Multidimensional approach involved researching three categories of the tourism impacts in the rural area, namely economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts (Mason 2003; Mathieson and Wall 2006; Page 2009). The research was conducted in December 2021. Of the ten Croatian and three Slovenian local government units, six representatives of Croatian tourist boards (TB) (Motovun-Montona TB (TB1), Buje-Buie TB (TB2), Vižinada-Visinada TB (TB3), Oprtalj-Portole TB (TB4), Kaštelir-Labinci - Castelliere-S.Domenica TB (TB5), Grožnjan-Grisignana TB (TB6) and two representatives of Slovenian TBs (Izola (TB7) and Koper (TB8)) were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with the Istria County Tourism Administration Office, as the main partner in the Parenzana project. The interview results were analysed using descriptive and analytical coding, and then codes were grouped into wider code groups that were set up in the analytical framework, and presented in the form of a code scheme.

Figure 1. Research area – Parenzana route



Source: DGU 2013; GURS 2017; MATTM 2017; Geofabrik 2022

Figure 2. **Population (2011 census) of the settlements in the analysed local administrative units in Croatia**



Source: GIS Data 2005; DZS 2013; GURS 2017; Geofabrik 2022; ESRI 2022

### 3. DEVELOPMENT, CHARACTERISTICS AND VISITATION OF THE PARENZANA RAIL TRAIL

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the municipality of Koper began to revitalise the tourism and recreational trails in Slovenian Istria. On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of operations of the Parenzana railway line in 2002, one part of the repurposed trail was opened as part of the project “Pot zdravja in prijateljstva” (*Health and Friendship Trail*). This was a stimulus to revitalise the route over its entire length (Černicki 2012). In 2006, the Istrian County Tourism Administration Office together with the City of Koper started the project “Parenzana – put zdravlja i prijateljstva” (*Parenzana – a trail of health and friendship*). Thanks to the positive results, new content was added later in the projects

Parenzana II and Parenzana III (Table 1).

**Table 1. Projects, partners, implementation periods and activities in the Parenzana projects**

Project	Partners	Period	Activities
Parenzana I – Trail of health and friendship	Istria County, Koper municipality, Izola municipality, Piran municipality, MTB Istra-Pazin cycling club	2006–2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60 km of the route from the Slovenian-Croatian border to Vižinada completed</li> <li>• Viaducts and bridges secured with railings</li> <li>• Solar-powered lightened installed in tunnels</li> <li>• Multimedia museum in Livade</li> <li>• 20 km of the route in Slovenia completed</li> </ul>
Parenzana II – Revitalisation of the Trail of health and friendship	Istria County, Town of Poreč, Vižinada municipality, Oprtalj municipality, Town of Buje, Koper municipality, Izola municipality, Piran municipality	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoration of the sections Vižinada-Poreč and Lama-Dekani</li> <li>• Construction of bridge at Livade</li> <li>• Real size model of Parenzana installed in Vižinada</li> <li>• Several rest areas built</li> <li>• Installation of signage and interpretation panels</li> <li>• Bike guides trained</li> <li>• Info-bike points installed</li> <li>• Expansion of the Parenzana Museum in Livade</li> </ul>
Parenzana III – Parenzana Magic	Istria County, Town of Buje, Motovun municipality, Koper municipality, Piran municipality, Town of Poreč, Izola municipality	2014–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former school in building in Triban repurposed into a cyclist's inn</li> <li>• Outdoor exercise areas completed (in Motovun, Poreč, Izola and Piran)</li> <li>• Rest areas with panels installed</li> <li>• Two new events: Wine Run cross-border marathon and Parenzana Day - history on site</li> </ul>

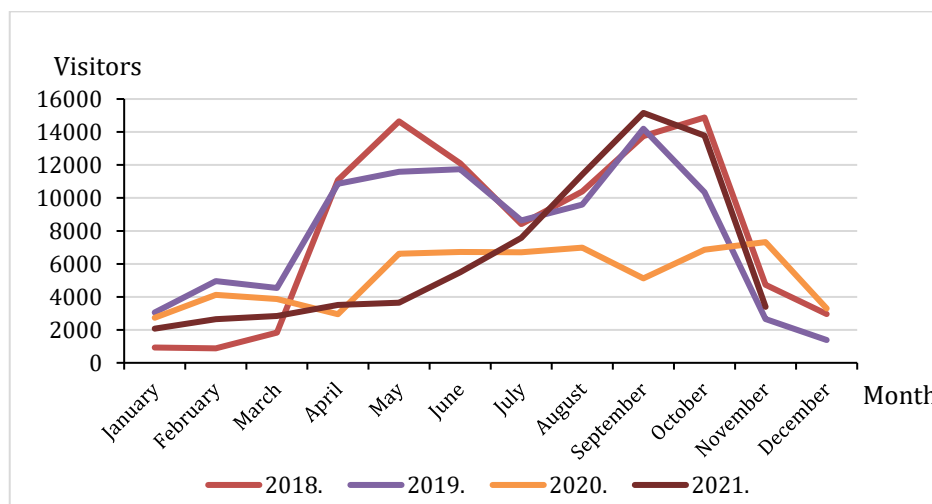
Source: Parenzana 2021

Visitor counters were installed on the Parenzana trail at four locations (Plovanija,

Vižinada, Grožnjan and Livade). In 2018, 96,590 walkers and cyclists were recorded. A somewhat larger number of visitors was seen in the northern parts of Istria (Grožnjan, Livade, Plovanija), than in the more southern Vižinada. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which severely hindered travelling, the number of visitors to the Parenzana trail dropped. However, the 2020 figures were two-thirds (67.7%) of the 2019 figures, while 2021 achieved 76.5% of the 2019 figures.

In examining visitation by months, it is evident that it is highest in the spring and autumn periods, which correspond with the tourism pre- and post-seasons (Graph 1). The highest numbers of visitors were recorded in May (14,644) and October 2018 (14,877). The number of visitors is also associated with the local events organised during those time periods, and also with the fact that the weather conditions during those months are most suitable for cycling and walking.

**Graph 1. Number of visitors on the Parenzana trail recorded using visitor counters for the period 2018 – 2021 by month.**



Source: Istria County Tourism Administration Office, 2021 (e-mail of 17 December 2021)

In the municipalities and towns through which the Parenzana route runs, several services and additional offer have been introduced as part of the development of cyclo-tourism (Fig. 3), in addition to specialised accommodation capacities (Fig. 4).

**Figure 3. Number of other services associated with cyclo-tourism on the Parenzana trail in 2021, by local administration unit**

Bicycle service	Equipment shops	Bicycle rentals	Transport	e-Bike charging stations	Bike-friendly points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poreč (5)</li> <li>• Buje (1)</li> <li>• Umag (7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umag (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poreč (9)</li> <li>• Buje (2)</li> <li>• Umag (6)</li> <li>• Motovun (1)</li> <li>• Karojba (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poreč (2)</li> <li>• Buje (2)</li> <li>• Umag (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poreč (8)</li> <li>• Buje (2)</li> <li>• Motovun (1)</li> <li>• Kaštelir-Labinci (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oprtalj (1)</li> </ul>

Source: *Istra Bike* 2021; Parenzana, 2021

**Figure 4. Number of accommodation facilities by Istria Bike&Bed accommodation categories on the Parenzana trail in 2021 by local administration unit**

<i>Bike&amp;Bed</i>	<i>Bike Boutique hotels</i>	<i>Bike hotels</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umag (10)</li> <li>• Buje (4)</li> <li>• Poreč (7)</li> <li>• Motovun (1)</li> <li>• Grožnjan (3)</li> <li>• Oprtalj (1)</li> <li>• Kaštelir-Labinci (4)</li> <li>• Višnjan (1)</li> <li>• Vižinada (2)</li> <li>• Karojba (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umag (2)</li> <li>• Buje (1)</li> <li>• Motovun (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umag (3)</li> <li>• Poreč (4)</li> </ul>

Source: *Istra Bike* 2021; Parenzana, 2021

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Role of cyclo-tourism

Research objective of the paper is to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of Parenzana Rail Trail in the local rural context. Therefore, after the first introductory chapter on the role of cyclo-tourism, the text is organized according to these three categories of impacts.

According to the *Action Plan for the Development of Cyclo-tourism*, Istria is Croatia's most significant cyclo-tourism destination (Institute for tourism 2015). The development of cyclo-tourism in Istria began in the mid-1990s and has been advancing ever since. In 2020, there were 153 cycling trails covering a total of 5554.28 km in the territory of Istria County. Though most of these trails are in Central Istria (1425.11 km), the areas around Poreč (878.9 km) and Umag/Novigrad (861.12 km) are also highly interlaced with trails (Institute of Agriculture and Tourism 2021).

As stated by the representative of the Istria County Tourism Administration Office, cyclo-tourism is an economic driver of the area it runs through, as it spurs the



development of numerous other accompanying services, helps to lengthen the tourism season in the pre- and post-season, and contributes to the development of selective forms of tourism. Accordingly, it is often one of the main forms of rural tourism in Istria (code A1).

*Cyclo-tourism plays an important role in the tourism development of the municipality, and is one of the main tourism development goals within the municipality. (TB4)*

Riding along routes that were once railway lines is an attraction in its own right, according to Gardzińska (2018), attracting tourists to the destination and developing demand for other services. By developing cyclo-tourism as another form of tourism activity, the municipality has increased what its tourism has to offer (code A2), and since this implies the movement through space, it is also suitable for connections with other tourism offer (code A5).

*We have a diverse tourism offer and are systematically working to raise all content to a higher level. (TB1)*

*When we developed the cycling trails, then we saw that it brought together all the other offer... we connected with accommodation providers, wine trails, and cultural sights of interest... (TB2)*

Though Page (2009) stressed that seasonality is the main characteristic of tourism, the significance of cyclo-tourism for strengthening the pre- and post-season has also been observed (code A4).

*When the young musicians leave Grožnjan, the post-season is quite empty... now we have cyclists riding around the Grožnjan area, I see them every day ... Parenzana has certainly been good for lengthening the season, especially in the post-season. (TB6)*

With respect to the pandemic, our interviewees most often stated that the *initial expectations were quite low*, and also that the season *turned out better than expected*. They stated that rural tourism in Istria has continued to develop, though slowly, and the situation has even brought several positive consequences, such as an increase in the share of domestic guests, and care for health through increased recreational activities. This is where cyclo-tourism is particularly significant (code A3). Parenzana has proven to be a tourism product that is resilient to unpredictable situations like the pandemic, even though Mathieson and Wall (2006) claim that tourism is an unstable activity due to the accidental circumstances that may affect it.

*Like everything else, cyclo-tourism dropped (at the start of the pandemic), but quickly recovered... primarily because foreign guests couldn't come... there was even an increase in the number of domestic guests. (TB1)*

*Parenzana became really popular in this area, because everyone was avoiding large gatherings, so there were many individuals or just small groups... cycling, at least in the Covid context, allowed for the retention of a large part of the desired number of visitors and consumption in the area. (TB6)*

#### 4.2. Economic impacts

The interviewees often stressed that Parenzana was responsible for increasing the tourism offer in the municipalities and overall, either directly or indirectly (code B2). Rural areas are ideal for the development of cyclo-tourism, as this implies the use of existing resources such as natural beauty, heritage and other characteristics that complement the primary tourism product – the trail (Broadway 2012). Due to its length and linear nature, Parenzana connects different tourism areas and offer within the municipalities (code B1).

*Economically, it has certainly affected development, both directly and indirectly, especially for those renting equipment and those in hospitality. (TB6)*

*At one end we have very little to do with Parenzana, as it only touches us and passes through the municipality in the southern part, but we have our network of cycling and walking trails which are complementary, as users use both networks. (TB5)*

*It passes through numerous areas, connecting them... points of different services are found in all these areas the Parenzana passes through. (TB6)*

As stated by the representative of the Istria County Tourism Administration Office, *Parenzana is a brand, the route is international, and is known in the European context, especially in the nearby countries.* Accordingly, its promotion is important, and this is performed by the Administrative Office through its official website and through other marketing activities. All municipalities benefit from this promotion (code B6). Gazzola et al. (2018) stated that cyclo-tourism increases the rate of filling destination capacities, their competitiveness and attractiveness, and makes them recognisable on the tourism market. The promotion of Parenzana increases the tourism recognisability of municipalities, which contributes to attracting tourists and finally increases the number of visitors to the municipality (code B7), thereby increasing revenues.

*The fact that the very name Parenzana is associated with something is the biggest contribution... there is no direct effect, instead this is an indirect effect. (TB5)*

*There are other cycling trails in addition to the Parenzana, but Parenzana is the most popular because it is the most widely known. (TB7)*

*One of the important effects of the Parenzana is how visited it is, and those visitors then also visit other cultural, culinary and wine forms of tourism. (TB4)*

Visitors to Parenzana also come in organised groups, not only as individuals, and this attracts both one-day and multi-day visitors.

*There are more and more buses with bicycle trailers parked in Grožnjan ... cyclists are not only coming individually, but also in busloads. (TB6)*

Lumdson (2000) stated that areas that develop cyclo-tourism have to develop a tourism product that is attractive and includes several products, such as guided tours or adapted accommodation, as those types of infrastructure can generate significant demand. The increasing visitation of Parenzana has spurred demand for functions associated with the provision of services for cyclo-tourism, such as bicycle rentals (code B4). The representative of the Istria County Tourism Administration Office stressed the

importance of the *Istra bike* section, which coordinates all cycling trails in the county, organises training for cycling guides and cycling tours.

*One initiative, rent-a-bike, was likely stimulated by Parenzana ... we also have a tourist agency that offers outdoor tours, and this is certainly directly connected with the Parenzana, which has always been a base. (TB1)*

*We are currently developing the Urban Plan for the development of the Grožnjan bike park ... a site for adrenaline races, exercise trails, additional activities and offer... it is our intent to also build a bike camp that will be an integral part of the bike park... all of this is tied directly with the Parenzana trail. (TB6)*

A part of the Parenzana project is also the adaptation of accommodation facilities to better receive cyclists, in the form of *Bike&Bed* accommodation. Though these types of accommodation are not equally available in all municipalities, the interviewees agreed that many local hospitality businesses and accommodation providers are following trends and adapting their facilities to meet the demand (code B3).

*Some (B&Bs) are right on the route ... the Kanegra tourism village is just 200-300 m from the route ... the Parenzana rural hotel is also just 20-30 m off the route ... the entire area of Kaldanija, Plovanija. (TB2)*

*Most of them (accommodation providers) have bicycle storage areas, and if needed can also organise bicycle repairs... even if they have not signed up with the project to receive the Bike&Bed label, they are still ensuring that guests have everything they need at their disposal. (TB3)*

Furthermore, other projects are also unfolding, like the *bike friendly point* and as mentioned above, the *bike camp*.

Encouraging cooperation and partnership at the local, regional and cross-border levels is viewed as an additional benefit of trail development (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004), and it also includes the perspectives of different stakeholders, which is key for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism development within the community (Reis et. al. 2014). The municipalities and towns along the route are all partners in the Parenzana project, together with the Istrian County Tourism Administration Office as the main partner. This project has achieved cooperation at the local, regional and cross-border levels, and has also stimulated networking among local businesses, the local community and the civil sector (code B5).

*The county and municipalities are working together to maintain the Parenzana thanks to the shared interest... this is a link between two countries and all the municipalities gravitating to the trail, and in that sense has certainly contributed to better communication, agreements, aligning common actions, resolving shared problems... (TB6)*

*Sometimes, someone will leave trash in nature, especially around the Kanegra tourism village ... the cycling clubs then tell us the location when they see this on the route. (TB2)*

*The Society of Italians of Livade-Gradinje has organised several events, including clean-ups or walks along the Parenzana, organised outdoor trips... these are occasional events, and this year was the first. (TB4)*

### 4.3. Sociocultural impacts

According to Mason (2003), some of the most common positive sociocultural effects of tourism are the revitalisation of poorly developed regions, raising the quality of life, and reviving the social and cultural life of the community. All these impacts have been recognised in the responses of the interviewees.

Together with other forms of rural tourism, Parenzana has generated interest for rural areas, not only in the tourism sense, but also generally for investments and development of those areas (code C2).

*It has certainly stimulated new building and new interest for this area, entire abandoned villages have been reconstructed, such as the settlements of Biroslavi (Grožnjan), Antonci, Krti ... all of these were rebuilt thanks to Parenzana, and this trend of inland tourism development... Parenzana has certainly had an effect on this. (TB2)*

In addition to this cooperation and networking, it should also be stated that the local community receives a great deal by participating in events associated with the Parenzana trail. Further, the arrival of tourists into sparsely inhabited areas enables their interactions with the locals, which has positive connotations and could result in the sale of local products (code C1).

*Schoolchildren participate in these events, they have held art competitions and exhibits to celebrate jubilee years... there was a station in Triban, where an art exhibit was hosted on the theme of the Parenzana trail. (TB2)*

*Parenzana bypasses larger settlements (Završje, Kostajnica, Grožnjan), but passes through several villages, where visitors can engage in social contact, even by asking for some water... people appreciate this and take every opportunity to promote their work. (TB6)*

Furthermore, well-maintained trails with additional offer contribute to the better maintenance of settlements, that the local population can also use for recreational purposes (code C3). Also, Parenzana is well connected with other bicycle trails in the municipalities, which is very favourable in the sense of safety of trail users, and from the aspect of preventing conflicts between cyclists and other road users (code C4).

*Buje does not have any walking trails, since the configuration of the settlement Buje is hilly... with the revitalisation of the Parenzana trail, we have received a walking trail that is widely used by all, from young people to the elderly, even mothers with children... it is connected to the centre of Buje with a sidewalk... and this means a lot for the daily life of the settlement. (TB2)*

*From Motovun, you can go to (other) bike trails and virtually not enter onto the paved roads, for a mountain bike trail that is a fantastic thing, and this is thanks to the Parenzana. (TB1)*

The role of the Parenzana trail today is different from the one it played in the past, when it served to transport agricultural products, raw materials, and even passengers. However, its role in preserving the spatial identity and as a symbol of connection remains prominent (code C5).

*In the past, Parenzana was very important for the local population... serving for the transport of wine... today it also connects the cultures of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia as it did before... if the trail had not been revitalised, it would have become overgrown with thickets and forests, and all this would have been forgotten (TB3)*

*We are all aware of how the Parenzana has always been important (from the economic perspective) and of its history, and all that it means and how this is part of our identity. (TB7)*

This identity is clearly visible in the names of the hospitality businesses.

*Just in the Buje area, I can't say how many apartment providers have added the name Parenzana to their name... and we also have the Parenzana rural hotel in Volpia and the Parenzana bike hostel in Triban ... (TB2)*

Parenzana has also stimulated the conservation of heritage. Though most railway structures have received new functions over time, including residential, near the track, there are facilities that revive cultural heritage, such as rooms in museums (code C6).

*A model of the trail has been installed, just 10 metres from the old station, which has since been repurposed into a residential building. (TB3)*

Restored bridges and viaducts, constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflect the architectural heritage of that age, and conserved intangible heritage is seen in the many events that are organised.

*The quality of the construction, bridges and tunnels... are indicators of the architecture of the day, all of these tunnels are lined with beautifully cut stone. (TB2)*

*On the last Sunday in September, we hold the traditional Parenzana bike rally, in honour of the Parenzana trail. (TB3)*

#### **4.4 Environmental impacts and physiognomic changes**

The advantages of repurposing the trail lies in the fact that existing and often unused resources can be used in planning the route and its content (Lumdsom 2000). Thanks to the Parenzana, many clean-up and landscaping campaigns were launched along the former railway line, to clean up the overgrowth...

*Parenzana is not a burden on the environment, on the contrary... before everything was overgrown and you couldn't even enter into the tunnels, we had to go around them... and trees were already growing on the rail line. (TB2)*

...later, new content was added in the area, with municipalities also investing to improve this (code D1). It should also be stated that part of this route serves as a road, which is beneficial for sustainability and conservation of the environment (code D3).

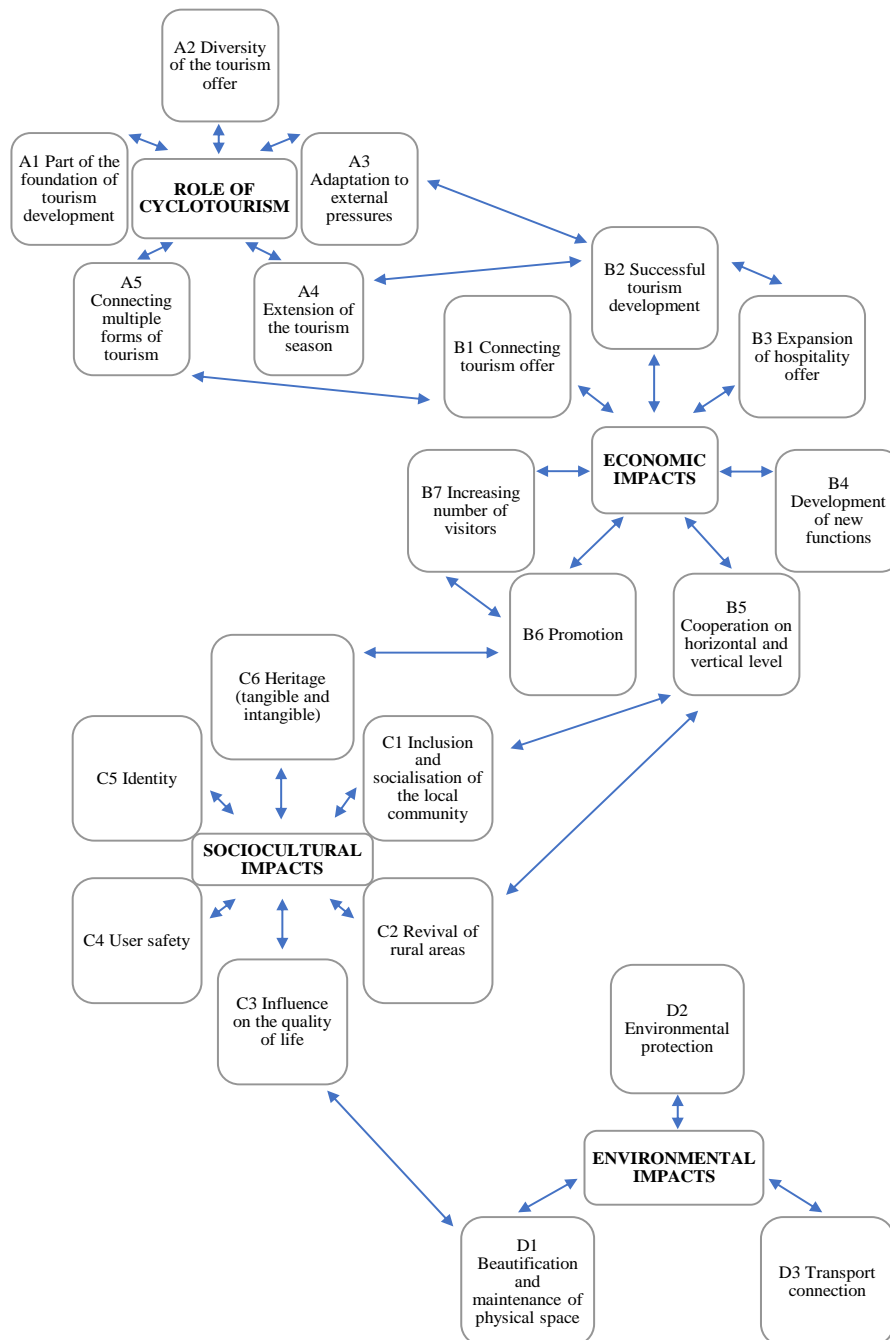
*An outdoor exercise area has been installed, this is great offer for both guests and the local population... it has positive effects on the spatial improvement... funds were obtained to install lighting in the tunnels, and this has brought direct benefits. (TB1)*  
*This connection between all these towns here in Slovenian Istria, is more important now than ever as a means of eco-friendly transportation. (TB7)*

Further, the interviewees stated that this trail has none of the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, as outlined by Mason (2003) and Mathieson and Wall (2006), such as soil pollution, vegetation and noise pollution. There is a problem that was stated and that they cannot control, and that is the use of the trail by motorised vehicles. Though this is prohibited, there is no systematic control in place. The Parenzana corridor, after it was made passable, also served for *other types of tourism, including motorsports (TB4), and served as a road to dump garbage dump, because people come with vans or cars and trailers and dump their garbage here (TB5)*. This damages the surface, increasing maintenance costs, and endangers the safety of trail users and harms the environment. Page (2009) stated that it is necessary to establish an adequate means of visitor management in order to protect the environment, and this is something that still requires work on the Parenzana trail. However, these were the only “negative impacts” that the interviewees recognised.

Finally, the interviewees stressed the importance of protecting the environment, as an important resource in tourism, and of highlighting the role of the Parenzana as a desirable form of tourism because it *does not burden the environment (code D2)*. As stated by Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) and Stoffelen (2018), tourists are distributed along the trail, and so the negative effects on the environment are reduced, making it easier to manage the carrying capacity. On the other hand, the natural environment is part of the authentic experience that the Parenzana offers visitors as a panoramic trail, and herein lies its high attractiveness.

*... this northwestern zone of Istria is very well preserved, particularly the upper area of Buje (Momjan, municipalities of Grožnjan and Oprtalj) ... this is ecologically the best preserved part of Istria. (TB6)*  
*The most beautiful part of the trail is when it enters into Croatia, with the view over Piran Bay and its saltworks, and then from Grožnjan towards Završje ... this is more panoramic ... the whole time, you can see the sea and Mt. Učka and the Mirna River valley. (TB2)*

Figure 5. Code scheme of the effects of the Parenzana and the role of cyclo-tourism



Source: Authors according to the interview results, 2021

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parenzana trail has shown that the repurposing of abandoned railway lines is one of the possible strategies for supporting the sustainable development of tourism in rural areas, as long as this is carefully planned. Integral and controlled development based on the resources at hand is also important. However, the research results have shown that the economic impacts of the Parenzana trail are moderate and more indirect than direct. The trail has not directly affected employment, but has resulted in an expansion of the hospitality offer. Furthermore, Parenzana has proven to be a tourism product that is quite resilient to unpredictable situations like the pandemic. Parenzana has created links between the existing tourist products and supported the promotion and collaboration of municipalities. It also helps to lengthen the tourism season. For the sociocultural impacts that are often shown in a negative way in the literature, the Parenzana trail has proven to be the opposite. It has helped a revival of the rural space and increased the popularity of the municipalities and towns along the route. It also contributes to the improvement of local rural services, especially in the areas of leisure and transport. It can also be concluded that the Parenzana trail does not negatively impact the environment, but that its relationship is more symbiotic. It helps the enhancement and maintenance of the environment along the route. For further development, property ownership issues will need to be resolved, as these are hindering the start of new projects. Also, the quality of the surface of the trail should be improved to make it more accessible to a wider circle of trail users. More shuttle services as well as greater investments in visibility are required. Finally, it is important to highlight the differences between Croatia and Slovenia. Though the trail in Slovenia also contributes to the diversity of the tourism offer, it mostly passes along the coast and through urban areas, oftentimes as a seaside promenade, perceived more as a city bicycle and recreational trail used by local population than a cyclo-tourism rail trail.

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**THE IMPACT OF THE PARENZANA RAIL TRAIL IN ISTRIA ON TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

**Abstract**

Railway trails or greenways are a well-known phenomenon related to rural tourism development. The Parenzana Rail Trail, a famous pedestrian and bicycle trail, was created by converting a decommissioned historic railroad line that runs through Italy (13 km), Slovenia (32 km) and Croatia (78 km). Research objective of the paper is to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of Parenzana Rail Trail in the local rural context. The research methodology is primarily based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of tourist boards from Croatian and Slovenian Istria. In 2019, a total of 93,545 visitors were registered at four centres in Croatia, with monthly visitor numbers highest in the early and late tourist seasons. Businesses have been established to provide bicycle rental and repair services and other equipment, and dedicated accommodation facilities have opened. Parenzana has created links between the existing tourist products and supported the promotion and collaboration of municipalities. It also contributes to the improvement of local rural services, especially in the areas of leisure and transport. Furthermore, it supports the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of spatial identity, and the enhancement and maintenance of the environment along the route. Future prospects include reducing spatial disparities in development trajectories, the need for greater promotion, and improving the surface of Parenzana to suit more visitors.

**Keywords:** Cyclo-tourism, Heritage revitalization, Istria, Parenzana, Rural tourism, Rail trails

**Natalija Krošnjak**, mag.geogr.  
E-mail: natalija.krosnjak@student.geog.pmf.hr

**Aleksandar Lukić**, PhD  
Full Professor  
Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb  
E-mail: alukic@geog.pmf.hr

## RECENT TRENDS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GORIŠKA BRDA: THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS

**Irma Potočnik Slavič**  
**Erika Kovačič Marinič**

### **Abstract**

Slovenian rural areas had encountered the tourist visit peak in year 2019; therefore, it is interesting to observe how rural areas with strong partnerships have mitigated the realities of two pandemic years (2020, 2021). The creation and practice of partnerships in rural areas was surveyed by using the quantitative and qualitative methods.

The focus is on a case study area, i. e. the Goriška Brda region (southwestern part of Slovenia, border region to Italy, wine and fruit growing is complementary upgraded with tourism in rural areas, with 5,600 inhabitants). The Goriška Brda region has been developing tourism for the last thirty years intensively and has become a well-known and high-quality (rural) tourist destination, attractive to international tourist markets. The year 2021 was recognized as the best tourist season ever: the region hosted 30,300 visitors and registered 58,400 overnights whilst offering 824 tourist beds. We were able to identify certain building blocks that strongly affect the co-construction of partnerships and affect the development of rural tourist destination: openness to new ideas and innovation, related to development of tourism in rural areas, willingness for networking, strong social capital resulting in target-oriented partnerships, entrepreneurial spirit, attachment to land, important role of supportive institutions (local wine cooperative), strong sense of place, but in pandemic period we should acknowledge the importance of the state's Covid measure of "tourist coupons". The later restructured the tourist visit in 2020 and 2021 when domestic tourists prevailed: comparing years 2019 and 2021, the arrivals of Slovenian tourists doubled, and the number of their overnights quadruplicated.

**Keywords:** Goriška Brda, partnership, Slovenia, tourism in rural areas

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Rural development is grounded, and driven by, what van der Ploeg and Marsden (2008) refer to as the rural web. This is a complex set of internally and externally generated interrelationships that shape the relative attractiveness of rural regions, economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. Rural webs are multidimensional, consisting of some key conceptual building blocks: of which endogeneity, novelty production, sustainability, social capital, institutional arrangements and the governance of markets are the key dimensions. The building blocks are seen and located in the dynamic context of »responses to the squeeze on rural economies through raising competitiveness« (van der Ploeg and Marsden 2008) and attempts to generally improve quality of life and sustainability of rural livelihood (altogether as broadly understood under the term resilience of rural

regions). Important features of such webs are their density, multi-dimensionality, impacts and dynamics.

Especially at the occasions of crisis (financial, food, and fuel crisis in 2008), natural hazards (earthquakes, floods, droughts, frost, etc.), international political situation (aggressions, migrant crisis) or pandemic (e. g. Covid-19) rural webs are essential since they reveal their resilience. Rural web is an analytical tool towards understanding (conceptually and empirically) of contemporary contested, complex, globalized, hybrid and fluid rural areas (Woods 2007; Klemenčič 2006; van der Ploeg and Marsden 2008; Potočnik Slavič 2010). Various authors (van der Ploeg and Marsden et al., 2008) argue that rural development processes occur as a continuous unfolding of rural webs in and throughout different rural regions. The development of such a web contributes to the performance of regional rural economies: the presence of smoothly functioning and comprehensive web explains the performance of a regional economy, its comparative advantages, its competitiveness, innovativeness and sustainability, as quality of life that it offers to its people (van der Ploeg et al. 2008, 2).

In this paper, we focus on the hilly and border winegrowing rural region in the south-western part of Slovenia (Goriška Brda region). The aim of our research is to identify key building blocks of functioning rural webs that have affected the recent trends in rural tourism development, by special focus on the co-construction of partnerships in the long-term development of a well-known rural tourist destination.

## **2. METHODS AND DATA**

Built upon several research (Kladnik 1996; Ažman Momirski et al. 2008; Pintar et al. 2010; Potočnik Slavič 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Cigale et al. 2013), on long-term fieldwork (from 1990s onwards) and data analysis on tourist accommodation facilities and tourist visit we managed to evolve a set of schematic and constructed graphical representations which explain the spatial-temporal development of Goriška Brda region as a (rural) tourism destination (Fig. 1).

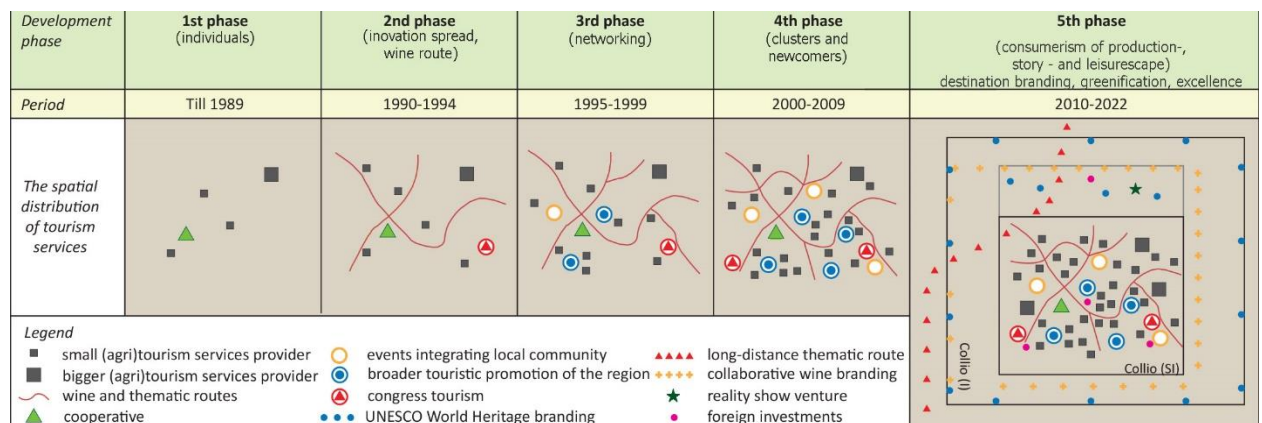
The below identified phases were constructed on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data, taking into consideration:

- the providers of tourist accommodation: their number, diversity and several spatial trends (dispersion and concentration) are evident;
- the scope and size of tourist infrastructure: the length and topics of thematic routes, events - either more locally oriented or several that contribute to the broader tourist promotion of the region (for example an attempt in a settlement of Slapnik to perform the reality show on architectural village reconstruction);
- the evidences on networking at local, regional and transnational level: the winegrowing region Brda (in Italian: Collio) extends over Slovenian (two thirds of

the region) and Italian (one third of the region) cross-border territory, and together they started with the process of acknowledgement of Brda/Collio terraces for the UNESCO World Heritage List;

- that Brda region is capitalizing on contact geographic position and history, being the meeting point of Sub-Mediterranean, Pre-Alpine and Alpine macro regions of Europe (e. g. with the long-distance hiking trail “from Alpine glaciers to the sea” with approx. 750 km connecting regions in Austria, Slovenia and Italy).

**Figure 1. Spatial-temporal modelling our (rural) tourism development in Goriška Brda region**



Source: adapted after Sirk, 2013.

Observing the investments, data and trends over more than 30 years, we identified five phases, which enable focused observation of the development of partnerships and rural tourism destination:

- the first/initial phase when mostly individual providers entered the scene (till 1989);
- the further development/second phase (1990–1994) where the spread of innovation (influenced mostly from neighbouring Italian Collio) could be encountered;
- the third phase (1995–1999) which was marked by networking being supported by local initiatives and national rural development policy measures (thematic routes, investment support);
- the fourth phase (2000–2009) where evident changes occurred in the appearance of clusters (several providers developed in some settlements), new events and some novel providers occurred;
- the fifth phase (from 2010 onwards) stretches over longer period of time which had to deal with several disruptions (financial crisis in 2008, Covid-19 effects, international political situations); as a consequence a more complex, hybrid structure of (rural) tourist destination is evident: growth of tourist visit is intertwined

with international destination branding (7 international certificates on sustainability: Green Key, Ecolabel, Emas, Ecocamping, Green Globe, Travelife, Bio hotels), greenification efforts and improvements in the quality of services, special policy measures for recovery after pandemic (so called national scheme of tourist coupons), and also an international recognition of high quality performance (ARGE Award for Goriška Brda region for integrated and sustainable rural development in 2021).

### **3. THE GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF GORIŠKA BRDA REGION (SHORT: BRDA)**

5,639 inhabitants (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije 2021) live in a small municipality, for Slovenian circumstances attesting a rather densely populated area. On average Brda consists of 45 settlements with 120 inhabitants. Particularly densely populated is the lower part of the area with 100 inhabitants per m<sup>2</sup>, while in the upper part there are less than 50 inhabitants per m<sup>2</sup> (Pintar et al. 2010). Today Goriška Brda region is facing with the unfavourable demographic structure (ageing index 164; SURS, 2020), but is at the same time a region with a strong agrarian character from the land use perspective and economic development as well (wine-cooperative, solo entrepreneurs, agricultural holdings with tourism as a supplementary activity on the farm; Ažman Momirski et al. 2008, Potočnik Slavič 2012), although the two-thirds of active population are employed in services (wholesale and retail, accommodation and food services are the key sectors), however, due to the specific geographical position an important share of active population daily commutes to the regional centre of Nova Gorica and to Italy (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The geographical location of Goriška Brda region



Source: Map database derived from NOAA OCS, Esri, DeLorme, geonames.org; Esri, DeLorme, NaturalVue, 2022.

Looking at the Brda municipality as a whole, it can be seen that the region has the irregular development pattern that is also evident in agriculture. The southern, lower, easier accessible and regarding to relief more open part of Goriška Brda is well developed with intensive viticulture and permanent orchards, while the upper Brda (including also bigger protected area) is lagging behind in development and had been affected by land abandonment and forest overgrowing. The southern part is more open to tourism development, whilst the northern part is facing a slower tourism development, as the area is also more isolated from traffic perspective from central part of Slovenia and rest of Brda (but on the other side just a few kilometres from Čedad/Cividale in Italy), there have been modest opportunities for employment outside agriculture (except few farm tourisms and art galleries for example in

settlement Breg at Golo Brdo), and that is why the emigration has affected the northern part of Brda in greater extent.

In Goriška Brda region, an important increase in rural tourism can be observed. Nowadays approach to tourism connects locally specific economic activities as viticulture, fruit and olive growing, which are in Goriška Brda already traditionally important activities. The municipality intends to strengthen the role of tourism by enabling the preservation of cultural landscape and assuring cultivation of land. Agriculture could be still more connected to the tourist offer, what has already been partly realised with recognisable quality farm tourism and wine shops offer, and their inclusion in wine road (wine, fruit), and every year's traditional, recognisable and well visited events (wine and cherries festival, national cycling marathons, Giro d'Italia, location for entertainment and film industry, etc.).

#### **4. TOURIST ACCOMMODATION STRUCTURE AND TOURIST VISIT OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS**

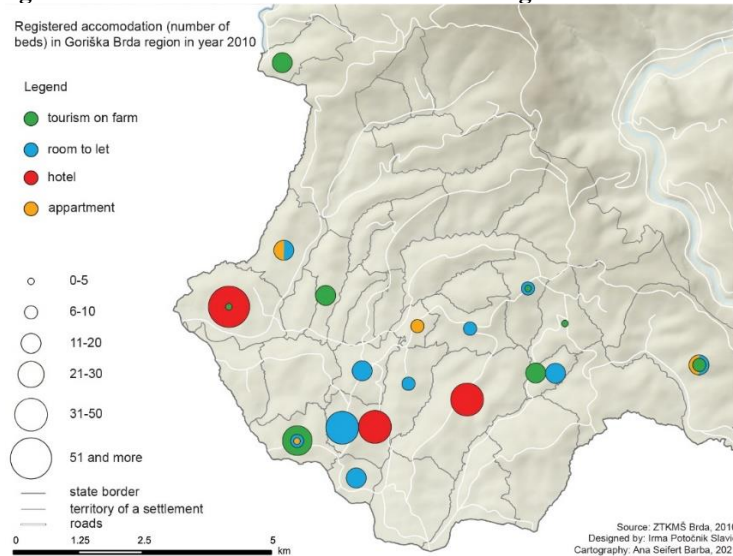
We have observed the spatial development of tourist accommodation in Goriška Brda region since 2010. We have not provided maps based on relative figures since we would like to present the absolute growth of this spatial phenomenon (Fig. 3–5).

According to the data (Zavod za turizem, kulturo, mladino in šport Brda, 2010) in **year 2010** the region had 356 beds on 25 locations and prevailing small (12 locations with up to 10 beds mostly as rooms to let) and medium sized accommodation providers (11 locations with 11–20 beds, preferably as tourism on farm) and two bigger providers (i. e. two hotels – one with 40, the other 64 beds). In **year 2020**, there were 674 beds available at 60 locations: 42 small providers offered up to 10 beds (a new offer of beds in apartments, flats and houses and rooms to let), medium sized providers (11–20 beds) were available on 14 locations, and four bigger providers (more than 20 beds) developed (Zavod za turizem, kulturo, mladino in šport Brda 2020).

Data (Zavod za turizem, kulturo, mladino in šport Brda 2021) revealed that in **year 2021** there were 824 beds available at 71 locations in Goriška Brda region. In comparison to years 2010 and 2020 (Fig. 6), we can observe important growth in number of small providers (47 with 1–9 beds), steady growth of medium sized (18) and also some shifts among bigger providers (4 in category 21–30 beds, 4 in categories exceeding 31 beds). Categorization of beds has changed as well: more apartments or higher quality of services are available (so called “houses”), but also a camp (settlement of Podsabotin) and glamping. In 15 years, the number of providers has tripled, accommodation providers from 2000 and 2020 have survived (just two businesses do not operate any more), and strong impetus was put on quality improvement. Clustering of tourist services in several settlements (Kozana, Medana, Plešivo, Podsabotin, Šmartno, Vipolže) is relevant, where several providers with different accommodations co-create a more complex tourist destination.

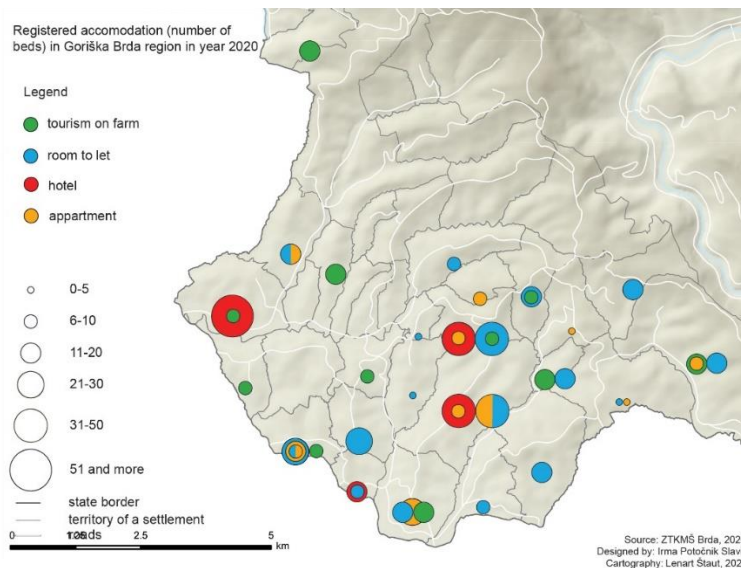


Figure 3. Registered accommodation in Goriška Brda region in 2010.



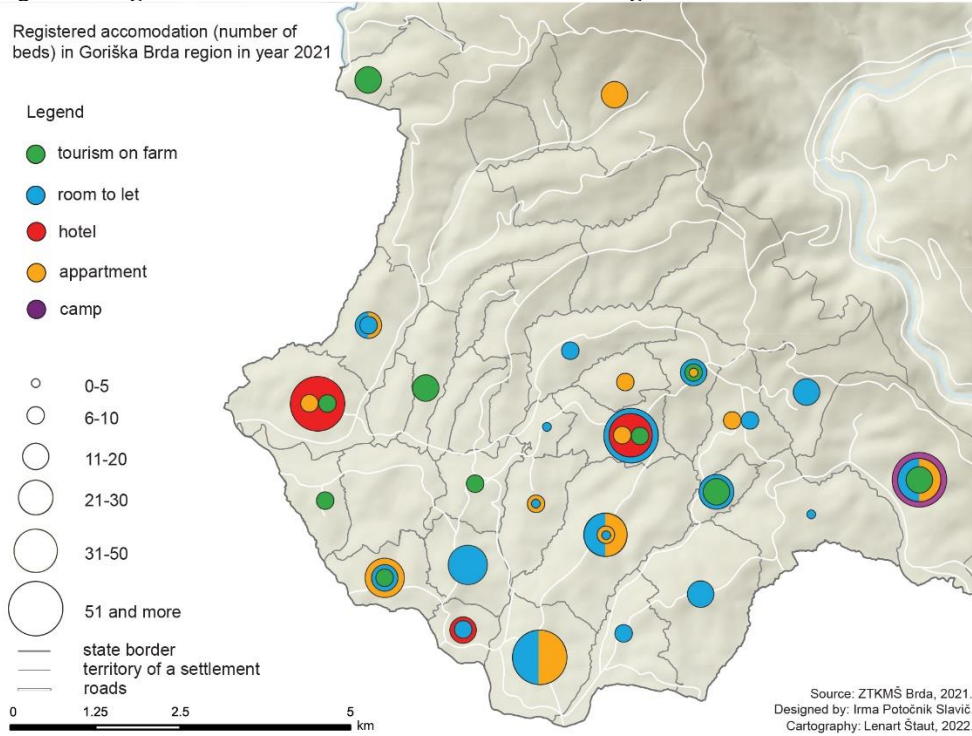
Source: ZTKMŠ Brda, 2010.

Figure 4. Registered accommodation in Goriška Brda region in 2020.



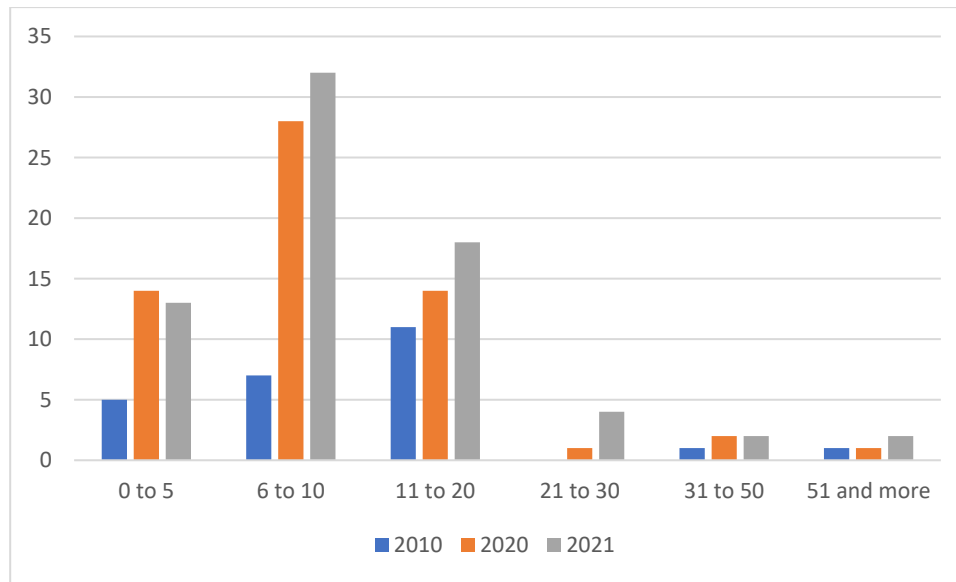
Source: ZTKMŠ Brda, 2020.

**Figure 5. Registered accommodation in Goriška Brda region in 2021.**



Source: ZTKMŠ Brda, 2021.

**Figure 6. Comparison of tourist accommodation providers (with number of beds) between 2010, 2020 and 2021.**

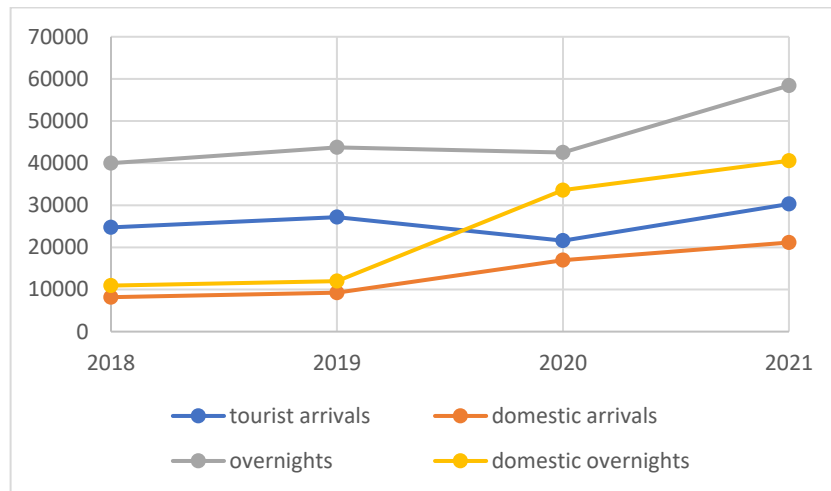


Source: Zavod za turizem, kulturo, mladino in šport Brda, 2010, 2020, 2021.

The structure of tourist visit changed importantly over the last few years (Fig. 7):

- in year 2018 Slovene arrivals represented 33% of total arrivals, and increased to 79% in 2020, and decreased to 70% in 2021;
- similar developments occurred also with overnights: Slovenian tourists participated with 27.3% in 2018, 78.8 % in 2020 and 69.5% in 2021;
- in year 2019 foreign tourist came from 100 countries, in 2020 from 68, and in 2021 from 84 countries;
- average tourist stay has been prolonged from 1,62 (2018) to 1,97 days (2020);
- a small decrease in tourist arrivals and overnights was recorded in 2020, but index 2021/2018 reached 122 (arrivals) and 146 (overnights).

Fig. 7. Data on tourist arrivals and overnights (2018–2021)



Source: Zavod za turizem, kulturo, mladino in šport Brda, 2010, 2020, 2021.

## 5. EFFICIENT NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIP, LOCAL/REGIONAL RURAL WEB CREATION CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

Despite the above explained endogenous potentials, constant novelty production (for example new varieties of wine, accommodations, different tourist products and services, new marketing campaigns, etc.), institutional arrangements (co-operative, consortium, associations and clubs, tourist information centre, etc.), special devotion to land management, openness to markets, and entrepreneurial spirit, one should emphasise that one of the most important building blocks of rural web in Brda, essential for rural tourism development and a very positive image of the region, is the existing social capital.

The *communitarian perspective on networking and partnership* equates social capital and economic development with local organizations such as clubs, associations, and civic groups (nearly 40 in the Municipality of Brda). This perspective centres on the number and density of these groups in a given community. Societies and associations shown in the innermost circle (Rado Simoniti Mixed Choir, Srečko Kumar Male Choir, Brda Brass Orchestra, Brda Cycling Club, Dobrovo Voluntary Firemen Society, Peasant Women's Association; Potočnik Slavič 2012; Fig. 8) are among the most active in terms of the number of events in which they take part as organisers or participants. These societies and associations are also important because of the number of members and participants in their activities on a local, regional, national or international scale since they act as promoters of Brda, Brda residents and their identity. In the opinion of providers of information, these societies and associations

are the driving force behind the strengthening and development of society, culture, sports, tourism and other activities within the local community.

We have opted for this kind of model since the structure of activity of the societies and associations promotes integration, complementarity and incentives: these societies and associations have a membership of 2,500, which means that more than 40 % of the population of Brda are, at least formally, members (this data is not accurate since many people hold simultaneous membership of several societies or associations; Potočnik Slavič 2012), one third of whom are active members. Some interest groups (i.e. the Vipolže Winegrower Society, which is now a consortium) have already outgrown the limits set for voluntary societies and are registered under different legal forms. This model concept reveals a solid interconnectedness which leads to the conclusion that strong social capital exists: it is estimated that relationships based on mutual knowledge, cooperation and trust also create the preliminary conditions necessary for active economic cooperation. Since many people in Brda are involved simultaneously in several activities, this means that, in essence, the same people engage in several activities. For this reason, we assume that these links (in spite of occasional occurring examples to the contrary) are even stronger, which can be corroborated by the self-promotion of some entrepreneurs, such as winegrowers within their associations. It should be noted that membership in societies and associations and their activities have a longstanding tradition in Slovenia and are, particularly in border, remote and rural areas, an important driving force behind the vibrancy of social life. Since these activities are carried out on a voluntary basis, it is impossible to ascertain their future development, given the fact that a great deal depends on individuals, their potential, mutual understanding, intergenerational transitions and the general attitude of the society towards these types of activities. Young people, in particular, rarely engage in this type of organisation or the strengthening of social capital in the rural environment. They find personal motivation, the example set by family, mutual relations or the image of a particular society or association in the broader community, to be of greater significance. The success of individual societies and associations can often be attributed to the personal endeavours of their chairman or active members. In Goriška Brda region the social capital is inherently good, and that its presence has a positive effect on community welfare and partnership set-up.

Fig. 8. Organisation of Societies, Clubs and Associations in the Municipality of Brda



Source: Potočnik Slavič, 2012.

The *networks approach on networking and partnership* attempts to account for both the positive and negative side of social capital and stresses the importance of vertical as well as horizontal associations between people and organizations, such as community groups and firms. We provide two important evidences: the local wine-cooperative and the entrepreneurial incentive.

*Local wine-cooperative* (Goriška Brda Wine Cellar) is a partnership of subcontractors: private individuals (600) who own 1,400 ha of vineyards in Goriška Brda region participate in a cooperative (est. in 1957) which is the biggest SME in Goriška Brda region with nearly 100 employees. Subcontractors have an average of 2 ha of vineyards, mostly they lease grapes to the cooperative, are part-time farmers, engaged in viticulture, fruit growing and olive growing in addition to their jobs. The cooperative takes care of processing, marketing

and sales, has its own specialized shop, a retail network and provides specialized trainings and knowledge exchange.

*Entrepreneurial incentive.* On the other side, mostly bigger vineyard owners (10-15 ha of vineyards, approx. 100 owners cultivate 600 ha of vineyards) have their own processing units, strong individual marketing and sales, quite often are also providers of tourism services (so called “houses” with high-quality and personalized approach), but are also important network brokers and contribute to destination marketing. Several “houses” became part of entrepreneurial incentive, which connects wine with art. “Art Circle” (since 2011) involves the establishment of cultural and artistic embassies. In wine cellars and farms throughout the Goriška Brda region, once per year artists occupy 14 locations and create artistic, sculptural, graphic and design creations fused with wine, wine culture, painting bottles, labels and barrels. The events take place with the cooperation of “houses”, artists and under the supervision of individual diplomatic and consular missions (more than 10), which have opened their premises on vineyard and cellar estates.

The *institutional perspective on networking and partnership* argues that the vitality of community networks and civil society is largely the product of the political, legal, and institutional environment and that the capacity of social groups to act in their collective interest depends on the quality of the formal institutions under which they reside (Tisenkopfs et al. 2008).

Due to a keen interest in introducing various activities for the purpose of strengthening the local economy, Brda has a huge conflict potential and runs the risk of invasive capital domination, resulting in a heavy environmental burden on this rural area and possibly its degradation.

For above listed purposes a special Sustainability Action Plan was prepared for period 2020–2022, herewith covering six fields: destination management, nature and landscape, environment and climate change, culture and tradition, social climate, local economy, social impact, operation of tourist enterprises. Document *per se* is based on collective learning since it requires that actors and stakeholders develop synergy, joint development visions and joint development activities. The common vision for Goriška Brda region as “an authentic, green, healthy, environmental friendly and safe destination” was confirmed by local population and visitors. Competent “green coordinator” will participate in educational and training provided by national Green Scheme of Slovene tourism. A strong cooperation is taking place among Association for Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports Brda (responsible for implementation of Sustainability Action Plan) and all relevant tourist stakeholders, also with practical scheduling events throughout the year and in different locations throughout the region. Contemporary monitoring on positive and negative impacts (based on tangible indicators) of tourism is provided, as well as proper communication and reporting to the mayor and municipality council. Several incentives are focused on sustainable mobility, sustainable water and waste management, energy provision, awareness of climate change. Special

emphasis is put on the inclusion of local products and services in tourism offer and monitoring of customer satisfaction (Akcijski načrt destinacije Brda 2020–2022, 2020).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Goriška Brda region is representing an area with very deeply rooted inter-personal contacts (strong bonding and bridging social capital) and is an example of a geographically defined area that strengthens its endogenous development potentials for a variety of reasons. Development is based principally on agriculture (wine- and fruit growing), which is closely followed by tourism. The area enjoys a positive reputation and is known in regional and international markets as being a high-quality and specialised rural tourism destination with well developed local networks and a distinctive local identity. Good established and active networking in Goriška Brda creates essential building block for local community capacity, rural web is oriented into various common objectives.

Rural web in Goriška Brda presents a backbone of resilient rural community. Establishment of networks and partnerships among societies and clubs, supported and facilitated by public administration, cooperative as well as by individuals, is highly welcomed Goriška Brda region and the networks tend to persist after initiation. Support for collective learning was also provided by local associations. In order to create resilient rural areas, it is necessary that diverse development actors learn to work together. Operational agents need to connect, include and coordinate many diverse actors. It is also important to find the right scale of operation – it should be related to areas sharing a common identity (Wellbrock et al. 2013). The preconditions for efficient networks, such as cooperativeness, entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, strong social bonds and long-term trust-based relationships, all being very important for long-term rural tourism development, count as characteristic features of the actors in rural areas of Goriška Brda region.

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## **RECENT TRENDS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GORIŠKA BRDA: THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Abstract**

Slovenian rural areas had encountered the tourist visit peak in year 2019; therefore, it is interesting to observe how rural areas with strong partnerships have mitigated the realities of two pandemic years (2020, 2021). The creation and practice of partnerships in rural areas was surveyed by using the quantitative and qualitative methods.

The focus is on a case study area, i. e. the Goriška Brda region (southwestern part of Slovenia, border region to Italy, wine and fruit growing is complementary upgraded with tourism in rural areas, with 5,600 inhabitants). The Goriška Brda region has been developing tourism for the last thirty years intensively and has become a well-known and high-quality (rural) tourist destination, attractive to international tourist markets. The year 2021 was recognized as the best tourist season ever: the region hosted 30,300 visitors and registered 58,400 overnights whilst offering 824 tourist beds. We were able to identify certain building blocks that strongly affect the co-construction of partnerships and affect the development of rural tourist destination: openness to new ideas and innovation, related to development of tourism in rural areas, willingness for networking, strong social capital resulting in target-oriented partnerships, entrepreneurial spirit, attachment to land, important role of supportive institutions (local wine cooperative), strong sense of place, but in pandemic period we should acknowledge the importance of the state's Covid measure of "tourist coupons". The later restructured the tourist visit in 2020 and 2021 when domestic tourists prevailed: comparing years 2019 and 2021, the arrivals of Slovenian tourists doubled, and the number of their overnights quadruplicated.

**Keywords:** Goriška Brda, partnership, Slovenia, tourism in rural areas

**Irma Potočnik Slavič**, PhD

Professor

E-mail: irma.potocnik@ff.uni-lj.si

**Erika Kovačič Marinič**

Project manager

Institute for Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Brda

E-mail: erika.km@brda.si

## **RURAL TOURISM OF GORSKI KOTAR - BETWEEN POTENTIALS AND REALITIES**

**Jasenka Kranjčević**  
**Goranka Tuhtan**  
**Izidora Marković Vukadin**

### **Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gorski kotar proved to be a very rural, accessible and safe tourist destination with a diverse offer due to its strong natural and anthropogenic spatial characteristics, good transport connections and low level of tourist exploitation. Given that Gorski kotar quickly adapted to the challenges, the question arises whether Gorski kotar has a tradition of tourism, or whether it is a new or old tourist destination? To determine whether Gorski kotar has a tradition of managing rural tourism, the history of tourist organizations, tourist traffic, accommodation, offer and methods of promotion from the very beginning of modern tourism to 1991 were researched. From that analysis, a synthesis of guidelines and activities that would ensure long-term and sustainable tourism development are proposed. The research is based on the collection and analysis of statistical data, legal regulations, tourist travelogues / books, guides, brochures, posters, advertisements, postcards and promotional materials). Based on various data collected from archives, libraries, museums, tourist boards and private collections and using desk research, time slice and inductive-deductive methods, the paper concludes that Gorski kotar has a tradition of rural tourism (winter and summer), offering various tourist products and promotion channels that can serve as a basis for designing new visions of development.

**Keywords:** Gorski kotar, rural tourism, tradition, tourist offers, tourist promotion

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Rural tourism, which includes all types of tourism activities, is becoming an important direction in the development of rural areas that are otherwise threatened by marginalization with all its consequences (Das and Rainey 2010). It is therefore not uncommon for the UNWTO to launch The Best Tourism Villages initiative to promote rural tourism, while pilot projects have been launched at EU level to promote specific aspects of rural tourism, such as smart villages, charming villages, slow travel, Network for Rural Development, etc. Rural tourism as a factor in reviving an area exposed to deruralization, deagrarianization and depopulation is frequently considered in international (Das and Rainey 2010; Johnson and Lichter 2019; López-Sanz et al. 2021) but also domestic scientific literature (Lukić 2000; Bartoluci et al. 2016; Marušić 2017; Kovačiček et al. 2019). So far, the development of rural tourism in continental Croatia has been largely left to individual entrepreneurial initiative and scarce sources of funding, so the heterogeneous and fragmented rural tourism offer based on different types and specific forms of tourism that can take place in space (Bartoluci et al. 2016).

The life cycle of rural destinations often neglects to place their positions in the global context of tourism, the impact and importance of local and global tourism organizations, the development of tourism products (forms of tourism) and tourism promotion over time as a basis for thinking, designing and implementing future activities. Rural tourism providers often face inadequate interdisciplinary development plans, lack of financial

resources for promotion, and also find it difficult to adapt to the current global market situation dominated by modern communication and technology (Dimitrovski et al. 2012; Završki and Horvat 2020). Therefore, with the help of state bodies, local self-government units, organizational and promotional role of the regional tourist community and reviewing previously acquired knowledge in the promotion of Gorski Kotar, we can reach guidelines for strengthening resilience to challenges, sustainable development, more effective promotion of the region (Mandarić et al. 2017) but also individual tourism products. Despite all the potentials of rural areas, rural tourism in practice encounters numerous obstacles such as interdisciplinary planning, promotion of areas and tourism entities operating in these areas. The power and role of global events and modern technology (social networks) for achieving fast communication in the market of tourist services (Standing et al. 2014) must not be neglected.

Rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic showed a propensity for tourism, especially if development stakeholders recognized their values, diversified tourism products and promoted themselves through modern channels. Tourist traffic and interest in rural areas have increased significantly in those regions that are best positioned in the supply of rural accommodation and have experienced a stronger and more lasting recovery in domestic demand, partly due to national and regional closures (Seraphin and Dosquet 2020; Peixeira Marques et al. 2022). This can primarily be related to rural destinations, such as Gorski kotar, whose rural characteristics such as spatial fragility, low population density, good transport links and different tourist offer were the basis for reviving tourism from several aspects through tourist traffic, increasing accommodation capacity and by extending the stay. Given the above, the question arises whether in the period of the pandemic Gorski kotar was recognized as a new or as an old tourist destination?

Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine, based on the valorisation of historical experiences of tourism, whether historical experiences can help in designing new tourism guidelines / activities that would ensure long-term and sustainable development of tourism. To this end, the development of tourism in Gorski kotar is divided into time periods in which global events have strongly influenced the organizations and flows of tourism. Within certain periods, the activities of tourist organizations, tourist traffic, accommodation offer, tourist products, forms of tourism and promotion channels were considered.

During the research, desk research methods were used, time slice and inductive - deductive. Some of the main limitations of the research are frequent changes in the territorial organization of local self-government units, making it difficult to accurately compare tourist traffic by municipalities / cities, archaic terms, the lack of a single database of uniform data on tourist traffic, tourist organizations throughout history, employment in tourism, and others.

## **2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GORSKI KOTAR**

Due to the construction of roads (Karolina, Jozefina, Lujzijana and Rudolfina) in the 18th and 19th centuries, the area of Gorski kotar, is mainly recognized for the transport of goods, in the so-called. the preliminary stage of tourism was recognized as an area of

transit. This laid the foundations of transit tourism (Knežević and Grbac Živković 2013). For the further development of tourism in Gorski kotar, in addition to the attractive area, an important role was played by the construction of the Budapest-Rijeka railway (1873), which, in addition to goods traffic, also offered passenger traffic to the Adriatic. This means that in this early stage of tourism development, the competitiveness of the rural mountain area of Gorski kotar was based on railways, which is ultimately reflected in the tourist information system - especially through the regular timetable, orientation drawings and propaganda leaflets (Knežević and Grbac Živković 2013).

In the Croatian-speaking area, the Illyrian Antun Nemčić Gostovinski pointed out the tourist potentials of Gorski kotar in the middle of the 19th century in Putošnice (1845). Although Nemčić is a writer, not a tourist worker, his comment is interesting when he commented on the lack of promotion of natural tourist potentials. Dragutin Hirc (1898) contributed to the greater tourist recognition of Gorski kotar in Croatia, as a mountain tourist destination, by publishing the book *Gorski kotar: pictures, descriptions, and travelogues* in 1898. This book presents in more detail the tourist area of Lokve, Delnica, Fužine, Skrad and other rural places and mountain peaks Risnjak, Bjelolasica, Viševica, etc. The possibilities of mountaineering excursions in Gorski kotar (summer and winter) and flora, fauna, mode of arrival, stay, etc. can be found in several articles published in the journal *Hrvatski planinar* (D.H., 1898, D.H. 1899, JM, 1899a, JM 1899b, JM 1899c, *Planinarski izvještaj*, 1914).

In the absence of data on the year of establishment of tourist associations or records of tourist traffic for the development of tourism in Gorski Kotar, the end of the 19th century is taken as the time of the beginnings of tourism development. As this paper seeks to explore tourism from the very beginning to the independence of Croatia, in order to facilitate understanding of its development of rural tourism is divided into periods associated with the establishment of different countries by periods.

### **2.1. Period until World War I.**

In this period, Gorski kotar is going through the initial stage of rural tourism development. In it, various publications such as books, travelogues, postcards and ultimately tourist guides are crucial for the development of communication with the potential market. Given the lack of other modalities of promotion in this period, the written word was crucial. From the aspect of tourism in that period, one of the most valuable publications is the publication *Baths, health resorts and summer resorts in the kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia [Kupališta, lječilišta i ljetovališta u kraljevinama Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji]*, published in 1914 by the Society for Foreigners of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia. In the chapter dedicated to Gorski kotar, 9 tourist places are highlighted. It is interesting to point out that the publication was primarily informative in terms of promotion and in the design of the tourist product, that the tourist places are described in such a way that possible excursions (content) but also reception accommodation capacities are described next to each place. Almost all places (Table 1) have a categorization of mountain resorts, while Fužine also has a categorization of climatic places, which indicates a connection with health tourism. This assumption can be related to the then well-known pharmacy "K sv. Antunu" from Fužine (Fatović

Ferenčić 2019).<sup>1</sup> The tourism sector has identified a large potential market in people with impaired health, which has influenced the development of health and spa tourism (Kovačević and Tomić 2019).

Thus, presented in one place 9 tourist places indicate that some places even before 1914 had established a Committee for the Traffic of Foreigners united in a broader form of association. The fact that Fužine had a Committee for the Traffic of Foreigners in 1911 (Crnić ed. 1981: 734) points to this assumption, while Skrad founded the Committee for the Traffic of Foreigners in 1914 (Turističko Društvo Skrad 1964). From the promotional material published 111 years ago, it can be seen that Fužine was categorized as a summer resort and offered winter sports, lawn tennis, forest trips with views of Rijeka, Kvarner islands, Velebit, etc., hot and cold baths, inns with moderate prices, a doctor and a doctor, a reading room, a post office with a telegram, an armory station, etc. Fužine pointed out that they have healthy and clean air (climatotherapy) and that an entertainment train runs from Rijeka every Sunday and on holidays. It was also pointed out that inns have moderate prices and have apartments for shorter and longer stays (Crnić ed. 1981: 734).

Table 1. Resorts in Gorski kotar-- tourist categorisations in 1914.

Settlement	Tourist categorization	Hospitality and tourist facilities	Excursion description
<b>Brod na Kupu</b>	Mountain summer resort	-	Yes
<b>Crni Lug</b>	Mountain summer resort	Holiday apartments in inns (10 apartments) and in private houses	Yes
<b>Delnice</b>	Mountain summer resort	Inn Šafar, Inn M. Rački, Hostelry Čop.	Yes
<b>Fužine</b>	Mountain summer resort and climatic place	-	Yes
<b>Lokve</b>	Pleasant mountain summer resort	-	Yes
<b>Mrkopalj</b>	Mountain summer resort	Inn Lovre Lipovca and Inn Blaža Mataje	Yes
<b>Plešće</b>	Mountain summer resort	Inn Antun Čop and Inn Milan Muhvić	Yes
<b>Ravna Gora</b>	Pleasant summer resort	-	Yes
<b>Skrad</b>	For the nervously ill	Hostelry Skrad	Yes

Source: Društvo za promet stranaca u kraljevinama Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji (1914): 24.-31.

It is an interesting approach to the promotion in which the contact persons with whom communication is necessary if you want to visit the Gorski Kotar area are very clear. Thus, for accommodation in Gorski kotar, except in inns for transit tourism, it is known that pharmacist Jelinek (J.M. 1899a) had to contact a pharmacist to plan a longer holiday in Delnice at the end of the 19th century. According to available data, until the First World War, the only hotel in Gorski kotar was the one in Vrbovsko (1900) with 25 beds

<sup>1</sup> The pharmacy received a silver medal for its work in Vienna in 1894.

and was owned by the Woodcarving Factory, while the inns were in Delnice, Fužine and Vrbovsko. Thus, according to available data before the First World War, there was a small number of tourist and catering facilities in Gorski kotar with small accommodation capacities of approximately 65 beds and 195 seats in restaurants (Crnić ed. 1981., Društvo za promet stranaca, 1914).

Figure 1. Postcards of Mrkopalj, Delnice, Crni Lug and Prezid before the First World War.



Source: TIC Mrkopalj, Private Archive

In addition to books, guides and publications, postcards played a role in the promotion and popularization of destinations, presenting attractive landscapes, places and the culture of life and work, and had today's role of personal transmission of information.

They began to be printed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, postcards are in postal traffic: Mrkopalj, Fužine, Lokve, Brod na Kupu, Čabar, Plešće, Gomirje and others. Active stay in the natural environment (walking, hiking, tennis, cycling and winter sports) are among the first forms of tourism that are highlighted for the development of tourism in Gorski kotar.

In February 1913, in Mrkopalj, the Croatian Academic Sports Club (HAŠK) organized a three-day ski course for 14 participants, and in 1914 for 16 participants.<sup>2</sup> After the course, the next day some participants went skiing to Bjelolasica, which hosted the first alpine skiing in Croatia— the first ski and mountaineering event in Croatia of this type. running of soldiers under war readiness and descent of skiers and soldiers from Čelimbaša 1.5 km long (Lipovščak 1952). From the above we can conclude that in the period before the First World War Gorski kotar was recognized as a destination for rural tourism with many tourist products. The development of tourism relates to vacation, health (climatic health resort, fresh and clean air) and sports and recreational forms (snow sports and hiking) (Kranjčević 2017, Kranjčević 2019). An organized promotion was also launched by issuing postcards, brochures, and guides.

## 2.2. The period between the two world wars

World War I cause a massive downfall of the pre-war rise of tourism. It took several years to reorganize and recover. In the new political conditions (new state, new government) tourism in Gorski Kotar was first organized through Committees and Societies for Foreigners, then through the Association for the Promotion of Tourism in the Upper Adriatic and from 1935 through the Tourist Association for the Croatian Littoral and Gorski Kotar.<sup>3</sup> This association carries out numerous activities in the area of Gorski kotar, especially from 1931 to 1934. Since 1936, the Association has regulated the rights and obligations of tourist places in Gorski kotar, namely: Brod na Kupu, Crni Lug, Čabar, Delnice, Fužine, Lokve, Mrzla Vodica, Ravna Gora and Skrad (Crnić ed. 1981). This laid the foundations for the systematic development of tourism.

The earliest data on tourist traffic in Gorski kotar were recorded in 1932 in Delnice. From the tourist traffic in the period from 1932 to 1939 it is evident that the largest tourist traffic was recorded in 1937 and 1938, which is the result of organized promotion and offer of tourist organizations. As for the number of visitors in Gorski kotar, in 1937 Delnice had the largest share (33.19%), and the largest share in the number of overnight stays was recorded in Fužine (32.55%), followed by Skrad (28.06%) and then Delnice (19.76%). In 1938, the largest share in terms of the number of visitors was recorded in Fužine (32.55%), Skrad (28.06%) and Delnice (19.76%), and the largest share in the number of overnight stays was recorded in Skrad (35.57 %), followed by Skrad, Fužine

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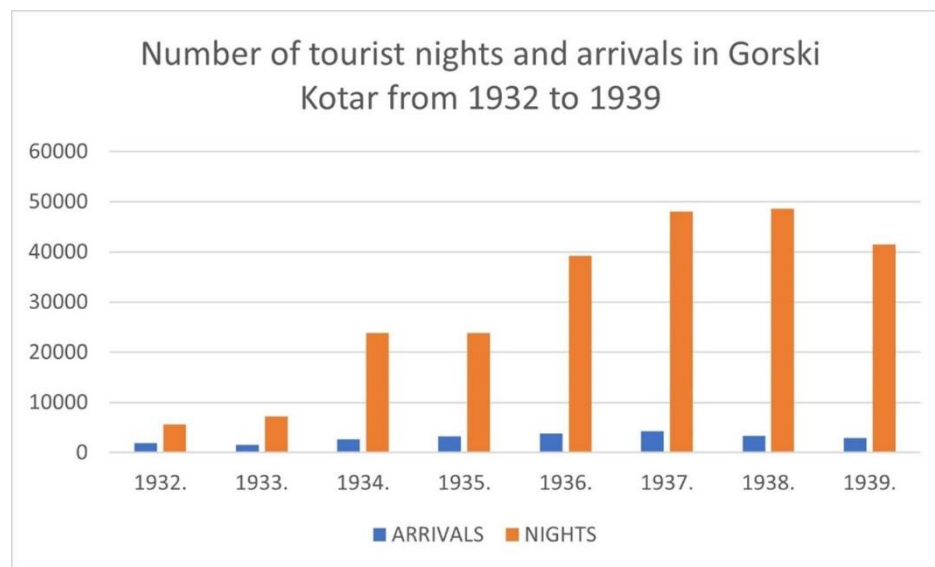
<sup>2</sup> In 1914, after completing the course, HAŠK organized the first "ski championship for Croatia and Slavonia" in Mrkopalj. 14 competitors took part in the 7 km run.

<sup>3</sup> Between the two world wars, the Committees for the Traffic of Foreigners were established, later called the Climate Improvement Commissions. Since 1936, these organizations have been called Tourist Boards (TO). The Association of Upper Adriatic Baths changed its name to the Association for the Promotion of Tourism in the Upper Adriatic and since 1935 to the Tourist Association for the Croatian Littoral and Gorski kotar - which assumes that the Tourist Board of Gorski kotar also joined the Association. TO Delnice has been a member of the Alliance since 1932, and Fužine, Lokve and Skrad since 1934, Brod na Kupu and Čabar since 1937 (Crnić, ed., 1981: 745).



(27%) and Delnice (19.14%) (Figure 2). In the period 1932-1935 the largest number of arrivals was made from the tourists from former Yugoslavia— domestic tourism, and that the biggest motive for arrival was vacation and in small share business tourism (Statistika prometa stranaca Hrvatskog primorja i Gorskog kotara, 1935, 1; Statistika prometa stranaca Hrvatskog primorja i Gorskog kotara, 1936, 28). At that time, children's colonies (resorts) were opened, as well as military resorts (for fitness training, recovery from submarines and vacations).

Figure 2. Number of tourist nights and arrivals in Gorski Kotar from 1932 to 1939.



Source: Gorski kotar (1981.), Gorski kotar Book Fund, ed. Alojz Crnić, Delnice

An important travelogue of Gorski kotar between the two world wars, which contributed to the promotion of tourism, is Rudolf Strohal's *Uz Lujzinsku cestu* from 1935. As for accommodation in Gorski Kotar, there are two hotels between the two world wars. Zeleni vir in Skrad since 1919 and Tomislav in Delnice since 1924. Pensions are open in: Vrbovsko, Vrata, Delnice, Fužine, Skrad, and Lokve. Inn opened in Čabar, Gerovo, and Brod na Kupu. The Banovina Children's Resort opened in Fužine and the Naval Resort in Skrad. These tourist and catering facilities have increased their accommodation capacity to receive tourists. These facilities need to be added to the services of cafes and inns. According to available data between the two world wars, in Gorski kotar, 15 buildings with 327 beds and 775 seats in restaurants were opened (Crnić ed. 1981).

Regarding the designed promotion, the issue of the prospectus on Gorski kotar in 1934 in 10,000 copies stands out. The Tourist Association issued brochures for the entire area of the Association with photographs and texts about Gorski kotar places, members in Croatian, German, French, Polish, Hungarian and Czech. Before the beginning of World War II in 1939, a new representative brochure was prepared for the entire area of the Alliance, which includes Gorski kotar in German, Hungarian and Croatian in 30,000 copies. Railways are also included in the tourist promotion of Gorski kotar. Attractive

photographs of Gorski kotar are on display at larger railway stations and in carriages (Crnić ed. 1981: 745). The role in the promotion at the end of this period is used by new media such as radio and film. A lecture of Gorski kotar was held in 1935 at the Zagreb Radio Station. The Goranin Society from Zagreb paid for the filming of the first film about Gorski Kotar in 1936. From 1936-1941, the Society published the magazine Goranin in which tourist topics were also published. The monthly Yugoslav Tourist Review 1934-1936 was launched in Sušak in which almost every issue is dedicated to the tourist articles of Gorski kotar with attractive photographs.

**Figure 3.** Postcards between the two world wars Brod Moravice, Delnice, Mrkopalj and Plešće.



Source: TIC Mrkopalj, Private Archive

In this period the emphasis of development is on mountaineering and sports-recreational (ski resorts) tourism, which is visible through the construction of tourist infrastructure. Mountain lodges are being built, including one on Risnjak. Delnice and Mrkopalj are increasingly important centres for winter sports because ski competitions from various snow disciplines are organized (Crnić ed. 1981: 745). An important fact for winter sports is that the first ski jumps in Croatia "Pod Vrhin" was built in Mrkopalj (Zlatni skijaški jubilej Mrkopalj 1913— 1963, 1963). In this period, the development of tourism is causally and consequently related to agriculture, electrification, landscaping (parks, public buildings) as well as employment. Summarizing the period between the two world wars, it is evident that Gorski kotar increased tourist traffic, increased number of

accommodation units, new forms of tourism are introduced, and in addition to brochures, postcards, etc., new media such as radio and film were used in the promotion.

### 2.3. The period after World War II to the 1990s

During the Second World War, Gorski kotar suffered great (human and material) suffering, so tourism was once again in its initial phase. In the new political, social and economic conditions, tourism sought new forms of association. In June 1952, the Association of Tourist Associations for Istria, the Croatian Primorje and Gorski Kotar was founded (Turistički savez Hrvatske 1953-1983: 39).<sup>4</sup> Later reorganization established the Tourist Association of Gorski Kotar with its headquarters in Delnice and consisted of the Tourist Associations of Fužine, Lokve, Mrkopalj, Skrad, Ogulin and Vrbovsko (Turistički savez Hrvatske 1953-1983: 160 -161). It took 14 years from the end of the war for Gorski kotar's tourism traffic to recover. It was not until 1959, with 50.150 overnight stays, the most visited pre-war year, 1938 was exceeded. After the Second World War, worker' resorts were opened in Fužine, Skrad and Begovo Razdolje, which did not work on a market basis and their sustainability was co-financed by the founders. Although there was a significant increase in tourist traffic until 1960, in the following period there was a slowdown and stagnation in demand, and by 1974 it did not exceed 100,000 overnight stays (Crnić ed., 1981: 750). In addition to statistical data on tourist traffic in the then municipalities (Čabar, Delnice and Vrbovsko), we also have data on mountain places (Delnice, Fužine, Skrad and Stara Sušica). The data (Table 2) show a departure from the propulsive tourism development of Gorski Kotar from the previous period, according to stagnation. Stagnation is also manifested through the number of beds, arrivals, and overnight stays. The peak of tourist demand was achieved in 1978, when a lagging phase followed, caused by several factors, the focus of state tourism policy on coastal areas, lack of adequate promotion and insufficient content development.

Table 2. Tourist traffic in Municipality of Čabar, Delnice and Vrbovsko 1969 – 1991

Year	Municipality of Čabar			Municipality of Delnice			Municipality of Vrbovsko			Total	
	No. of beds	Arrivals	Nights	No. of beds	Arrivals	Nights	No. of beds	Arrivals	Nights	Arrivals	Nights
1970	56	1.669	2.456	1.573	2.0674	92.979	15	339	339	22.682	95.774
1975	60	1.333	4.585	1.994	2.2018	92.443	9	221	221	23.572	97.249
1980	111	2.388	6.440	1.590	17.422	81.640	71	4.310	6.598	24.120	94.678

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that it was not until 1953 that the Dubrovnik Tourist Board was founded, and in 1953 the Croatian Tourist Board was founded. See Croatian Tourist Board (1953-1983) Zagreb 1983.

1985	125	2.595	1.2547	1.130	21.546	104.355	45	2.087	2.400	26.228	119.302
1990	145	801	4.061	1.065	12.254	36.328	36	704	1.130	13.759	41.519
1991	145	119	617	655	6.371	26.475	24	318	431	6.808	27.523

Source: Republički zavod za statistiku RH (1992), Turizam dokumentacija 1969-- 1991

In connection with the accommodation facilities in Gorski kotar, in 1953 there were 9 tourist and catering facilities with a total of 138 beds and 385 places in restaurants. Twenty-two years later, in 1975, 30 tourist and catering facilities with a total of 1.059 beds and 3.090 restaurant places were recorded in Gorski kotar. The most successful touristic year was 1986 with more than 29 thousand arrivals and almost 125 thousand overnights in the then municipalities of Čabar, Delnice and Vrbovsko. At that time, a significant decline in tourist traffic came from decrease in demand for health tourism (Knežević and Tomić 2019) and was partially offset by transit tourism.

After the Second World War, most investments were made in winter tourism and snow sports, which is especially visible in Delnice, where ski competitions are held, as well as in Mrkopalj (Zlatni skijaški jubilej Mrkopalj 1913-- 1963, 1963). Ski tourism is developing in the commercial facilities of the 60s, i.e., with the opening of the school resort in Begovo Razdolje in 1965, with a capacity of 77 beds and 120 restaurants, the ski lodge in Mrkopalj in 1967 with 40 beds and 100 restaurants, and the mountain lodge in Tuk 1968 with 25 beds and 50 restaurant seats. The first large ski lift in Gorski Kotar was built in 1965, and in 1980 the hotel "Jastreb" was opened in Begovo Razdolje, together with a previously arranged resort and ski lift.

Figure 4. Postcards from Delnice, Skrad and Mrkopalj





Source: TIC Mrkopalj, Private archive

### 3. CONCLUSION

Looking at Gorski kotar through tourist organizations, tourist traffic, available promotional materials from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1991, it is evident that it has a tradition of rural tourism, and the life cycle of a tourist destination can be traced in three basic time periods. The life cycle of the destination has been strongly influenced by global events (world wars) because organizations as well as tourism flows have been re-established.

Table 3. Overview of the characteristics of the development of tourism of Gorski kotar by periods.

	Period until 1918	Period from 1919 until 1939	Period from 1945 until 1991
Degree of tourist development	Introduction to the tourist market	Reintroduction to the tourist market + development stage + stagnation	Reintroduction to the tourist market + development stage + stagnation
Forms of tourism	Health, summer and winter holidays, business tourism, the beginnings of sports and recreational tourism (Skiing and hiking)	Sports and recreational tourism (skiing and hiking)	Sports and recreational (skiing and hiking), development of winter sports
Promotional channels	Books, travelogue, publications, postcards, guides	Travel books, publications, postcards, guides, brochures, travel magazines, radio shows, film facilities	Guides, travel magazines, daily press, TV and radio shows



Source: authors

From the very beginning, the tourism of Gorski kotar recognized the tourist potentials (natural and anthropogenic) but the attractive mountain area with places (settlements) dominated the tourist offer and offered a different offer in summer and winter. From this different offer comes the desire for a reduced influence of seasonality, i.e., a decrease in seasonality. tourist activity throughout the year. In this sense, tourism in Gorski kotar recognized its potential and offered various tourist products. Gorski kotar, depending on the season, offered various tourist products (hiking, tennis, skiing, walking, hunting, baths, etc.). While once the railway had an impact in tourist availability, due to the development of road infrastructure (roads and highways and the increase in the use of passenger cars), Gorski kotar has increasingly been used as an auto destination.

From the very beginnings of the development of tourism, i.e., when tourist traffic was negligible, there were numerous and different tourist products that are still current today, but their more modern tourist valorisation and interpretation is necessary. At the very beginning of the development of tourism, domestic arrivals dominate due to transport availability by rail, which limited demand, and the market is stable and less susceptible to shocks (example of the COVID-19 pandemic). Accordingly, from the very beginning, and due to the distance of the emission sources, and the climatic characteristics, health and sports forms of tourism played a dominant role. These elements also dominated the tourist promotion, which highlighted the attractive mountain area, good transport links, clean and healthy air, nature trips through hiking and walking, hot and cold baths, hunting and winter sports - skiing, cross-country skiing, mountain descents, ski jumps, hunting, etc.

Looking at the development of tourism of Gorski kotar, it is characteristic of the repetition of the stages of development, whereby the rises of tourism are usually stopped by global events (world wars). The largest tourist traffic in Gorski kotar was after the Second World War but before the Homeland War, when in the former municipalities of Čabar, Delnice and Vrbovsko in 1986, 29,122 arrivals and 124,399 overnight stays were recorded (several socially owned hotels were working at the time). Changes are also visible in the length of stay per individual periods. After World War II, tourists stayed in Gorski kotar for an average of 4.3 days in Gorski kotar in the 1980s, while in 2021 the average length of stay was 2.5 days.

In the organizational and management sense at the end of 2020, there was a new reorganization of local tourist boards with the aim of combining the tourist offer and promotion through the Tourist Board of Gorski kotar. In this sense, it is of great importance to design promotional activities that will ensure tourism development in the long term and sustainably. From the historical perspective of the rural tourism in Gorski kotar, one can certainly look at all its tourist potentials, but also indicates that these potentials were during the previous periods utilized and promoted in a more sustainable manner.

Rural space in tourism and promotion of Gorski kotar was considered only a beautiful backdrop, which very rarely complements the tourist content or offers to connect with the local community and lifestyle. On the other hand, in modern tourism we can also

acquire some knowledge from the preliminary stages of tourism, for example, emphasizing the health benefits of staying in Gorski kotar, but also developing innovative events within the framework of sports tourism.

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## **RURAL TOURISM OF GORSKI KOTAR - BETWEEN POTENTIALS AND REALITIES**

### **Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gorski kotar proved to be a very rural, accessible and safe tourist destination with a diverse offer due to its strong natural and anthropogenic spatial characteristics, good transport connections and low level of tourist exploitation. Given that Gorski kotar quickly adapted to the challenges, the question arises whether Gorski kotar has a tradition of tourism, or whether it is a new or old tourist destination? To determine whether Gorski kotar has a tradition of managing rural tourism, the history of tourist organizations, tourist traffic, accommodation, offer and methods of promotion from the very beginning of modern tourism to 1991 were researched. From that analysis, a synthesis of guidelines and activities that would ensure long-term and sustainable tourism development are proposed. The research is based on the collection and analysis of statistical data, legal regulations, tourist travelogues / books, guides, brochures, posters, advertisements, postcards and promotional materials). Based on various data collected from archives, libraries, museums, tourist boards and private collections and using desk research, time slice and inductive-deductive methods, the paper concludes that Gorski kotar has a tradition of rural tourism (winter and summer), offering various tourist products and promotion channels that can serve as a basis for designing new visions of development.

**Keywords:** Gorski kotar, rural tourism, tradition, tourist offers, tourist promotion

### **Jasenska Kranjčević, PhD**

Assistant Professor  
Institute of Tourism, Zagreb  
E-mail: [jasenka.kranjcevic@iztzg.hr](mailto:jasenka.kranjcevic@iztzg.hr)

### **Goranka Tuhtan, mag. oec.**

TIC Mrkopalj  
E-mail: [tic.mrkopalj@gmail.com](mailto:tic.mrkopalj@gmail.com)

### **Izidora Marković Vukadin, PhD**

Institute of Tourism, Zagreb  
E-mail: [izidora.markovic@iztzg.hr](mailto:izidora.markovic@iztzg.hr)

## **STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES TO BRANDING IN RURAL TOURISM EXPLAINED USING THE EXAMPLES OF THE REGIONS OF ALLGÄU (GERMANY) AND ISTRIA (CROATIA)**

**Božo Skoko**

### **Abstract**

The paper deals with the theory and practice of destination branding, with particular regard to the branding of regions through the development of rural tourism. The author analyzes various theoretical approaches and strategies used by individual destinations in managing their own identity and image – in other words, in developing tourism products and attracting tourists.

The paper presents two case studies, analyzing the approaches used by the regions of Allgäu in Germany and Istria in Croatia. By analyzing their practices, the author explores ways of organizing and institutional structuring, management, policies, approaches to sustainable development, offering products and services, managing quality, communication and market promotion.

Comparing two completely different strategies, in different parts of Europe and in different economic, cultural, geographical and political contexts, the paper reveals universal strategies and opportunities for the development of rural tourism and branding of regions through this segment.

**Keywords:** branding, region, rural tourism, strategy, communication

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The corporate practice of brands and branding has found its use in the branding of destinations (places, cities, regions and countries). Destination branding has grown very rapidly in the past two decades, linking together marketing, public relations and creative industry on the one hand and politics and economy on the other. Every city or region wants to become a well-known and respected brand in order to add additional value to local economic subjects and tourism operators while attracting visitors, buyers and investors in the process. As for the growing competition – which has become global – it has increased creativity and innovation in developing tourist supply and destination brands. On the other hand, as this phenomenon is attracting growing attention of the scientific and expert communities, various destination branding approaches and strategies are being explored and developed.

All the more so because tourism has suffered substantial damage in the past two decades, first from post-9/11 terrorist threats and then from Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The efforts to increase investments and tourism led to aggressive marketing campaigns of some countries and regions, but also to investments in the strategic process of

the overall destination identity and reputation management. This is why many countries, even the less developed ones, have been trying to develop national, regional or city brands in the past years, either separately or all three of them together, hierarchically. In this they used very diverse approaches, strategies, techniques and tools...

On the other hand, Covid-19 pandemic has changed to an extent tourists' behavior and expectations. For example, instead of mass tourism, we can now expect an individual approach. Traditional dependence on sun and sea alone has been replaced with active tourism which requires immersion in local communities, a more intensive contact with nature, exploration of less known, authentic culture... Such an approach has been favorable to less populated areas and less popular destinations. Specifically, in Croatia, much more people have started discovering the potentials of the continental parts of the country and the demand for rural tourism has grown in all parts of Croatia. The destinations recognized as a brand achieved relevant results. Their reputation served as a promise of a sort and as quality assurance for their guests. But it's a long and arduous road to creation of a brand...

In order to establish what are the ways and specific phenomena of branding regions by means of rural tourism, this paper presents two case studies from different parts of Europe. While both approaches have shown impressive results and created distinctive regional brands, they differ quite a lot in their approach, priorities and project organization and management. We will use the cases of German Allgäu region and Croatian Istrian region to present various branding possibilities and potentials and, at the same time, identify the similarities indispensable in every destination branding process.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF DESTINATION BRANDING**

While *branding* is a part of the modern vocabulary, the process of branding in its original form of *designating* products and services in order to underline their apartness and warrant their quality first appeared way back in the Antiquity, when master potters designated their pottery products. However, the purpose of designation as such changed over the centuries. Instead of being a trademark as before, it became an end in itself: nowadays brand exceeds by far the material value of a product or corporation and functions as its strong added value. Hence the new definitions of brand and branding, which usually contain the following elements: reinforcing the distinctiveness of a product/service identity and improving its image; building future identity; making promises and having the ability to deliver promises to end consumers in accordance with how they experience a brand; giving an object a "soul" and bringing it to life in the minds of consumers; generating value added by creating a brand's emotional (intangible) and functional (tangible) attributes; creating unique emotional associations; penetrating the mind of consumers and creating qualitative differences relative to the competitors... (Skoko, 2009: 128).

Olins (2004) reminds that once upon a time brands were simple household goods and that the brand was a symbol of consistency that stood for standard quality, quantity and price;

today, functional characteristics of a product go without saying and brands represent added value and image. They spilled over from the manufacturing sector to tourism, sports, fashion, culture, politics... Creating a brand implies creating and maintaining trust and fulfilling promises.

Jones and Slater (2003: 32) define brand as a product that provides functional benefits plus the added value that clients (consumers) voluntarily assess as desirable and/or affordable. According to Kotler and Gertner (2005: 41) brands incite beliefs, evoke emotions and prompt behaviors. The authors point out that brands have social and emotional value to users and that, having their own personalities, they speak to them. This way they enhance the perceived utility and desirability of a product.

If we want to turn a product into a brand, we have to create and emphasize its unique quality by making it different from that of our competitors, create unique emotional associations, and win its relevance in the consumer's perception. This in turn will fuel the demand and ensure the longevity of the brand and a higher financial value.

Brands are like beacons in the sea of supply. Hurried consumers have less and less time for detailed analyses of what they are buying and the supply is increasing daily. This is why they rely on their experience or on the recommendations given to them. In other words, consumers will go for what inspires their confidence, feels safe and looks familiar, thus saving time and reducing the risk of disappointment. As Pike (2010: 218) points out, consumers today have a wider range of products available to them, but the time at their disposal for making choices is shorter than ever before. This is why it is immensely important to have a brand: it simplifies decision-making, reduces the purchasing risk, and generates and meets expectations.

Van Ham (2002: 251) gives four main reasons why it is a good idea to consider creating a brand: "... (1) products, services and locations have become so alike that they can no longer differentiate themselves by their quality, reliability and other basic traits. Branding adds emotion and trust to these 'products', thereby offering clues that make consumers' choices somewhat easier; (2) this emotional relationship between brand and consumer ensures loyalty to the brand; (3) by creating an aspiration lifestyle, branding offers a kind of Ersatz for ideologies and political programmes that have lost their relevance; and (4) the combination of emotions, relationships and lifestyle (values) allows a brand to charge a price premium for their products, services and locations, which would otherwise hardly be distinguishable from generics."

Bahr Thompson (2003: 82–84) mentions four traits important for brand positioning: *relevance*, *distinctiveness*, *credibility* and *flexibility*. Some strong brands forge ties with their customers and meet not only their functional, but also their emotional needs and desires. Strong brands have an added value, which makes them different from the competitors' brands. In order to ensure consumer loyalty, a brand must be credible and fulfill the promises made. Also, a brand's permanent success rests not only on its relevance in the changing world, but also on innovation, launching new products and expanding its value. Obviously, brand management is a permanent process. When the market and public start perceiving a product or corporation as a brand, this status is not permanent. It can change, not only because of a decline in quality or operational or communication errors, if any, but also because of inadequate care about the users/consumers or because the competitors have the edge in

innovation, creativity and quality. In this respect, Anholt (2007: 80) reminds that we never own the market value of a brand; we merely hire it and must pay rent for it in regular installments if we do not want to lose it.

Although many papers were written about similarities between corporate branding on the one hand and product and destination branding on the other, Therkelsen and Halkier (2004, in: Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006: 140) say that the principal difference between them is the fact is that the branding of places involves a multitude of stakeholders and accompanying interests: national, regional and local authorities, private sectors and even individuals. These interest groups include manufacturers, national and local tourist agencies, economic sector ranging from high tech to agriculture, and the public in general. The ultimate goal is to consolidate these different interests into a joint process of branding and promoting the overall image. (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006: 140) As the destination branding process goes close to the heart of the national or regional identities and affects the entire population, all the groups should reach consensus on the fundamental values and vision of the future. At the same time, principal stakeholders should be trained for their respective roles in managing the brand and they should be informed on what impact will that have on their daily activities and their life in general. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2011: 35) point out that the whole thing begins at home as part of a larger reputation management process and that it depends on establishing a productive link between the citizens, government and business sector, which can later function as a powerful moving force of progress. All this requires new forms of cooperation and partnerships between various competing interest groups (some of them even in conflict) on the one hand and destination management organizations as coordinators of all active participants on the other. In the past years, numerous authors have analyzed the role and importance of destination branding. For example, Kavatzis, Warnaby and Ashworth (2015: 244) mention investment/tourist attraction efforts as the key reason why destinations are forced to compete with each other, adding that the pool of potential immigrants, investors and tourists is limited.

In Croatia, there are but a few institutions and agencies experienced in developing national, regional or city brands. The ones that have developed their own branding concepts are even harder to find. Prominent among them is Millenium promocija, a communication management agency involved in the branding of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Karlovac, Međimurje and Zagreb Counties, Herzegovina, and the cities of Karlovac, Samobor, Mali Lošinj, Hvar etc. In 2015, in cooperation with Edward Bernays College in Zagreb, the agency developed its own branding strategy that includes the following elements: defining a destination's fundamental values and potentials (history, nature, culture, tourist supply and attractions, people, economy, infrastructure, brand products, celebrities, symbols...); analyzing competitors and market trends; defining a destination's modern identity; exploring its current image and defining its desired image; consulting key stakeholders and organizing a public debate on the destination's identity and image in order to reach consensus on the key elements of the identity and the vision of development; defining the architecture brand; defining the brand implementation model and developing a communication strategy. (cf. Skoko, 2021: 451)

In order to present the entire branding process and how it is organized in practice, the aforementioned case studies are included in this paper. Comparing two completely different strategies, in different parts of Europe and in different economic, cultural, geographical and political contexts, the paper reveals universal strategies and opportunities for the development of rural tourism and the branding of regions through this segment.

### **3. BRANDING DESTINATIONS THROUGH RURAL TOURISM – EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**

#### ***3.1. Case study No. 1: Allgäu, Bavaria<sup>1</sup>***

Allgäu is a region in German Bavaria (more specifically, in Swabia), stretching mostly in the Alps and Alpine Foreland. It has a population of approx. 650,000. The region consists of Upper Allgäu (Oberallgäu), Lower Allgäu (Unterallgäu) and Eastern Allgäu (Ostallgäu) in Bavaria and Western Allgäu (Westallgäu), mostly located in the Upper Swabian region of Baden-Württemberg, another constituent state of Germany. Well-known for its beautiful landscapes, the region is a popular destination for vacation and therapeutic stays. In Germany, it is known for its farm produce, especially dairy products including the popular Hirtenkäse (“herdsman’s cheese”). Allgäu’s alpine parts rise over 2,000 meters in altitude and are a popular skiing destination. The world-famous castle of Neuschwanstein, one of the region’s biggest tourist attractions, is in the eastern part of Allgäu.

#### *Branding process*

For years now, the Allgäu region has been systematically branding itself. The agencies in charge of the process (the regional government in cooperation with economic subjects and tourism operators) first “defined” the region and its identity and values. Then they set the goal they intended to reach; they picked out their partners to help them create a new brand (professionals, artists...). A reasoned debate with all targeted publics – critics in particular – ensued, and efforts were made to reach consensus on the region’s development. The principles of cooperation and unity were constantly promoted. In the end, a brand manager was appointed and a new visual identity was selected. The intended key associations – the values expected to be linked with the brand – included the following: beautiful landscapes, preserved environment, enterprising spirit, locals being true to their word, continued development – from farmers and cattle growers to entrepreneurs.

The branding process was primarily focused on tourist supply. In 2009, when the tourism brand had become recognizable in both national and international market, it was extended to a wide range of products and services in the region. A new visual identity was created and a

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is based on the author’s study visit to the Allgäu region and his subsequent contacts with representatives of the regional institutions. This example of high-quality branding of a region was also used in the author’s book (Skoko, 2021).

distinctive “blue checkered” logo with the white inscription “Allgäu” was launched. In the beginning it was a label of origin but over time it also became a label of quality. In addition to tourist and entertainment attractions, its use was extended to the best things the region had to offer in other sectors, too. The label thus became a seal of a sort, a certificate of originality, sustainability and quality. The goal was to have a uniform visual identity that would designate quality and serve as a warranty of and recommendation for the region’s products, services and everything else that can symbolize its identity and ensure an added value. With the idea of joint efforts in creating the values for the future of the region in their mind, those in charge of the branding process are focused on the following fields: nature, culture, regional products, quality of life, tourist supply (attractions, programs, services) and gastronomy. Their vision is to turn Allgäu into a region perfect for living, working and vacationing in rural environment, all based on sustainability, agricultural and economic development, environmental protection and social sensitivity. They are very close to making this vision a reality.

#### *Umbrella institution for brand management*

Founded in 2011, Allgäu GmbH company consolidated all the brand management activities in the region. The two key segments the institution operates in are marketing and development (*Allgäu Marketing* and *Allgäu Initiative*). It has three divisions: Destination Management, Tourism and Brand Management (the last one also covering marketing and public relations).

The decisions crucial for running this institution are made by the stockholders’ assembly. The assembly appoints the supervisory board and finances the company’s operation. The assembly consists of local tourist boards, relevant tourist operators and businesses, crafts cooperatives and entrepreneurs’ associations (municipalities, towns and cities cannot be stockholders). The expert guidance is provided by Council of Advisers consisting of the region’s leading experts from various fields. Professionals are in charge of the company’s operations. Allgäu GmbH is focused on the following domains: Winter, Mountaineering, Towns, Culture, Education, Agriculture and Destination Management.

#### *Brand partners*

The institution is partly financed from the membership fees paid by more than 250 brand partners. The monthly fee for the right to use the brand is EUR100-2000, depending on the size of a company. In order to become a partner and have the right to use the label, a company must meet at least four out of six following conditions: being relevant for the regional economy; being responsible for its suppliers and partners; investing in professional improvement of its employees; abiding by laws and standards; energy efficiency, environmental protection and business sustainability; and using the raw materials originating from the Allgäu region.

The umbrella institution has a number of mechanisms for continued supervision and control of their partners’ quality of business and adherence to business standards. These mechanisms

are also used to educate the partners. Having the right to use the label and being part of the system facilitates access to the market for companies (as their quality is guaranteed by the institution). It also increases buyers' and users' trust in these companies (due to continued investment in promotion of the brand).

But the crucial question when selecting partners and partner projects is: Does the project fit in the Allgäu brand strategy and will it empower it additionally? A body of 17 members (8 mayors and 9 representatives from the fields of economy, tourism, environmental protection etc.) decides on this.

### *Projects*

When developing projects as part of the brand, efforts are made to connect partners from different fields, such as tourism, agriculture, economy, culture etc. Of these projects, some of the most successful are The Taste of Countryside (*Land Zunge*), with 80 local inns and restaurants participating; Allgäu Mountain Pleasure (*Allgäuer Alpenruss*); Autumn Dairy Days in Allgäu...

In Tourism segment, particular attention is paid to the following fields: winter, health, mountaineering, hiking, cycling, golf, family, towns, culture, music... A particular focus is on the development and management of hiking trails. Every year, a new product intended to mark the season with its strength is launched and the projects already in place are additionally strengthened and developed. Also, in tourism sector, particular care is given to the hierarchy of tourism organizations and associations. All educational institutions contributing to quality improvement are coordinated from a single place.

### **3.2. Case study No. 2: Istria, Croatia<sup>2</sup>**

Surrounded by sea on three sides, Istria is the largest peninsula in Eastern Adriatic and (together with Dalmatia) one of Croatia's best known tourist regions. The northernmost parts of the peninsula belong to Slovenia and Italy and the remaining part (88%) belongs to Croatia. Administratively, it belongs to Istrian County. According to the 2021 census, Istria has a population of approx. 208,000. Geographically, Istria spans Central European hinterland and the Mediterranean. In addition to major tourist seaside destinations such as Rovinj and Poreč, Croatia's record-holders in overnight stays, particularly developed is Istria's green hinterland with its small historical towns, wineries and vineyards, some of the best-known truffle sites, rich cultural heritage... In order to underline the diversity of Istria's tourist services, the "Blue Istria" – "Green Istria division was introduced. While Blue Istria offers sun, sea and related seaside attractions, Green Istria boasts forests, olive-groves, vineyards, agricultural products, historical towns nested on hilltops... Foreign media often present Istria as "Croatian Tuscany", often including it among the world's best gastronomy and wine regions.

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<sup>2</sup> As a consultant for Millenium promocija agency, the author was involved in a segment of the development and communication of the IQ (Istrian Quality) designation.



### *Branding process*

Like many other Adriatic destinations, both in Socialist Yugoslavia and in independent Croatia, Istria was oriented to mass tourism. Its tourist offer was primarily concentrated in coastal towns, while the hinterland was mostly unknown and rather unattractive to foreign visitors. The old villages and towns in Istrian hills were undergoing depopulation due to migrations to cities and coastal tourist destinations. Together with substantial investment in hotels in leading destinations, the key turning point in Istria's tourism was the decision to revitalize Istria's hinterland, develop rural tourism, reconstruct old houses and family farms and develop agriculture, primarily olive and wine growing. According to Denis Ivošević, head of Istria Tourist Board,<sup>3</sup> Istria introduced a radical change into its perception of tourism in the 1990s. Being a tourist destination and observing what was going on in the global tourism market, they realized they stood no chance competing with major regional tourist destinations because the latter ones could always offer lower prices. So they decided to take an individual approach and offer autochthonous tourist products that would best present Istria. In late 1995 they launched the "wine routes" project, followed by voting for the best restaurants and taverns, developing small family-run hotels, rural accommodation and agritourism and focusing on cycling, trekking, truffle-hunting, wine-tasting etc. Gradually, with these individual projects and development, Istria's new brand was created. The initiators of this development and branding process were the local authorities, together with Istrian Development Agency and Istria Tourist Board.

### *Branding of Istrian olive oil*

The Extra Virgin Olive Oil Route project was launched in late 2004, after many new olive groves had been planted since 1995 as a result of the Istrian County and local self-government units' combined effort in supporting the olive-growing industry. The Rules on Istrian Extra Virgin Olive Oil Routes were introduced and an educational manual, *Introduction to Extra Virgin Olive Oil*, was published in cooperation with the Italian *Associazione Nazionale Città dell'Olio* (National Association of Oil-producing Cities). Crucial for all this was educating the active participants in the process and introducing high standards of production and promotion of extra virgin olive oils. Courses for olive-oil sommeliers were organized and – with support of experienced Italian partners – Association of Sensory Analysts of Olive Oil (USAMU) was founded and soon took charge of further sommelier training. In less than a decade, Istria made a substantial shift in quality, not just in production of extra virgin olive oil, but also in its introduction to restaurant and hotel menus, in development of Istrian olive-oil routes and in destination promotion activities. In terms of this shift, it left behind all other

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<sup>3</sup> Denis Ivošević: *U manje od 10 godina Istra je napravila najveći kvalitativni pomak u svijetu maslinovih ulja* <https://plavakamenica.hr/2020/02/03/u-manje-od-10-godina-istra-je-napravila-najveci-kvalitativni-pomak-u-svijetu-maslinovih-ulja/>, downloaded on 26 February 2022.

destinations in the world. Also, they began exporting olive oil. As quantities are limited, investing in quality is of utmost importance. This is why, on average, a liter of Istrian extra virgin olive oil costs twice as much as a liter of its Italian or Spanish equivalents. This helped Istria achieve high ranking among olive oil-producing regions in 2010, second only to Tuscany. In 2016, it ranked first. *Istra Gourmet* manual specifies 136 olive-oil routes and points, rating 37 among them as “of very high quality” and another 36 as “of high quality”. When rating these routes, it is not just the quality of olive oil that matters; there are many other criteria, such as specially designed olive cellars and tasting/promotion halls, original packaging and bottle design, modern labels, multilingual web pages, social network activities, reputation among journalists and opinion makers, media coverage, world promotions and fairs etc. Every year, the 20 top-ranking olive-oil cellars receive more than 60,000 individual visitors, who are also buyers. Denis Ivošević, head of Istria Tourist Board,<sup>4</sup> claims that Istria boasts the best overall extra virgin olive oil on menus, from small family farms and taverns to large hotels.

#### *Branding of other agricultural products*

The quality of Istrian wines has also improved substantially in the past twenty years or so. Today, Istria is one of the leading winegrowing regions in Croatia. Vinistra certainly had something to do with it. This association of winegrowers and winemakers of Istria was founded in 1994 in order to provide technical assistance to its members, facilitate their contacts, represent their interests, foster and maintain traditional customs related to wine production, improve the promotion of Istrian wines and create their image as high-quality natural products.<sup>5</sup>

In 2005, in order to increase the quality of *Malvasia*, one of the best known Istrian wines, and to stimulate the production of this autochthonous wine and its promotion and sales in Croatia and worldwide, Vinistra and Istrian Development Agency (IDA) signed a contract on the use of IQ (Istrian Quality) label. The label had been introduced by Istrian County back in 1999, but Istrian *Malvasia* producers were the first ones it was awarded to. In 2013, this label was awarded to the producers of *Teran*, also an autochthonous wine, albeit somewhat less present in the market. In the beginning, the label would be granted to 20-30 winemakers every year.

According to the Rules on Awarding the “Istrian Quality” Label, its goal is to exploit Istria’s potentials, increase the level of quality of Istrian products, stimulate the development of local production, creativity, originality, innovation and promotion of Istrian region, and create Istria’s identity in the national, European and global markets. Every product or service must meet a number of strict criteria in order to be awarded IQ label and promoted as such. After wines, the use of the label was extended to other autochthonous and high-quality foodstuffs.

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<sup>4</sup> Denis Ivošević: *U manje od 10 godina Istra je napravila najveći kvalitativni pomak u svijetu maslinovih ulja* <https://plavakamenica.hr/2020/02/03/u-manje-od-10-godina-istra-je-napravila-najveci-kvalitativni-pomak-u-svijetu-maslinovih-ulja/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.istra.hr/hr/gourmet/vino/istarska-kvaliteta-iq?chapter=1>

Between 2018 and 2020, rules on awarding the IQ label were introduced for extra virgin olive oil, hard liquor, Istrian prosciutto, honey and Istrian garlic.<sup>6</sup> In addition to Istrian Development Agency as the project leader, other project implementation partners included Agency for Rural Development of Istria (AZRRI), regional Institute of Agriculture and Tourism, Istrian County and Cluster IQ (Cluster for the Promotion of Istrian Products).

#### *Branding of Istria's accommodation capacities*

In merely a few years, Istria managed to raise its accommodation capacity standards and was among the first Croatian regions to promote accommodation in the rural environment. The Domus Bonus project, launched in 2006 by Istrian County, Istrian Development Agency and Istria Tourist Board, contributed to it. Similar experiences of Austria and Scotland were used as role models. The goal was to create a new Istrian brand, trusted by guests and encouraging local renters to increase the quality of accommodation and create additional services that would reflect Istria's identity. The first step was to organize training on improvement of accommodation capacities, architecture, interior design and house lot face-lifting, administration, online sales and promotion... The renters immediately took a great interest in obtaining the label because it came not only with strong promotional logistics provided by tourist boards, agencies and tour-operators, but also with favorable financial arrangements for improvement of accommodation capacities, reconstruction of old houses etc. offered by banks. In 2006, the first 73 accommodation units were granted their licenses. As early as 2010, four hundred apartments and holiday homes received their certificates. Houses in rural environment were particularly popular. Domus Bonus had defined 100 conditions that had to be met by private renters in order to be granted the label. As a result of an increase in quality and successful communication and promotion, Istrian holiday homes and apartments became much sought after and rural accommodation became one of distinctive features of Istrian tourist industry. The synergy of the tourist services offered by hotels on seaside destinations and the ones offered in the rural hinterland made a significant contribution to both Istrian and Croatian tourism industry.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Although the abovementioned approaches to regional branding through rural tourism are seemingly very different, many similarities can be observed. The German approach follows the classical recommendations for branding process – from defining a region's identity and key values to establishing a central institution for brand management to launching new tourist products and attractions. The Croatian approach can be seen as an opposite process to an extent: new tourist products and services, in line with the destination's identity, were first created; and then, through the process of raising quality of accommodation and agricultural

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ida.hr/hr/bn/stratesko-planiranje/iq-istarska-kvaliteta/>

production and branding of individual tourist products, the outlines of Istria's entire "green and blue" brand were created. While German approach may be seen as an innovative role model in rural tourism branding, we can also learn a lot from the atypical Croatian example. Although requiring additional institutionalization and professionalization, it has already come to fruition.

As there are much more similarities than differences, we can observe them through nine similar approaches or principles: *changes in the field, not in packaging; clear vision of development; sustainability awareness; using autochthonous quality in creating a range of services; combining agriculture and tourism; bringing together all relevant stakeholders; defining the joint purpose of the development; creating a quality label; creativity and innovation as an added value.*

The term "branding" has been used for a number of things. For some, it is limited to identifying and designing a product or service. But a branding process also implies specific changes in the functioning of a destination and its range of tourist services, which indicates that the term also applies to essential elements, not just to promotion and communication. This is why both examples substantiate the *changes in the field, not in packaging* principle. Also, it is obvious that both examples had a *clear vision of development* in their respective brand development processes, which would later be executed step by step. They also exhibited exceptional *sustainability awareness*, as it was one of the preconditions required for protection of their scenery, preservation of their resources and authenticity and creation of a long-term platform for development, production and sustainable tourism.

Being a brand requires having an original approach and designing unique products or services, not imitating others. Although Istria did use some Italian experiences in olive-growing development, just like Allgäu did use experience of some developed Alpine regions, both of them managed to preserve their own *autochthonous qualities and turn them into unique range of products and services*. While taking this direction, they showed that *combining agriculture and tourism* could be a winning combination in the ever-demanding tourism market. They even used some of their traditional agricultural sectors to develop unique tourist products (e.g. dairy industry and olive-growing). In both cases, *bringing together all relevant stakeholders* was essential for success. While the Bavarians decided to distribute the responsibilities for creating and managing the brand, the Croatians opted for synergy of various stakeholders in the creation of their range of tourist products and services – from education process to quality management. Particularly important was the inclusion of all stakeholders from agricultural, tourism and economic sectors and of local population. Their education, motivation and contribution to the creation of the new faces of their respective regions served as the key driving force. This is why we can say with all reason that *defining the joint purpose of the development* contributed additionally to the sustainability of the whole system. A widely inclusive process resulting in a widely beneficial common brand and better quality at all levels is guaranteed to be successful. Figuring prominently in this context were the *quality labels*: they made the participants of the process in both examples raise the quality standards. Both examples can be seen as evidence of the importance of developing, protecting and branding a region's autochthonous products

(cheese and milk in one case and olive oil and wine in the other). In both examples, developing a quality label for autochthonous products and tourist services has made their consumers and users feel safe about them. In addition to quality, *creativity and innovation* were also assets in both cases. They are reflected in the design of products, tourist routes, promotions and communication, various events etc.

According to the place branding principles of *Placebranding Ltd.* (in: Clifton and Simmons, 2003: 224), branding of a destination coordinates the messages that the destination is already sending, in line with a robust and recognizable strategic vision; it also releases the talent of the local people in order to strengthen and supplement this vision. In this context, the destination brand must represent a credible, interesting and sustainable vision of the destination's future. Destination branding can and should be used for achieving social, political and economic goals. One of the most difficult tasks of destination branding is to comprise the abundance of a destination's resources and the diversity of its people, while communicating it to the world in a simple, truthful, motivating, attractive way which is worth mentioning. It seems that the two destinations analyzed in this paper have managed to achieve just that.

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**STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES TO BRANDING IN RURAL TOURISM EXPLAINED  
USING THE EXAMPLES OF THE REGIONS OF ALLGÄU (GERMANY) AND ISTRIA  
(CROATIA)**

**Abstract**

The paper deals with the theory and practice of destination branding, with particular regard to the branding of regions through the development of rural tourism. The author analyzes various theoretical approaches and strategies used by individual destinations in managing their own identity and image – in other words, in developing tourism products and attracting tourists.

The paper presents two case studies, analyzing the approaches used by the regions of Allgäu in Germany and Istria in Croatia. By analyzing their practices, the author explores ways of organizing and institutional structuring, management, policies, approaches to sustainable development, offering products and services, managing quality, communication and market promotion.

Comparing two completely different strategies, in different parts of Europe and in different economic, cultural, geographical and political contexts, the paper reveals universal strategies and opportunities for the development of rural tourism and branding of regions through this segment.

**Keywords:** branding, region, rural tourism, strategy, communication

**Božo Skoko**

Fakultet političkih znanosti  
Sveučilište u Zagrebu

## **AGRITOURISM–OPPORTUNITY AND POTENTIAL FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL DESTINATIONS**

**Tatjana Mrvoš**  
**Ines Milohnić**  
**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**

### **Abstract**

Agritourism development refers to economic activities carried out in a rural area. Most often it is linked to supplementary activities on farms and yields results that have not yet been fully investigated and are not comprehensively measurable. Given that agritourism is developing as a relatively new business opportunity providing a source of income for entrepreneurs, the study focuses on the elements of agritourism operations, with special emphasis on tapping potential for long-term sustainability.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present the current state of entrepreneurship in the rural areas of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (PGKC), while focusing on the role and importance of family farms. Accordingly, the paper analyses the structure and characteristics of agritourism entrepreneurs; the offering of products and services provided, by type of facility in rural tourist destinations; entrepreneurial motivations, and development opportunities for the future.

The methodology used for the needs of empirical research is tie to: a) the conducted analysis of the business performance of family farms in PGKC, approved for providing hospitality services, and b) the analysis of previous studies on entrepreneurs operating in rural regions. Research was carried out using the interview method and a previously designed questionnaire.

Research results indicate that the conducted study reveals additional room to implement new development opportunities, stronger entrepreneurial networking and more efficient use of financial aid, while respecting the sustainable development of rural areas, thus bringing benefits for residents and enhancing market competitiveness.

The contribution of this paper is seen in the authors' suggestions and guidelines to strengthen the integration of entrepreneurs, as a vital factor of rural tourism development, and open up opportunities for boosting overall development and competitiveness, adjusted to the specific features of individual rural destination.

**Keywords:** Agritourism, family farms, sustainable development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In a rural development context, the steadily growing trend, focused on the development of agritourism as a specific type of rural tourism, is bolstered by the attitudes of entrepreneurs, decision-makers and other stakeholders towards recognising the potential for economic and income-based diversification through and by way of tourism.



This paper provides a theoretical overview and analysis of the basic concepts of rural tourism and agritourism based on recent foreign and domestic scientific studies.

Importantly, the focus of all relevant strategic documents, at the EU level and at the national level in Croatia, is on the sustainable use of the resources of rural areas and villages in tourism development. The same applies to the development strategies of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (PGKC), which is striving to preserve and develop its rural potential through incentive measures and the development of alternative sources of income on farms, and which is the research area of this paper.

The central part of the study focuses on analysing the state of agritourism as an activity that combines agriculture and tourism to provide employment and help retain people in the rural region of PGKC, and on analysing all key aspects of business operations on family farms that provide hospitality and tourism services.

The research results indicate an increase, in the period 2007 – 2022, in the number of agritourism entrepreneurs and in the type of categorised facilities in which hospitality services are provided. The study also investigates motivations for launching an agritourism business, the economic aspects of business operations, and business constraints.

The conclusion section presents a synthesis and interpretation of findings, and provides recommendations for future studies as well as guidelines for the further development of agritourism and its potential for sustainable development of rural PGKC regions.

## **2. ROLE OF TOURISM IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Agritourism is developing as a new market opportunity of combined economic activities in rural regions. As the terms “rural tourism” and “agritourism” are often used interchangeably as synonyms, implying a rural spatial dimension, it is necessary to underline the conceptual difference between them.

Rural tourism is the broader concept, encompassing all tourism services and activities and all types of tourism in rural areas, such as hunting tourism, fishing tourism, nature park tourism, winter tourism, countryside tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, and cultural tourism. It can encompass professional activities (for example, small family hotels, equestrian centres, etc.) but not necessarily supplementary activities on a farm to generate additional income (Baćac 2011).

The criteria used to define a rural area are 1) the OECD criterion according to which a rural area is an area with a population density below 150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and 2) the EU criterion, stating a population density of 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Based on the OECD’s methodology, 75.08% of Croatia’s total population lives in rural and mixed regions that cover 56,164 km<sup>2</sup> or 99.24% of the country’s total surface area (2014-2020 Croatian Rural Development Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, hereinafter 2014-2020 RDP).

Table 1. Overview of strategic documents of rural development

Level	EU	CROATIA	PGKC
Docu- ment	1. EUROPE 2020 A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth 2. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 3. European Green Deal 4. EU Territorial Agenda 2030	1. 2014-2020 RDP 2. Strategic Plan of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 3. National Development Strategy by 2030	1. PGKC Development Strategy 2016 – 2020 2. Implementation of Rural Development Programme 2017- 2020-2022

Source: EUROPE 2020; National Development Strategy by 2030 (<https://www.europski-fondovi.eu, 22.02.2022>); European Green Deal ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_hr 22.02.2022](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_hr 22.02.2022)); EU Territorial Agenda 2030 ([https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/hr/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/ 22.02.2022](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/hr/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/ 22.02.2022)); Strategic Plan of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 (<https://www.aprrr.hr/buducnost-zpp-a/ 22.02.2022>); 2014-2020 RDP ([https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/program/\\_17.2.2022](https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/program/_17.2.2022).) PGKC Development Strategy 2016 – 2020; Implementation of Rural Development Programme 2017-2020-2022 (<https://www.pgz.hr/ustroj/upravna-tijela/upravni-odjel-za-turizam-poduzetnistvo-i-ruralni-razvoj/ 15.02.2022>)

In accordance with the goals and priorities set in the strategic plans, the adopted rural development measures provide the basis for ensuring sustainable, inclusive, targeted and innovative territorial development. One of the fundamental principles contained in Croatia’s 2021–2027 Strategic Documents refers to the revitalisation of rural areas and the improvement of quality of life in them. Also underlined is the importance of putting in place support systems, including the education and integration of small entrepreneurs, and the creation of better-designed, themed and meaningful offerings of individual private farms as well as at the level of clusters and destinations (Croatian Tourism Development Strategy by 2020).

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has launched the drafting of the new Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy by 2030, and 2021-2027 National Sustainable Tourism Development Plan, together with the first Strategic Environmental Assessment, which should be adopted by the end of 2022.

## 2.1. Conceptual definition of agritourism

The term “agritourism” comes from the Italian *agriturismo*, coined from two words – *agricoltura* (agriculture) and *turismo* (tourism) – and meaning agricultural or agrarian tourism on a family farm. The concept “countryside tourism” is narrower than the concept “rural tourism” but broader than that of “farm tourism”, and is linked to the countryside and the activities taking place there (agriculture, events, gastronomy, folklore, ethnology, and other economic activity, Baćac 2011).

Agritourism first emerged in Europe in the 1960s. In some countries, the term refers only to those activities that generate more than 50% of a household’s total income through

tourism, with agricultural production accounting for the remaining share (Ciolac et al.2020).

Agritourism is the core product of rural tourism development, from which it derives its connotation. With regard to the strategic aspect of development, the term “agritourism” is replaced with the broader term “rural tourism”, of which it is a part, and in this context the development of agritourism is viewed from the perspective of rural tourism development (Krajinović et al. 2011).

According to the European Commission, over 30 activities, categorised into seven groups, can be found in rural areas. These are touring, water-based activities (on rivers and lakes), aerial activities, sports activities, sightseeing activities, work process-based activities, and cultural and health-related activities (Ružić 2012.).

The discrepancies between rural and urban areas can be reduced through tourism development, depending on the development of small tourism enterprises based on agricultural production, production of traditional products, gastronomy, and tourism services. The exploitation of rural areas and the countryside has contributed to an increase in the number of registered family farm tourism holdings in Croatia (Smolčić Jurdana et al. 2015).

Around the world, there is a growing trend to commercialise agritourism as a modern and lucrative IT-based activity and as an interesting business opportunity for entrepreneurs as well as framework creators (Olsen 2009). The special features of agritourism are based on a family providing tourism services on their farm while engaging foremost in agricultural production and possessing hospitality and communication skills (Brščić et al.2010).

In this way, agritourism represents an additional source of income to agricultural producers who invest to expand the range of products and services they offer, leading to greater earned income.

**Table 2. Conceptual definition of the term “agritourism”**

Author, year	Definition- agritourism	Key words
Ilak Peršurić, A.S, Oplanić, M., Trošt, K., Juraković, L.,Rajko, M. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ a form of the offering, agriculture and tourism, employment and retaining people in rural areas</li> <li>✓ constraints; from legal and competence-related, to local communities and tourist boards, and intrinsic – at the family farm level</li> </ul>	Family farm, rural, agriculture, tourism, retaining people, development, subsidies
Demonja D., Ružić P. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓rural tourism –marketing agricultural products, traditional customs, crafts, skills, heritage, etc.</li> <li>✓cultural, architectural and historical heritage</li> <li>✓two economic sectors – tourism and agriculture – specific tourism offering of a farm or in a rural setting</li> </ul>	Activities, agricultural products, preserved environment

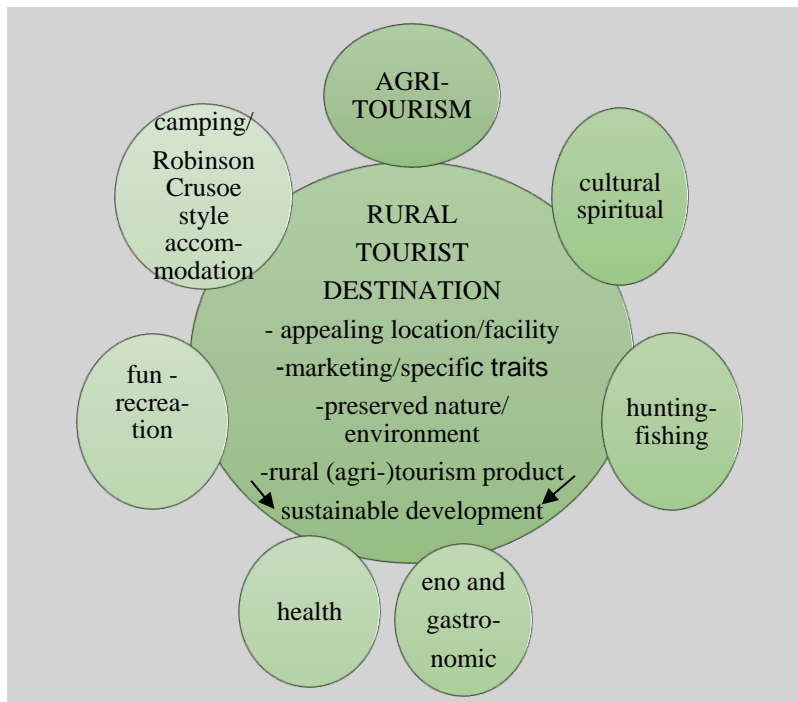
Krajinović A., Čičin-Šain D., Predovan M. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ coreproduct of rural tourism development</li> <li>✓ Farm-Based Tourism(FBT)</li> <li>✓ tourism on family farms</li> <li>✓ holistic approach</li> </ul>	Farm tourism, strategic, rural development
Brščić, K., Dropulić Ružić M., Ružić D. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ tourism activity, visitors in agricultural activities or environment</li> <li>✓ revitalisation and protection of rural region</li> <li>✓ contribution to quality of life and the economy</li> <li>✓ employment, market</li> <li>✓ tourist satisfaction</li> </ul>	Tourism activity, agricultural activities, protection of rural region
Ciolac, R. et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ a form of rural tourism on farms = agricultural activities + tourism – supplementary source of income;</li> <li>✓ 2aspects; tourism activities do not replace agricultural activities</li> <li>✓ complementarity</li> </ul>	Farms, income source, complementary, sustainable development

Source: Prepared by the authors

Accordingly, generating additional income from tourism activities through diversification helps to preserve farms and, in turn, to boost the sustainability of rural communities. Despite tourism being seen by development strategy guidelines as a supplementary activity and additional source of income in farms, a trend has emerged, contrary to expectations, in which tourism-generated income exceeds agriculture-generated income, and the existing agricultural production is not capable of meeting the farm's tourism consumption needs (Trošt et al.2011).

The development of sustainable rural destinations, in which all forms of tourism activities and services are provided, calls for a holistic, strategic approach, together with a specific type of marketing, thus enabling the conceptual development of an appealing agritourism product.

Figure 1. **Types and forms of tourism activities in rural spaces**



Source: Prepared by the authors (after Ružić 2012)

There is an obvious trend towards family farms, whose operations are no longer tied only to agriculture but are expanded through a hospitality and tourism offering, taking on a new role, that of gate-keepers of the rural identity and environment to ensure the comprehensive sustainability of rural destinations.

## 2.2. Hospitality services in family farms: Legislative framework

The legislation valid in Croatia in the fields of agriculture and tourism consists of the Law on Hospitality Activities (Official Gazette nos. 85/2015, 121/2016, 99/2018, 25/2019, 98/2019, 32/2020, 42/2020, 126/2021) and the Ordinance on Classification and Categorisation of Establishments that Provide Hospitality Services in Family Farms (Official Gazette nos. 54/2016, 69/2017, 120/2019). According to the Law on Hospitality Activities, hospitality activities include the preparation and serving of food, drinks and beverages and the provision of accommodation services. Certain hospitality services can also be provided by physical entities – citizens and owners or members of family farms.

Table 2. Overview of legislative framework

Law	Law on Hospitality Activities	Law on Family Farming
Definition	Family farm –a farm entered into the Family Farm Registry, in accordance with special regulations, and providing hospitality services	Family farm–organisational form of a farmer as an economic operator and physical entity, who independently and permanently carries out agricultural and related supplementary activities to generate income
Type of activities	<u>Hospitality services:</u> 1. preparation and serving of food, drinks and beverages, mostly from own production; 2. serving (tasting) wine, alcoholic beverages and food from own production 3. accommodation	<u>Agricultural + supplementary activities:</u> 1. production of food and non-food products and items of general use on family farms 3. hospitality, tourism and other services 4. other services/facilities and activities
Subordinate regulations	Regulation – facilities on family farms	Regulation - Register of Family Farm
Provisions	✓ <u>minimal requirements (MR) for all types of facilities</u> providing hospitality services	✓ <u>overview of supplementary activities that can be carried out</u>
Definitions and types of facilities/services	<u>Facilities on family farms/types:</u> 1. Winery/ tasting room 2. Excursion site 3. Room 4. Apartment 5. Rural holiday home 6. Campsite 7. Quickstop campsite 8. Robinson Crusoe-style accommodation facility	✓ <u>hospitality services + services in tourism</u> (agricultural activities, harvesting fruits and vegetables, hunting, fishing, horse riding, hiking, etc.) ✓ other services and activities (courses/workshops) ✓ registered supplementary activities
Procedure	✓ Application–Decision-Approval for providing hospitality services in a facility	✓ application for entry of supplementary activities into the Register of Family Farms; proof – approval for providing accommodation and services in the facility
Competent authority	✓ County Administrative Department of Tourism	✓ Branch Office of the Paying Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development (Agency; PAAFRD)

Source: Law on Hospitality Activities (Official Gazette nos. 85/2015, 121/2016, 99/2018, 25/2019, 98/2019, 32/2020, 42/2020, 126/2021) and Ordinance on Classification and Categorisation of Establishments that Provide Hospitality Services on Family Farms (Official Gazette nos. 54/2016, 69/2017, 120/2019), Law on

Family Farming (Official Gazette nos. 29/2018, 32/2019) and the Regulation on the Register of Family Farms (Official Gazette no. 62/19)

Pursuant to the Regulation, the procedure of registering family farms for agricultural activity is conducted by the competent bodies that also give approval to family farms to carry out supplementary activities. The Regulation also stipulates that family farms may use commercial names such as *turističko seljačko domaćinstvo* (farm tourism household), *turističko seljačko gospodarstvo* (farm tourism holding), and *agroturizam* (agritourism).

**Table 3. Types of accommodation facilities on family farms**

Type of facility	Category "Sun" ☀ / min.requirements (MR)	Max. Capacity per Art. 39 Of Law On Hosp.Act.	Quality Label	Stipulations
1. Winery/ Tasting room	MR	80 day-trippers	-	✓ in traditional facilities (wine cellar, shepherd's hut, fishing hut, dry stone hut, barn, etc.) ✓ in the outdoors (on grass, stone, terrace, etc.); traditional (roasting-spit, grill, baking-lid, baker's oven, skewers, cauldron); ✓ facilities can also be located in the rural environment outside of the family farm
2. Excursion site			Q	
3. Room	2, 3, 4 ☀	10 rooms/ 20 persons at the same time (without spare beds)		
4. Apartment				
5. Rural holiday home				
6. Campsite	MR	20 accommodation units/ 60 guests at the same time	-	
7. Quickstop campsite			-	
8. Robinson Crusoe-style accommodation	MR			

Source: Law on Hospitality Activities (Official Gazette nos. 85/2015, 121/2016, 99/2018, 25/2019, 98/2019, 32/2020, 42/2020, 126/2021) and Ordinance on Classification and Categorisation of Establishments that Provide Hospitality Services on Family Farms (Official Gazette nos. 54/2016, 69/2017, 120/2019)

### 3. ANALYSIS OF AGRITOURISM ENTREPRENEURS IN PGKC

This section analyses the activities of agritourism entrepreneurs, to provide a platform for further research for the needs of this paper. It maps the advantages and constraints in business operations in order to rate the potential of agritourism as one of the elements in developing attractive tourist destinations and designing an appealing tourism offering for PGKC.

PGKC comprises 14 towns, 22 municipalities and 510 settlements, all of which, with the exception of the city of Rijeka, the 2014-2020 Croatian Rural Development Programme (2014-2020 RDP) defines as rural.

Table 4 presents a comparative overview of farms, by organisational form, in Croatia and PGKC.

Table 4. Overview of farm holdings

	No. of farms	No. of family farms	Other legal and physical entities	Utilised agricultural land (ha)
CROATIA	143,901	139,472	4,429	1,505,294
PGKC	3,288	3,061	221	16,677.82
PGKC/CRO%	2.2	2.1	4.9	1.1

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Agricultural Census 2020, <https://www.dzs.hr/>, (10.02.2022); Internal data of the Paying Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development (PAAFRD), Rijeka Regional Office (9.02.2022)

Farms in PGKC account for a relatively low share in the structure of farms in Croatia (farms and family farms account for 2% and other registered legal and physical entities, for 5%, and together they account for 1% of utilised agricultural land).

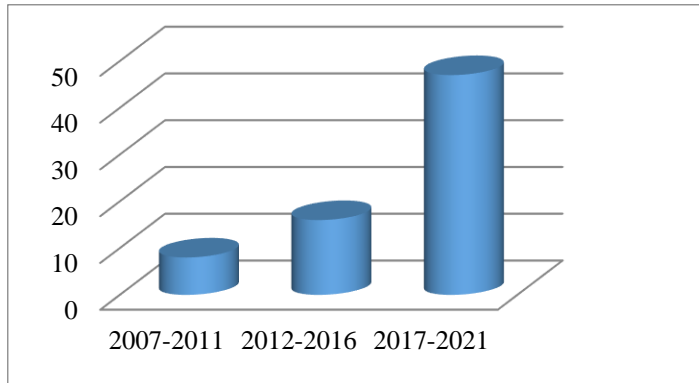
In the rural region of PGKC, 33 family farms are registered for providing hospitality and tourism services in a total of 50 categorised facilities. Based on the Implementation Programme of Rural Development Measures 2017-2020-2022, 13 farms were co-funded to a total amount of HRK 364,527.54 in 2021, and this will continue in 2022 as well (data of the PGKC Administrative Department for Tourism, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development, January – February 2022).

An upward trend in tourist traffic is present throughout PGKC, which recorded 38% more overnights in 2021 than in 2020, of which the rural sub-region of Gorski Kotar accounted for 110,000 overnights or fully 98% of the number of overnights in 2019 (data of the Kvarner Tourist Board, February 2022).

Notably, the increase in tourist numbers in PGKC has been paralleled by an increase in the number of categorised facilities on family farms.



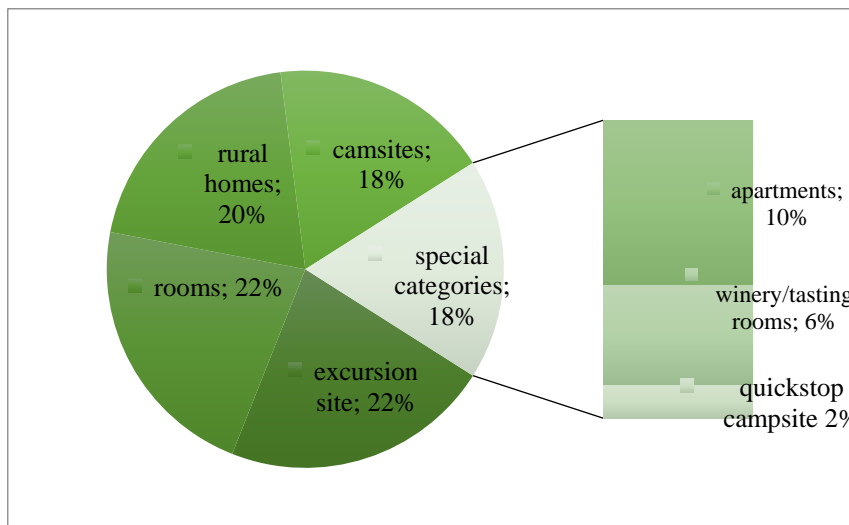
**Graph 1. Hospitality facilities on family farms in PGKC**



Source: Prepared by the authors, after the data of the PGKC Administrative Department for Tourism, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development, February 2022

A comparison of the data on the number of registered hospitality facilities on family farms clearly indicates continuous growth, in particular in the period 2017-2021 which boasts 31 newly registered facilities.

**Graph 2. Structure of registered facilities on family farms in PGKC, by type**



Source: Prepared by the authors after the data of the PGKC Administrative Department for Tourism, Entrepreneurship and Rural Development, February 2022

An analysis of the structure of registered facilities by type reveals that all types of facilities are equally represented on family farms, with the exception of apartments, wineries/tasting rooms and quickstop campsites. No Robinson Crusoe-style accommodation facilities have yet been registered.

The total accommodation capacity of campsites, quickstop campsites, rural holiday homes, rooms and apartments is 470 persons on permanent beds and 17 on spare beds.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The target group in this study are family farm owners, with permits for providing hospitality services in categorised facilities in PGKC.

The interview method was used to collect data, with a questionnaire designed on the basis of previous studies:

1. Hint Lab Project (2015): Comparative analysis: State of entrepreneurship in rural tourism in Croatia and Slovenia,
2. Brščić, K., Franić, R. and Ružić, D. (2010): Why agritourism: Opinions of owners,
3. Trošt, K., Ilak Peršurić, A.S. and Oplanić, M., (2011) : Attitudes of owners towards further development of agritourism in Istria County

Research was conducted in February 2022 on a sample of 25 study subjects who are owners of family farms, operating in 31 facilities. The questionnaire comprised 38 questions and was made up of the following sections:

1. General section: socio-demographic data, primary and supplementary activities, years of experiences, type and capacity of facilities, number of family members engaged in business operations, income sources, and data on employed persons,
2. Economic aspects of business: use of financial aid, business performance, planned investments,
3. Entrepreneurial motivation and business constraints.

Presented below are the results of the study on the attitudes of agritourism entrepreneurs, with emphasis on the current challenges, constraints and opportunities to improving business.

Table 5. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

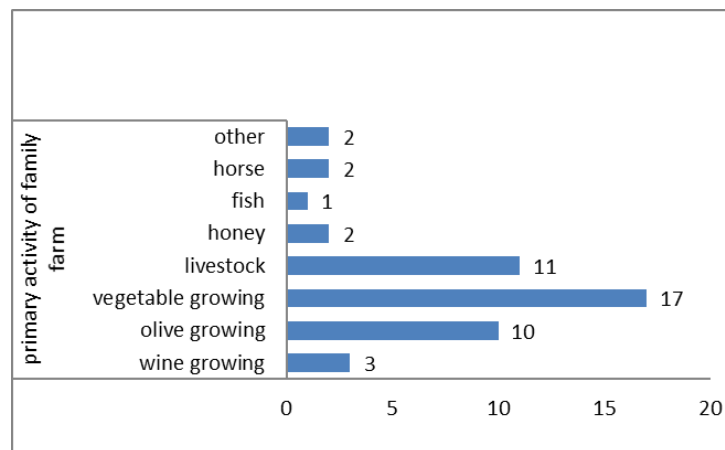
Criterion		PGKC/ N=25	Average
Gender	Male	19	76%
	Female	6	24%
Age	31-40	1	58.1 years old
	41-50	6	
	51-60	9	
	60 and over	9	
Education	Elementary school	1	4%
	Secondary school	15	60%
	2-year college	2	8%
	University	6	25%
	Spec., MSc, PhD	1	4%

The results show the average owner of a family farm to be male, belonging to the middle age group (58.1 years old) and holding secondary school qualifications.

The largest share of respondents have 6 – 15 years of work experience (64%), followed by respondents with over 16 years of work experience, while only 12% of respondents have less than 5 years of work experience.

The results also show that the family farm business is a supplementary source of income for most of the respondents (72%), that in their families the respondents have on average 1.4 employed persons, and that 3.2 of their family members take part in the operation of the family farm.

Graph 3. Primary agricultural activities on family farms



Primary agricultural activities are, for the most part, linked to market gardening/fruit growing (68%), livestock breeding (44%), olive growing/olive oil production (40%), wine growing (12%) and other activities (8%).

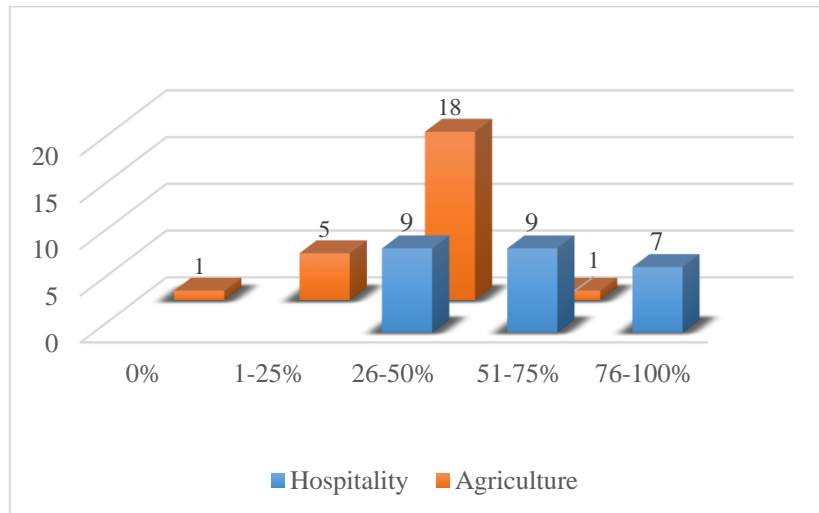
Analysis of the offering shows that 25% of family farms have swimming pools and/or playgrounds, and provide the opportunity for guests to participate in agricultural activities such as harvesting olives and vegetables. Additional facilities/services include viewing displays of artefacts used in the past (antiquities collection), cycling, hiking, driving vehicles and watercrafts, swimming, farm tours, feeding farm animals, horse riding, motorcycle meets, etc.

Interestingly, fully 84% of respondents intend to expand their offering in the near future to include novel products by organising theme visits and tours, planting new gardens and improving existing ones, procuring farm animals, opening product processing plants, and investing in accommodation facilities, swimming pools and other additional facilities and services.

An analysis of the economic aspects of business operations reveals that, in the past 5 years, 64% of family farms received financial aid through subsidies and funding drawn from funds (47% receiving up to EUR 5,000, and 12% receiving from EUR 5,000 to EUR 20,000). Financial aid exceeding EUR 20,000 was received by 41% of

entrepreneurs linked to rural development and the launching of non-agricultural activities.

**Graph 4. Income generated by agricultural production and hospitality services on family farms**



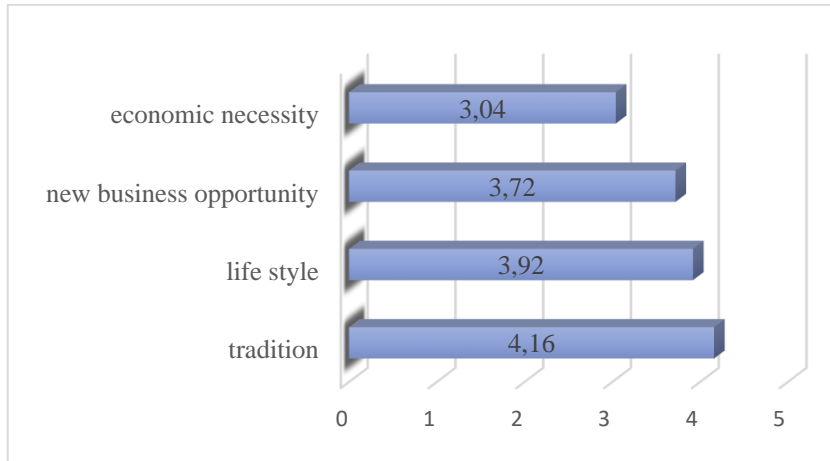
Results pertaining to income earned point to the significant share of income generated by providing hospitality services, clearly positioned in the higher income grades.

A comparison of income generated by providing hospitality services and income generated by agricultural production shows that entrepreneurs earn considerably less income from agricultural production.

Business results in 2021 are linked to income earned from business operations (76%), with 60-90 days being the average number of days when accommodation capacities were occupied (48%).

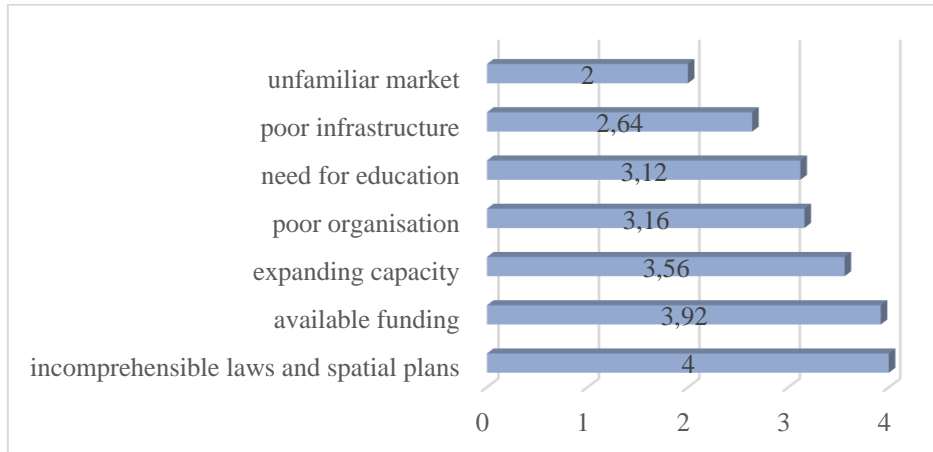
Furthermore, entrepreneurs plan to finance future development using their own resources (40%) and resources drawn from funds, subsidies and loans (36%).

Graph 5. **Entrepreneurial motivation**



The results of the scores given to motivations for launching a business show that key motivations are carrying on the family tradition (4.16), life style (3.92), identifying new business opportunities (3.72) and economic necessity (3.04).

Graph 6. **Business constraints**



The greatest business constraints according to the entrepreneurs are laws and spatial plans (4.0), available financial resources (3.92), few opportunities to expand capacities (3.56), poor networking and cooperation (3.16), and lack of education (3.12). Considerable business constraints are also damage caused by wildlife, as reported by entrepreneurs on islands and in mountain regions (48%) and a significant lack of qualified workers (32%), as reported by entrepreneurs in coastal areas.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although the strategic guidelines of development strategies for rural regions closely link agritourism to the conservation and sustainability of the rural resources of the countryside and the environment, the subject matter explored in this paper is still under-researched.

The findings of the conducted research are consistent to those of previous studies with regard to business constraints to entrepreneurship, in particular concerning ill-adapted legislation and the failure to recognise the importance of agritourism activities in rural regions (poorly-suited spatial plans, lack of co-funding loans, failure to provide education). Namely, the results of this study show that the amount of income generated by tourism exceeds the amount of income from agriculture on family farms, suggesting that special attention should be focused on the specific features of agritourism farms to prevent them from becoming exclusively hospitality and tourism business entities in rural regions. Accordingly, the study suggests that additional efforts should be taken to develop and encourage agricultural production and activities on farms.

The study's findings concerning entrepreneurial motivation show that the primary motivation is the desire to carry on the family tradition, taking into consideration the specific features of agritourism farms.

The study's contribution to application is that it corroborates the fact that agritourism belongs to a highly potent field, capable of ensuring long-term, sustainable economic activity in rural regions. Encouraging are the data on the positive business results of entrepreneurs who follow and are familiar with the needs of the market, and whose primary motivations are the desire to carry on the family business tradition, while encouraging the networking of family farms with other stakeholders in the destination to ensure long-term sustainable competitiveness. Other possibilities include the transfer of knowledge and skills through educational workshops to enhance the quality of business operations and ensure better market positioning.

The authors propose the following guidelines for the future development of agritourism: a) at the local and national levels, simpler rules and regulations need to be drawn up and action taken to facilitate the adoption of entrepreneur-oriented spatial plans and/or instate simpler procedures to change existing spatial plans; b) facilitate the procedure of applying for subsidies from EU funds through rural development measures, by providing free-of-charge education or consultancy aid; and c) facilitating the employment of a skilled workforce by making it easier to access the labour market and by providing education that covers all the specific features of agritourism activities.

The limitations of this study refer to the relatively small number of respondents (25 family farm owners) in the region where they operate (PGKC). To continue the same or similar studies in the future, it would be necessary to set up an electronic National Central Register that would include all farms that provide hospitality services in their facilities.

The authors also suggest that future studies should be conducted on larger samples and longitudinally over future periods, together with a competitor analysis using benchmarking, with emphasis on optimal entrepreneurial business models, thus making it possible to create and sustain an integrated agritourism product based on a destination's attractions as well as on the specific features of the offering and facilities to ensure long-term, sustainable competitiveness in the market.

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**AGRITOURISM–OPPORTUNITY AND POTENTIAL FOR THE SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL DESTINATIONS**

**Tatjana Mrvoš**  
**Ines Milohnić**  
**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**

**Abstract**

Agritourism development refers to economic activities carried out in a rural area. Most often it is linked to supplementary activities on farms and yields results that have not yet been fully investigated and are not comprehensively measurable. Given that agritourism is developing as a relatively new business opportunity providing a source of income for entrepreneurs, the study focuses on the elements of agritourism operations, with special emphasis on tapping potential for long-term sustainability.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present the current state of entrepreneurship in the rural areas of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (PGKC), while focusing on the role and importance of family farms. Accordingly, the paper analyses the structure and characteristics of agritourism entrepreneurs; the offering of products and services provided, by type of facility in rural tourist destinations; entrepreneurial motivations, and development opportunities for the future.

The methodology used for the needs of empirical research is tie to: a) the conducted analysis of the business performance of family farms in PGKC, approved for providing hospitality services, and b) the analysis of previous studies on entrepreneurs operating in rural regions. Research was carried out using the interview method and a previously designed questionnaire.

Research results indicate that the conducted study reveals additional room to implement new development opportunities, stronger entrepreneurial networking and more efficient use of financial aid, while respecting the sustainable development of rural areas, thus bringing benefits for residents and enhancing market competitiveness.

The contribution of this paper is seen in the authors' suggestions and guidelines to strengthen the integration of entrepreneurs, as a vital factor of rural tourism development, and open up opportunities for boosting overall development and competitiveness, adjusted to the specific features of individual rural destination.

**Keywords:** Agritourism, family farms, sustainable development

**Tatjana Mrvoš**, PhD student  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management,  
Primorska 42, p. p. 97, 51410 Opatija, Croatia  
dr102mor@fthm.hr

**Ines Milohnić**, PhD, full professor  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management,  
Primorska 42, p. p. 97, 51410 Opatija, Croatia  
ines.milohnic@fthm.hr

**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**, PhD, Full professor with tenure  
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
Primorska 42, p. p. 97, 51410 Opatija, Croatia  
doras@fthm.hr

## EVALUATION OF CHANNELS AND TECHNIQUES OF PROMOTION OF RURAL DESTINATIONS IN EASTERN SLAVONIA

**Davorin Turkalj**  
**Antun Biloš**  
**Aleksandar Erceg**

### **Abstract:**

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and the avoidance of large crowds have contributed to the emerging demand for tourism facilities that have not previously been the focus of tourism development strategies. Rural tourism stands out due to its isolation, unexplored beauty, and nature, all of which correspond to emerging behavior patterns among today's tourist consumers. The tourism sector is among the most affected by the two-year crisis. Governments seek answers to these challenges by outlining measures that focus on addressing the untapped potential of rural destinations that are self-imposed as a logical choice in overcoming the adverse effects of a pandemic. Implications in economic terms are multiple: from keeping the population in rural areas, increasing employability, designing tourist and gastronomic offers, to redefining the concept of life in rural areas and its sustainability. The theoretical part of the paper determines the characteristics and importance of rural tourism on the totality of the tourist offer in the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Promotion as a significant part of activating the visibility and provision of rural tourism is examined in the empirical section of the paper. Preliminary research results present an evaluation of techniques and tools for promoting rural destinations in Eastern Slavonia on a sample of a student population. It is difficult to predict the direction of development and the circumstances in which the tourism sector will adapt to new requirements and thus to new forms of tourism. However, rural tourism and the specifics of communicating its offer will undoubtedly become a prominent part of the tourism development strategy that is in line with the narrative defined by its consumers.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, east Slavonia, online promotion, rural tourism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has been among the most affected economic sectors by the pandemic. Globally, in the year 2020, there was a decline of 73% in international travel. Such a decline represents historically low results in tourism (UNWTO, 2021). At the same time, the tourist sector has shown remarkable resilience, proven by overcoming previous crises that have affected it throughout history. Some authors suggest that a tourism crisis results from regular unavoidable cyclical movements caused by various environmental, natural, political, and economic instabilities. (Richards, Morrill, 2020).

In contrast, others argue that appropriate and timely crisis management can build crisis resilience in tourism. Before embarking on recovery strategies, it was necessary to establish support mechanisms to halt the further deterioration of the industry. As a result of the adverse effects of the pandemic crisis, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), in its document, gives recommendations for preparations for the new living and business conditions. In particular, in the context of this paper, a call for the

implementation of measures that governments and the private sector can apply with specific emphasis on market diversification and tourism supply in the final stages of implementing this action plan. Recent academic literature states that the pandemic has affected travelers' increased demand for rural destinations due to its safe properties primarily associated with detachment from crowded areas (Vaishar & Št'astná, 2020; Silva, 2021). Many consider this a new consumer behavior pattern that will become the new norm. Buzzanell (2010; 2018) states that in the presence of crises, the best way to communicate its effects is by utilizing social media and other new technology forms to deliver messages via storytelling, slogans, rituals, and emerging narratives emphasizing benefits made to individual health, satisfaction, and happiness (Rahmanto, 2021). This paper aims to address the importance of diversification of tourism offer in the new circumstances caused by Covid-19. Rural tourism is identified as one of the most attractive and probable forms to fit the recent change in tourism demand. For that purpose, the paper evaluates promotional means and techniques for delivering appealing content to potential tourists in rural destinations of eastern Slavonia.

## **2. RURAL TOURISM – LITERATURE REVIEW**

Rural tourism is not easy to define, although it is not new. Lane (1994a) mentions that interest in rural area leisure grew up during the 19th century to lower the unpleasant stress of big cities. The "new" rural tourism od 1970-1990ties is very much different from 19th-century one. Academical community studied tourism from its emergence, but it is essential to mention that rural tourism was not the academic community's primary research topic. More significant rural tourism research and studies have started relatively late concerning the other tourism types (Wicks and Merret, 2003; Gartner, 2004). Although rural tourism occurs in the countryside, there is no simple definition of rural tourism (Grefe, 1992). Due to the complexity of the difference in rural areas worldwide, it is hard to have one complex definition of rural tourism. Some of the problems for defining rural tourism include the following: some of the rural areas are difficult to define; some of tourism that takes place is in rural areas is "urban"; there are different types of rural tourism; rural areas are in the process of changing themselves (Lane 1994b; Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). Dimitrovski, Todorović and Valjević (2011) state that rural tourism can be used as a geographical term for describing cultural activities and related to other terms such as agro-tourism or eco-tourism. Rural tourism includes recreational and leisure activities in rural areas (Liu, 2010). Due to the stated differences in defining rural tourism, different researchers (Tsai, 2007; Ružić, 2012; Pröbstl-Haider, Melzer, and Jircka, 2014) have presented different definitions of rural tourism which are valid for their rural areas (Table 1). The most significant differences in definitions of rural tourism are between developed and undeveloped countries (Nair et al., 2015:318).

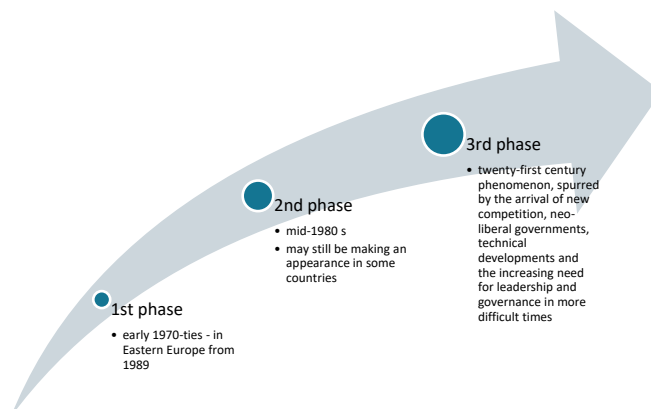
Table 1. **Definitions of rural tourism**

Author	Definition
Tsai, 2007	Content of rural tourism covers tourism in orchards, farms, culture, life, scenic areas, religious activities, food, and air in rural areas.
Ružić, 2012: 17	Rural tourism is an activity or a movement through which man leaves an urban environment and returns to nature.
Pröbstl-Haider, Melzer and Jircka, 2014	Type of tourism with which the life in the countryside, art, natural and cultural heritage of a rural area is presented.
Liu, 2010	Rural tourism is a kind of lifestyle and a critical part of the leisure industry.
Jepson and Sharpley, 2015	Rural tourism takes numerous forms, and, therefore, the reasons or motivations for participating in rural tourism are equally numerous.
Bartoluci, 2013	Rural tourism involves occasional stays of tourists in a rural region to participate in specific activities.

Source: Authors

As Bartoluci, Hendija, and Petračić (2015) concluded, most of the above definitions are directed exclusively to the point that a region and its characteristics characterize rural tourism, simultaneously disproving market conditions. One of the results of rural tourism development is that it has transformed from sightseeing activities (Kohl, 2006) into broadly established business activities with numerous adventure and activity tourism events differing with occasionally quite conceptual exploratory enjoyment (Jepson and Sharpley, 2015). Daneshpour and Pajouh (2014) concluded that rural tourism is an excellent opportunity for progress in economic development and various social results achieved from the rural environment. It is the fastest-growing segment of the tourism business that increases foreign investment and earnings. Lane (2015) stated three phases of rural tourism development (Figure 1).

Figure 1. **Rural tourism development phases**



Source: adapted from Lane and Kastenzholz, 2015

In the first phase, we see the emergence of rural tourism. This is seen at different levels (e.g., enterprise, national or international) as a viable option for deteriorating agricultural sector since the sector was unable to secure income for people living in rural parts of developed countries world. In the second phase, we can see a consolidated growth of rural tourism. This growth was infrequently coordinated or planned at any previously mentioned level, spreading across countries and continents (Nair et al., 2015). Rural tourism development's third phase is seen in some but not all destinations, and as Lane and Kastenholz (2015) state, it can change or decline rural tourism.

World Tourist Organization (UNWTO, 2004:13) states four vital elements for determining rural tourism. They are (i) rural natural resources (e.g., lakes, mountains, woods.); (ii) rural way of living (e.g., crafts, gastronomy, traditional music.) (iii) rural heritage (e.g., traditional architecture, villages, castles.) and (iv) rural activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, biking, water sports.). European Union published a paper on rural tourism – Towards Quality Rural Tourism: Integrated Quality Management (IQM) of Rural Destinations (European Commission, 2008). This document defines rural touristic destinations as areas specially identified and promoted to tourists to enjoy rural scenery. Researchers (Ružić, 2009; Bartoluci 2013; Bartoluci, Hendija and Petračić, 2015) state that rural tourism initiates several economic and non-economic activities in rural areas: agricultural production, growing natural and healthy food; active attitude towards nature and ambient depiction of rural life. Petračić (2018) stated that rural tourism influences ecological sustainability by contributing to the local community, and its encouragement supports several positive economic and social effects within the area it is implemented. Encouraging rural tourism development improves the local and national economy, creates new jobs in the tourism sector, strengthens regional independence, and provides infrastructure financing. If rural tourism develops evenly and correctly, it reduces differences in the development of urban areas compared to rural ones, especially those already affected by population depopulations (Petračić, 2018).

### **3. STRATEGIC DETERMINANTS OF TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA - THE ROLE OF RURAL TOURISM**

Dulčić and Petrić (2001: 265) define a tourism development strategy as a program or set of coherent actions aimed at adapting the tourism system to environmental conditions and criteria for efficient use of development resources, with the aim that tourism development makes an optimal contribution to achieving national development goals. Ivandić et al. (2012) state that tourism development aims to increase the total tourist receipts while respecting the principles of sustainable development. The primary strategic determinant for the future development of Croatian tourism is the environment that fosters the foundation of a special offer of innovative tourist experiences based on abundant natural and cultural values and knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship. They further state that the goals for the development of tourism include: (i) improving current and creating new tourist services and experiences; (ii) successful branding of Croatian tourist regions; (iii) establishing requirements for improving entrepreneurship and (iv) methodical rising of the level of skills, knowledge, skills, and education of tourism workers.

Croatian parliament brought a new national development strategy of the Republic of Croatia (2021) in which one of the goals is the development of sustainable, innovative,

and resistant tourism. One of the goals is to keep Croatia among the leading European tourist destinations in terms of safety, quality, added value, sustainability, and innovation. The sustainability, innovation, and resilience of Croatian tourism will be achieved by improving the tourist ecosystem, developing sustainable transport and connectivity, more competent resource management, and developing smart skills. Development of functional and sustainable tourist regions to offer a complete tourist experience, with the extension of the season and the shift to higher value-added tourism products based on better accommodation and accompanying facilities, will enable smart micro-regional specializations in various niches of particular forms of tourism. These are among other rural, gourmet tourism, eco-tourism, sports tourism and so forth. Krajnović, Čičin-Šain, and Predovan (2011) stated following key strategical factors for the success of the rural tourism as part of Croatian tourism: (i) multidisciplinary approach; (ii) constant communication with other stakeholders; (iii) strategy should be publicly available and (iv) the adoption of a strategy does not end with its development. By following these four factors, rural tourism can have a significant role in developing Croatian tourism. Based on the strategy, the particular investment will be made in infrastructure related to the valorization of cultural, historical, and natural heritage, in line with smart micro-regional specialization of functional and sustainable tourist regions.

Currently, rural tourism in Croatia, despite its vast potential, is still underdeveloped due to several restrictions, ranging from undefined legislation competencies that permeate several ministries (agriculture, tourism, rural development) to restrictions at the level of local communities, tourism communities, and intrinsic factors - those at the level of the family farm itself. Therefore, it is of great significance that all Croatian counties create plans for rural tourism development. These plans can encourage self-employment and motivate young people to stay in rural areas and lower the migration threats, raise the quality level of accommodation, catering, and tourism services and actively work on specific programs connecting two strategic sectors for the development of rural areas: tourism and agriculture (Demonja, 2014: 86).

#### **4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH RESULTS**

The primary purpose of the study was to determine which communication channels and techniques respondents perceive as the most successful for receiving information on tourism facilities in Slavonia, as well as which characteristics may be leveraged to brand Slavonia's rural tourist offer. The research framework and related research instrument were developed for the purpose of this research while taking into account the fact that several prior studies were utilized regarding the questionnaire structure and item distribution (Bartoluci, Hendija and Petračić, 2015; Andreopoulou et al., 2014; Ray and Das, 2011 and others). A survey was created using Alchemer online software and consisted of 10 questions and 22 associated items. Closed-ended questions were used dominantly. For scale-type questions, a 5-point Likert scale was used in which the marginal position 1 represented the minimum value and the marginal position 5 represented the maximum value. The first part of the survey explored the extent to which respondents access tourism-related content and services. The second section of the survey inquired about respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of promotional channels related to tourism.

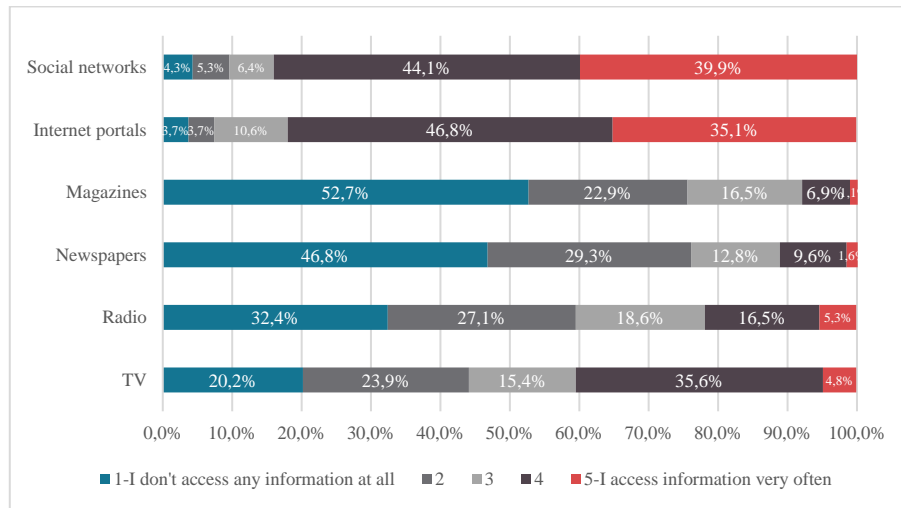
The study was conducted on a segment of Croatian students of economic orientation who participated in project tasks related to branding a tourist destination and obtained some knowledge about tourism marketing. The survey was administered using an e-learning platform with authorized access and made available to verified respondents.

The data collection took place during January and February 2021. During this time period, 202 responses were received; however, only 188 were approved for data analysis. The remaining 14 responses were eliminated from the study due to survey abandonment, a high percentage of missing data, or otherwise irrelevant or unusable data. The final convenience-based sample consisted of N=188 respondents who participated in this study. The sample gender distribution suggests that there were 62,8% female respondents and the remaining 37,2% of males. A vast majority of respondents (90,4%) came from eastern Croatian counties, namely: Osijek-Baranja county, Vukovar-Syrmia county, Požega-Slavonia County, and Brod-Posavina county. Slightly under 70% of respondents are unemployed, with the remaining 30,3% of employed respondents.

Based on the total sample, 57,4% of respondents confirmed that they have previously been a user of tourist offer in Slavonia. Respondents were asked to select which of the predefined terms they associate the most with Slavonia. The most frequently selected answer was (1) tradition (29,8%), followed by (2) agriculture (18,6%), (3) nature (18,1%), (4) enogastronomy (15,4%), (5) rural areas (12,2%) and (6) cultural heritage (5,9%).

Respondents were asked to estimate to what extent they access information about rural destinations through predefined 6 media channels, including 4 traditional media channels and 2 internet-based media channels: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet portals, and social networks. For each media channel, respondents estimated the frequency of information access based on a 5-point scale, with marginal position 1 described as "I don't access any information at all" and position 5 as "I access information very often". A detailed overview of the media channel's popularity regarding information about the rural destination is presented in the following figure.

Figure 2. Frequency of information access related to rural destinations per media channel



Source: authors' research

In order to compare the tested media channels, mean values were calculated. The most popular media channels for accessing the information about rural destinations are the 2 internet-based ones: (1) social networks ( $M=4,1$ ,  $SD=1,01$ ) and (2) internet portals ( $M=4,06$ ,  $SD=0,97$ ), followed by traditional media channels, (3) TV ( $M=2,81$ ,  $SD=1,25$ ) and (4) radio ( $M=2,35$ ,  $SD=1,24$ ). Print media channels recorded the lowest mean values among the tested channels: newspapers ( $M=1,9$ ,  $SD=1,06$ ) and magazines ( $M=1,81$ ,  $SD=1,02$ ). The presented patterns of media usage related to rural destinations are broadly similar to general information-seeking patterns of young target audiences.

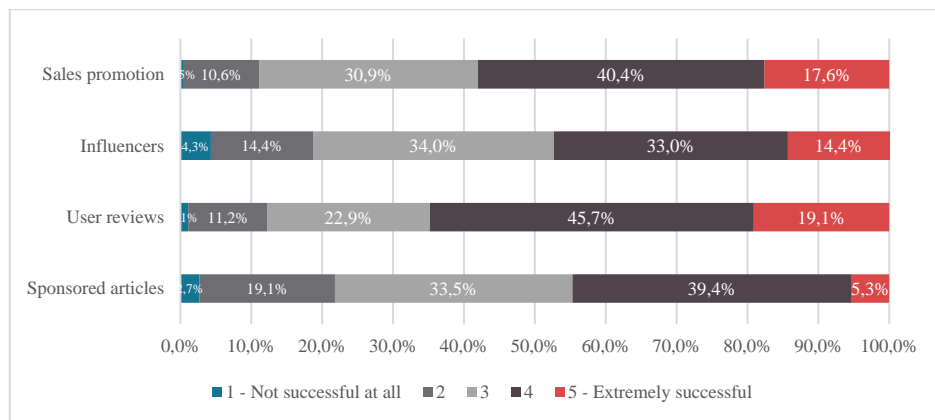
Following the perceived position of a particular media channel, respondents were asked to select a digital media channel for which they would most likely give permission to receive information about tourism-related content. Based on four predefined digital media channels, social networks were convincingly the most popular channel. More than two-thirds of respondents (67,6%) selected social networks as the preferred channel with permission for communication-related to tourism-related content, followed by e-mail/newsletters (21,3%), mobile app of a tourism-related company (6,4%), and instant messaging apps such as Viber and WhatsApp (4,8%).

In order to evaluate the perception of internet-based promotional activities related to Slavonia, respondents were asked to assess the position of Slavonias' online promotion in comparison with other tourist offers to which they were exposed. A 5-point scale was used with marginal positions described as 1-Not represented at all and 5-Strongly represented. Over a half of respondents (51,1%) stated that the online promotion of Slavonia is only slightly represented in comparison with others (scale position 2), with an additional 34% saying it is moderately represented (scale position 3). Only 0,5% of respondents reported that they believe it is strongly represented (scale position 5), and an additional 5,9% believe it is not represented at all (scale position 1). In addition, a mean value of  $M=2,47$  ( $SD=0,76$ ) confirms that respondents perceive online promotional



activities associated with Slavonia as only slightly represented in comparison with other tourism-related promotional content. This indicates that promotional activities are perceived as unrepresented and that there is a lot of room for improvement. Finally, respondents were asked to evaluate the success of e-marketing techniques and tools in providing information about the tourist offer based on a 5-point scale with marginal positions described as 1-Not successful at all, and 5-Extremely successful. The four predefined items were: sponsored articles, user reviews, influencers, sales promotion (including group discount websites). A detailed overview of perceived e-marketing techniques and tools' success is presented in the following figure.

**Figure 3. Perceived successfulness of selected e-marketing techniques and tools for providing information about the tourist offer**



Source: authors' research

In order to compare the evaluated e-marketing techniques and tools, mean values were calculated. When compared, the most successful item were user reviews ( $M=3,71$ ,  $SD=0,94$ ), followed by sales promotion ( $M=3,64$ ,  $SD=0,91$ ), influencers ( $M=3,39$ ,  $SD=1,04$ ) and sponsored articles ( $M=3,26$ ,  $SD=0,92$ ). It should be noted that all the evaluated techniques and tools have a mean value between 3 and 4, indicating a moderate to very successful perceived success rate in providing information about the tourist offer. There are several limitations to this study that should be addressed and noted for future research efforts. One of the restrictions is the sample dispersion and sampling technique. The findings' generalizability is limited due to the non-probability sampling approach. Another issue is that the sample is limited to a student population, which clearly limits the findings' generalizability. Future research efforts should include a variety of different target audiences in order to provide a deeper insight into populations' perceptions. In addition, evaluated techniques and tools should be expanded as well as specific communication channels in the digital environment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study's main goal was to find out which communication approaches respondents thought were most effective for getting information on Slavonia's tourism facilities, as well as which features may be used to brand Slavonia's tourist offer. The research was carried out on a group of Croatian students with an economic orientation who took part in project assignments linked to tourist destination branding and gained some understanding of tourism marketing. The total number of people that took part in this study, N=188, formed the convenience-based sample.

Based on the provided study, it can be concluded that around 60% of respondents have previously experienced some kind of tourist offer in Slavonia. Respondents associate Slavonia dominantly with tradition, agriculture, and nature, followed by enogastronomy and rural areas. The most popular media channels for accessing information about rural destinations are internet-based channels: social networks and internet portals followed by traditional media channels. The media consumption trends relating to rural places shown here are notably similar to general information-seeking patterns among youthful target audiences. More than two-thirds of respondents chose social networks as their preferred medium for communicating tourism-related content with consent. Over half of the respondents said Slavonia's internet promotion is slightly represented compared to other tourist offers to which they were exposed, with another 34% saying it is moderately represented. This suggests that promotional activities are underrepresented and that there is much space for improvement. Among the evaluated e-marketing techniques and tools for providing information about the tourist offer, respondents perceived user reviews as the most successful, followed by sales promotion, influencers, and sponsored articles.

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## EVALUATION OF CHANNELS AND TECHNIQUES OF PROMOTION OF RURAL DESTINATIONS IN EASTERN SLAVONIA

**Davorin Turkalj**  
**Antun Biloš**  
**Aleksandar Erceg**

### **Abstract:**

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and the avoidance of large crowds have contributed to the emerging demand for tourism facilities that have not previously been the focus of tourism development strategies. Rural tourism stands out due to its isolation, unexplored beauty, and nature, all of which correspond to emerging behavior patterns among today's tourist consumers. The tourism sector is among the most affected by the two-year crisis. Governments seek answers to these challenges by outlining measures that focus on addressing the untapped potential of rural destinations that are self-imposed as a logical choice in overcoming the adverse effects of a pandemic. Implications in economic terms are multiple: from keeping the population in rural areas, increasing employability, designing tourist and gastronomic offers, to redefining the concept of life in rural areas and its sustainability. The theoretical part of the paper determines the characteristics and importance of rural tourism on the totality of the tourist offer in the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Promotion as a significant part of activating the visibility and provision of rural tourism is examined in the empirical section of the paper. Preliminary research results present an evaluation of techniques and tools for promoting rural destinations in Eastern Slavonia on a sample of a student population. It is difficult to predict the direction of development and the circumstances in which the tourism sector will adapt to new requirements and thus to new forms of tourism. However, rural tourism and the specifics of communicating its offer will undoubtedly become a prominent part of the tourism development strategy that is in line with the narrative defined by its consumers.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, east Slavonia, online promotion, rural tourism

**Davorin Turkalj**  
Associate Professor  
University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek  
davorin.turkalj@efos.hr

**Antun Biloš**  
Associate Professor  
University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek  
antun.bilos@efos.hr

**Aleksandar Erceg**  
Associate Professor  
University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek  
aleksandar.erceg@efos.hr

## CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE POST PANDEMIC PERIOD

**Marko Koščak**

### **Abstract**

Tourism, as with many parts of the economy, is at a pause-reflect-reset stage in the post-pandemic world. This text puts forward some positive and practical concepts for the reset stage in terms of pushing towards wholly sustainable tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic has been disastrous in terms of the loss of human life, the physical and mental strains placed on large numbers of populations across the globe who have been quarantined in their homes and in terms of the costs of dealing with the pandemic and supporting business and citizens through the period. Tourism has been comprehensively damaged, not only in advanced economies, but also in poorer developing economies where tourism provides a vital source of income and employment. The problem has been complicated by the shattering effect on mass tourism, which has been far more sensitive to the shutdown of travel and accommodation than ethical and responsible tourism activities focused at a local sustainable level. Therefore, this text evaluates how the pandemic and economic decline affects ethical and responsible tourism – the type of tourism, which sustains and develops local communities in a balanced way for the benefit of future generations. It determines how ethically and responsibly focused tourism may adapt, develop and maintain safety for consumers in the post-virus world. The post-COVID world of tourism has created a situation in which the practicalities are glaringly obvious, whilst the theory which was happily embraced a year ago is now found not wholly relevant.

**Key words:** COVID – 19, ethical & responsible tourism, environmental balance, local tourism destination, post-pandemic tourism development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

To achieve sustainable levels of tourism requires management, marketing, promotional development, product and capacity development to be wholly integrated with an ethical and responsible approach. Whilst traditionally, tourism has sought to maximise people flows, ethical and responsible tourism seeks to regulate flows to ensure that footfall does not damage unique heritage and cultures whilst preserving historical and physical environments. Thus, responsibility in tourism is concerned with creating and agreeing a balance between socio-economic objectives, which benefit communities, and the preservation of the human, cultural and physical environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been disastrous in itself in terms of the loss of human life as well as the physical and mental strains placed on large populations across the globe who continue to be quarantined in their homes. The pandemic first appeared in late December 2019 in China and then moved into neighbouring countries in SE Asia through January/February 2020, before reaching Europe in February/March 2020. Indications confirmed its continuation into 2021 in the more advanced economies and potentially into 2022 in less under-developed economies.

Therefore, we consider how both the pandemic and resultant economic issues have and will affect tourism, and specifically ethical and responsible tourism – that type of tourism, which sustains and develops local communities in a balanced way for the benefit of future generations. It was developed as a model which by the end of 2019, we saw as being the way forward for sustainability at a local level.

## 2. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

According to the Brundtland Report, officially entitled “Our common future”, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987), sustainable development is a process that “ensures to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition implies the limits imposed by the present state of technology and social organisation on environmental resources. It also speaks to the limited capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. Therefore, sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony but rather a process of change with the major objective to satisfy human needs and aspirations while protecting natural environment and creating structures that ensure economic development of the society. The five basic principles of sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Report, are:

- holistic planning and strategy;
- preserving essential ecological processes;
- protection of human heritage and biodiversity;
- intergenerational equity;
- balanced fairness and opportunities between nations.

Sustainable development was declared an international goal by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992).

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2003), sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are “applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments”. In addition, the UNWTO states: Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Thus, sustainable tourism should:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and

consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them (UNWTO 2003).

Sustainable tourism, particularly where it impacts at a local level and relates to the cultural heritage, places additional restraints on local tourism development - the need to extend and promote the local cultural environment in its physical, social, and historic heritage setting, whilst at the same time protecting the same cultural heritage from the destructive trends that often accompany mass tourism.

### **3. HERITAGE TOURISM**

Heritage is defined as the elements of our inherited past that we value. Heritage tourism is defined as tourism markets and industry that have evolved around heritage. Heritage tourism is the form of tourism whose objective is, among other aims, the discovery of monuments and sites. It has become a more popular tourist activity in making visits to historical cultural heritage sites, in this electronic era. Culture, heritage, environment, and tourism are interconnected and taking significant attention globally (Perera 2013).

Heritage tourism, in line with the global trend in cultural tourism, has emerged as one of the most popular tourism categories (Chen and Chen 2010). The economic contribution of heritage resources is a major means to achieve sustainable tourism development (Apostolakis and Jaffry 2005). Therefore, a better understanding of heritage tourist behaviour in terms of heritage service attributes, specifically tourist preferences, may provide insightful information leading to the ability of heritage managers to create effective sustainable development strategies (Chen & Chen 2012). Chen and Chen have clearly described the importance of heritage tourism for sustainable economy. Creating a visitor profile for the kind of tourists interested in natural and cultural heritage tourism is very difficult due to their diversity of interests and the general lack of targeted market research. Thus, only general comments may be given here, based on the results of practical experience in different tourism destinations. Tourists in search of natural and cultural heritage appear to look for a wide range of different attractions and activities that are designed to satisfy different needs, be they for learning, relaxation, recreation, or adventure. The following are examples of activities that may be developed using natural and cultural heritage and are related to cultural tourism:

- festivals and events, banquets;
- music, theatre, shows;
- village life and rural life (e.g. farms, Sunday markets,);
- gastronomy, visiting/tasting local products;
- general sightseeing, village buildings and “atmosphere”;
- visiting historic and religious monuments or vernacular buildings, ruins;
- sites connected to famous people in the region.



It is also worth mentioning that nature- and culture-orientated tourists are also strongly influenced by the quality and type of accommodation and food on offer. It seems that tourists in search of nature or culture are rarely attracted to large luxury hotels. They will be much more interested in smaller establishments of good quality which provide a personal service and a certain level of comfort and quality – the demand for two- and three-star accommodation is generally very strong. There is also a small but growing proportion of tourists looking for character and “charm” in their accommodation. Rural accommodation, family hotels and pensions that use local quality crafts or are located in vernacular buildings are becoming increasingly popular. There are, however, a number of additional factors that should be borne in mind when dealing with natural and cultural heritage (UNWTO 2011):

- *Cultural and environmental heritage cannot be easily re-produced:* They exist because of history and geography and cannot be created easily in the short term. This means that destinations need to work with what they have. If their intrinsic appeal is low or only moderate it will be very difficult for the area to gain a competitive edge over other destinations.
- *Cultural and natural attractions are mostly a public resource:* Tourists rarely have to pay to see nature and most of the culture – e.g. visiting nature reserves, landscapes and village architecture. It is therefore primarily the private businesses, which develop a derived product around this public resource and thus reap the economic rewards. However, there is no automatic mechanism for ensuring that some of this income is remitted back into maintaining and enhancing the cultural and natural heritage itself.
- *Damage to natural and cultural resources is extremely difficult to measure:* Tourism inevitably impacts on the natural and cultural resources of a particular destination but its interrelationship is extremely complex and very difficult to quantify. There is no universal formula for determining carrying capacities for sites (i.e. the number of people that can visit the site without causing significant damage to it) as so much depends on the particular circumstances of the area.
- *Finally, the pricing structure of heritage-based tourism is not as clear as in other services or other forms of tourism:* There is little guidance available in this area due to the lack of established benchmarks. Comparable attractions in other regions might exist but in a different economic climate which makes comparisons difficult. Consequently, businesses might be pricing themselves out of the market, or more likely undercharging.

#### **4. ETHICAL TOURISM**

In August 2020, Zurab Pololikashvili, the UNWTO Secretary-General, stated that by abiding by the organisation’s *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, tourism would be able to maintain the delivery of better opportunities and sustainable development for millions across the globe. The aim of this code of ethics is to help maximise tourism’s benefits whilst reducing potentially negative impacts on the environment, cultural heritage, and societies at a global level (UNWTO 2020).

Ethical tourism may thus be defined as a form of tourism that operates by accepting a range of ethical values concerning host destinations. It seeks to ensure an avoidance of over-capacity and reliance on practices, which may be detrimental to the physical and cultural environment in which host destinations are located as well as the beliefs, values and culture of host populations. It also engages in ensuring that seeking such ethical values will ensure a degree of well-being to both host and visitor (Morand & Lajaunie 2018). In a sense, it may also be observed as a response to the fact that tourism in many fragile environments has been a destructive influence on local ecology, culture and heritage. The economic benefits that tourism is proposed to have brought may tend to be centred on a relatively small group of influential multinational investors (Koščak & O'Rourke 2020). It is therefore important when understanding ethical tourism to be able to comprehend the measurable impacts on host communities and their culture (Jones & Travis 1983)

Indeed, a balancing act is involved for ethically focused destinations which frequently occur in peripheral regions. They seek to create sustainable socio-economic inputs for local inhabitants given that success as an ethical destination may well improve income flows and maintain viable populations. Unfortunately, whilst such regions seek to strengthen the unique cultural, historical, ethnological, and ecological structures that makes them worthy of preservation, the risk of becoming a cultural/heritage theme park overrun by tourists is a clear threat (Koščak & O'Rourke 2020). Thus, striking a balance between important economic inputs to preserve unique environments, cultures and languages, and the risk of wiping out those environments with the detrimental effects of tourism is indeed a very difficult and hard balancing act.

Essentially ethical tourism is a vital component of the actions and concepts, which lead to sustainability in tourism. It focuses on the important values of:

- resisting the destruction of fragile local environments
- boosting the ability of local stakeholders to develop a form of tourism which meets capacity requirements
- protecting the physical and cultural heritage
- ensuring sustainable socio-economic benefit to local communities (Koščak & O'Rourke 2021)

An important element in understanding ethical tourism is the local tourism perspective; ethical tourism generally tends to operate at a local level rather than in mass tourism locations - albeit elements of ethical practice are growing in over-tourism centres such as Barcelona, Dubrovnik, and Venice. Indeed, it may be possible to suggest that the most effective developments of ethical niche sectors such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism and activity & adventure tourism have tended to be at a local level. In many cases, such forms of tourism have developed in regions that are geographically peripheral, rural, or coastal in nature and have a lower level of socio-economic development than the country in which they are located (Koščak & O'Rourke 2020).

Undoubtedly, a powerful focus in the ongoing development of ethical local tourism is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has heightened understanding of human fragility and how human planning and actions may be changed in such a short

space of time to be unable to react coherently. To a greater or lesser extent, this global virus that frightened and forced us to take refuge in our homes, has created a rethink of the operation of tourism in general and its relationship with the world in particular (Koščak & O'Rourke 2021).

## 5. IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Tourism is one of the many external forces influencing the direction and options for local development. The question of whether tourism can be sustainable – that is, whether it can contribute to local sustainable development – is therefore rightfully addressed. A truly legitimate and practical discussion on sustainable tourism must take place in and with the communities that are being influenced by tourist industry development. It must create accountability of the tourism industry to locally defined development visions. The true proof of “sustainable tourism” will be the sustainable development of local communities that serve as tourist destinations

Tourism in 2020 - 2022 failed to become free from the health, economic and emotional impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as spikes in infection rates affected all major tourism destinations and country/regional lockdowns continued. All indicators suggest that we are heading towards a change of paradigm in tourism, a new world that is yet to be discovered and we must understand, accept, and adapt to this new context. In the social, family, and personal sphere, the scale of values and perception of reality have changed. The confinement for weeks in their homes of almost half of the world's population surely promotes the need for freedom, to know and enjoy a leisure that in some cases has not been given sufficient attention and means to discover our immediate neighbourhoods. This is where tourism brings value and the offer of possibilities as wide as each citizen determines.

In recent surveys on the needs of citizens and their relationship with tourism, several “immediate” or “direct from the heart” responses stand out (Hoffman 2014):

- Sense of freedom
- Open spaces
- Security
- Health
- Normality
- Hope
- Fragility and a new vision of the world
- Locality

This crisis has shown human fragility and how human planning and activity may be changed in such a short space of time that we are unable to react coherently. In a world where it seemed that the economy dominated everything, where algorithms had become the modern prophets through the knowledge of gigabytes of data, and where even the number of travellers who would arrive at a hotel could be predicted months in advance, we are severely impacted by a pandemic, which makes any form of future planning useless. Despite everything, we remain connected thanks to tools such as the Internet,

allowing “mobility” between the physical and virtual worlds. To a greater or lesser extent, this global problem that frightens us and forces us to take refuge in our homes is making us rethink the operation of the tourism sector in general and its relationship with the world. We strongly believe that locality becomes even more important in view of the recent COVID-19 situation as well as a shift in ecological discourse from sustainability to resilience.

It may be proposed that locality becomes more important given the pandemic, as well as the shift in ecological discourse towards resilience. A need for resilience in a locality places emphasis on the capacity and quality of local planning/governance since the focus is the functioning of urban systems, both soft and hard. This however presents a political conundrum for the locality; planning for resilience requires a longer timeframe than the short-termism of the local political cycle. Indeed, a recurring issue in formulating ethical solutions is the lack of long-term strategic thinking even in the face of the level of adversity engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, the pandemic created conditions in which it became necessary for the tourism community as a whole to pause, reflect and reset.

## **6. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

The short-term in Europe Domestic and intra-EU tourism will prevail in the short-term. Some 267 million Europeans (62% of the population) make at least one private leisure trip per year and 78% of Europeans spend their holidays in their home country or another EU country (Eurostat, 2019). Used creatively, once lockdown measures are lifted, the crisis offers an opportunity for Europeans to enjoy the rich diversity of culture and nature in their own or other EU countries and discover new experiences all year around.

Many European regions and cities rely heavily on cultural tourism. Cultural tourism, representing 40% of tourism in Europe, particularly has suffered as most cultural activities, like fairs and festivals, were cancelled and institutions such as museums closed (92%). Technology has helped to reinvent cultural tourism during this pandemic by opening new opportunities for creative expression and by expanding audiences. Furthermore, it may be estimated that over half of European tourism capacity is located in coastal areas and almost one third of tourism nights are spent at beach resorts. Whilst high-capacity non-sustainable coastal tourism may operate on an all-year round basis, smaller rural/regional resorts, which are significantly more sustainable and ethically responsible, will be required in future to explore off-season capacities, e.g. niche tourism modes as well as small scale meetings, conferences and events. New opportunities are arising to discover hidden or forgotten natural and cultural gems closer to home and to taste locally produced products.

In several Member States where patronage voucher schemes have been set up, customers have shown enthusiasm for supporting their favourite hotels or restaurants. Such schemes could extend to other tourism related businesses such as culture and entertainment. This could be showcased on an IT portal, which would link up suppliers with all initiatives and platforms offering such schemes. It would help customers to find all initiatives and offers throughout the EU. In addition and in cooperation with many Member States and

their regional and local tourism destinations, the EU Commission could call for pledges to launch patronage voucher systems from local tourism organisations, but also from market players who are active in the tourism sector, such as small and large online platforms (through which many tourism businesses connect with their clients), credit card companies and payment system providers.

### **6.1. Implications in advanced economies**

Data from OECD (2020) implies that:

- Sustainability will potentially take a greater significance as a result of the collapse of mass tourism as well as a heightened understanding by tourism consumers of climate change and the adverse impacts of tourism
- This would suggest that local destinations which have strong environmental and sustainable content will drive tourism recovery and will be based on tourism which has a lower environmental impact
- We would also suggest that domestic tourism will gain a greater share, as tourists will in general be more reluctant to risk the health and hygiene threats of long-distance travel. For example, travel by over-night sleeping car trains, which not only provide a discrete personal environment but also are mask-free, may grow in volume over air travel.
- At the same time, we should keep in mind that due to the collapse of mass tourism, a large number of skilled tourism employees will be released onto the labour market. Many of them will be unable to find employment in locally focused tourism activities and may therefore shift to other economic activities. The new reality may be that the jobs these individuals once had will no longer exist
- We also must recognise the fact that the global investment sector continues to support large-scale tourism activity due to its immense equity and debt exposure. At the same time, global investment has shown scant regard to engagement with small and micro-scale tourism activity, despite the actual inherent risk balance being consistently lower.
- This will grow the need for locally based investment and funding, which in essence will release a currently unseen capacity at a local and regional level. But this will require more flexible and SMART financing technologies, including blending loan/equity/mezzanine financing as well as crowd funding and the use of small-scale micro-equity markets

### **6.2. New horizons – towards a sustainable future**

Beyond the immediate steps to bring relief, we should look ahead to the future of tourism and transport in the EU and look at how to make it more resilient and sustainable,

learning from the crisis and anticipating new trends and consumer patterns related to it. Our shared ambition should be to maintain Europe as the world's leading tourist destination in terms of value, quality, sustainability, and innovation. This vision should guide the use of financial resources and investment at European, national, regional, and local levels.

At the core of this new ambition is sustainability and responsibility. A joint aim should be to:

- enable affordable and more sustainable transport and improved connectivity,
- boost smart management of tourism flows based on sound measurement and tools,
- diversify the tourism offer and extend off-season opportunities,
- develop sustainability skills for tourism professionals, and
- valorise the variety of landscapes and the cultural diversity across Europe – while protecting and restoring Europe's land and marine natural capital, in line with the strategic approach for a sustainable blue and green economy.

This should include the promotion of sustainable tourism accommodations and other innovative schemes such as EU Ecolabel and the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). This ambition towards sustainable tourism should guide investment decisions at EU level, but it can only work in combination with a strong commitment at regional and local level (EU Commission 2020).

Equally, tourism can gain from the digital transition, providing new ways of managing travel and tourists flows, opportunities, and more choice, as well as more efficient use of scarce resources. The use of big data analysis can create and share accurate tourist profile segments and help understand traveller trends and needs. It can enable tourism to respond immediately to the changing customer demand and provide predictive modelling analysis. Finally, the application of blockchain technology would allow tourism operators to have all the available information about safe transactions.

Digital tools can also be confidence-building measures to reassure people that travel, and tourism can be safe. This means investment in digital skills, including cybersecurity and fostering digital innovation, and connecting tourism businesses and actors with existing data spaces at local and regional level (for instance through the ongoing work on the European data space on mobility). This is particularly important in rural, remote areas and outermost regions where tourism is fragmented and highly dependent on information, transport, and travel accessibility.

Within this digital transition, micro and small enterprises (MSEs) will need particular attention in supporting such tourism MSEs become more resilient and competitive. This requires building cross-sectoral linkages, interdisciplinary knowledge flow, stronger connections, and capacity to ensure accelerated uptake of sustainable digitalised products, services, and process innovations. Such networks should connect tourism with other industries to accelerate uptake of new solutions whilst fostering cross-sectoral

investments in the tourism ecosystem with ICT, renewable energies, health and life sciences, agri-food, marine, the media, cultural and creative sectors.

## **7. CONCLUSION: NEW SUSTAINABLE TRENDS?**

The sobriety in 2020 for the tourism sector was probably strong and painful enough; unfortunately, the potential for further shocks to occur until mass-vaccination occurs is inevitable. However, the experience of 2020 shows that the crisis has been successfully survived by those destinations that provide individual safety and distance, quality natural environment, remoteness from the masses, etc. Before 2020, the key words for the development of sustainable tourism (Koščak & O'Rourke 2020) could be seen as related to:

- Responsible management
- Seeking added value for local products and services
- Safety and social responsibility
- Accessibility for all
- Assessment of the carrying capacity of the environment
- Managing excessive tourism
- Participatory planning and partnership approach

Certainly, this remains important for the future development of sustainable tourism. However, especially in view of the events in 2020 – 2022 that have not yet seen their end, the following new trends and implementation of measures that will ensure the following in tourist destinations should also be viewed as important in our new reality:

- Experiential approach in product design and new experiences to travellers
- Security
- General and personal hygiene
- Social distancing
- The environmentally sustainable approach towards a preserved environment
- Conditions for the well-being of guests
- Addressing nearer markets

We believe that many local destinations will be able to provide all the above elements of the new reality. Without doubt, those who are successful in that process will have to face the task of transforming their development strategies and searching for new development paradigms that intensively incorporate the principles of sustainable and responsible tourism. Diluting of those principles will result in sliding back towards the complacency, which marked the tourism sector prior to 2020. For local tourism to enter a fully sustainable and responsible environment and to develop and flourish within such an environment, requires a fundamental commitment to enduring change over the medium to longer term.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE POST PANDEMIC PERIOD \***

**Marko Koščak**

### **Abstract**

Tourism, as with many parts of the economy, is at a pause-reflect-reset stage in the post-pandemic world. This text puts forward some positive and practical concepts for the reset stage in terms of pushing towards wholly sustainable tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic has been disastrous in terms of the loss of human life, the physical and mental strains placed on large numbers of populations across the globe who have been quarantined in their homes and in terms of the costs of dealing with the pandemic and supporting business and citizens through the period. Tourism has been comprehensively damaged, not only in advanced economies, but also in poorer developing economies where tourism provides a vital source of income and employment. The problem has been complicated by the shattering effect on mass tourism, which has been far more sensitive to the shutdown of travel and accommodation than ethical and responsible tourism activities focused at a local sustainable level. Therefore, this text evaluates how the pandemic and economic decline affects ethical and responsible tourism – the type of tourism, which sustains and develops local communities in a balanced way for the benefit of future generations. It determines how ethically and responsibly focused tourism may adapt, develop and maintain safety for consumers in the post-virus world. The post-COVID world of tourism has created a situation in which the practicalities are glaringly obvious, whilst the theory which was happily embraced a year ago is now found not wholly relevant.

**Keywords:** COVID – 19, ethical & responsible tourism, environmental balance, local tourism destination, post-pandemic tourism development

**Marko Koščak**

Izv. prof. dr.

Fakulteta za turizem Brežice, Univerza Maribor  
Cesta prvih borecev 36, 8250 Brežice, Slovenija

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR FOR THE ECONOMY OF CROATIA

**Danijela Vakanjac**  
**Kristian Šimunija**  
**Mladena Bedeković**

### **Abstract**

Agriculture has a significant impact on the economy of every country, including Croatia. Its three primary functions are to feed the domicile population, to supply all the industries requiring so with raw materials, and to export production surplus. For any country, agriculture is one of the fundamental activities to be mastered to enable further development and progress. Natural resources and a capable labour force are the key prerequisites for agricultural development and expansion. Croatia has highly favourable conditions for the development of agriculture, due to the intertwining of two different climatic regions, namely the Mediterranean one, being a temperately warm and humid climate with hot summers, and the humid snow forest climate with cooler summers. The aim of this paper is to explore and present the importance of the agricultural sector for the Croatian economy, specifying some basic issues such as outdated agricultural machinery and facilities, insufficient land consolidation and irrigation and drainage infrastructure, lack of interest of young people in agriculture, insufficiently educated agricultural population, etc. In addition to presenting the situation and current issues based on statistical indicators, the paper also illustrates the measures that the European Union provides and the grant opportunities which most of young people successfully use today, thus defining new standards for their agricultural holdings which is extremely important for the future of Croatian agriculture.

**Keywords:** agricultural issues, agricultural policy, natural resources

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Agriculture has significant functions in every country, and these are: feeding the local population, supplying the industry with agricultural raw materials and achieving the highest possible value in the export of agricultural products. If the agriculture of a country functions efficiently, it not only supplies the domicile population and the food economy, but also makes large profits in the foreign market.

This paper studies the issues of the economic development of agriculture from the theoretical aspect, examines the issues that emerge in implementing rural and regional development policies, as well as examining the current issues of agriculture such as insufficient land consolidation, necessary building of an agglomeration infrastructure, frequent changes in laws, the importance of educating young and old farmers and the issues alike. The paper also lists previous research related to the topic of the paper.

### **2. HISTORY AND KEY PRECONDITIONS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

“Agriculture, in its millennia-long historical development, was the least written about when it was the activity that a far larger percentage of the population was engaged in. The first simple written traces of agriculture were written by numerous historians, writers, philosophers, chroniclers, and travel writers, who recorded observations, for example, on the manner of performing certain works (ploughing, sowing, harvesting and

similar jobs), as well as on the means (tools) with which these jobs were done” (Grahovac 200, 27). It follows from the above that in the beginning of agriculture, the methods of cultivating crops were not recorded because the knowledge and experience about cultivating the land was transmitted by word of mouth.

According to Defilippis (2005), some of the first preconditions for economic and cultural development were created in the time of classical antiquity, around 3000 BC. The interest in agriculture deepened and expanded during the time when there were greater difficulties in feeding the population, i.e. hunger, and all this was preceded by various factors such as extremely unfavourable climatic conditions, disease epidemics, war, major natural disasters and similar situations. All this has led to agriculture having not only a function of production but also pronounced ecological and social functions.

“The primary task of agriculture is the production of food for the population, i.e. the supply of sufficient quantities, diverse, high quality and nutritionally high value products at moderate prices. Likewise, agriculture should provide raw materials of precisely defined characteristics for the needs of the food industry” (Kovačić 2000 151). Mataga (2002) states that the modernization perspective of the Croatian countryside also depends on several assumptions.

Since Croatia has adopted an agrarian strategy aimed at developing agriculture on market principles, it seeks to meet an aggregate demand for agricultural products at the lowest possible total cost, which can be defined as a general economic goal that is almost identical in all market economy countries that conduct a market economy and strive to achieve growth dynamics in agricultural production (Grahovac 2005). Defilippis (2005) emphasizes that the main goal of agricultural policy is to encourage efficient production and marketing of agricultural products in order to improve the welfare of farmers, thus contributing to economic growth and protecting the country's natural potential as well as ensuring the competitiveness of agriculture.

In order for agriculture to develop properly, it is necessary to meet certain conditions such as favourable weather conditions, satisfactory soil quality and sufficient amounts of water or, as Grahovac (2005, 96) states, “historically, labour and land, with scarce means of production that are and remained almost unchanged for centuries, were fundamental factors in the maintenance and development of agriculture”. Global trends show that the agricultural workforce is declining. Another issue that agricultural development is facing is the growing outflow of labour to the non-agricultural sector.

Since technology is evolving exponentially and many technological innovations have nowadays replaced human labour, nature and the landscape cannot be relocated or replaced, but need to be developed and improved in correspondence to technology. Although the results of the research conducted by Zrakić et. al. (2018) cannot postulate on the entire agricultural population due to the convenient and small sample; it can nevertheless be concluded that farmers have positive attitudes about technological innovations.

When it comes to the agricultural resources of the Croatian economy, it can be claimed that the Croatian economy meets almost all the preconditions to produce a quality and

competitive product coming from domestic fields and arable land. Natural resources are one of the most important factors when it comes to the progress of the domicile economy, and the development of the Croatian economy largely depends on their controlled and responsible use (Skala 2003).

### **3. CHARACTERISTICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN CROATIA**

In the last decade of the past century, Croatia found itself in a market transformation. Macroeconomic factors such as employment, economic growth and even other variables such as population growth have been on a downward trend, while external debt has tripled (Družić and Tica 2003). Croatia began to experience its shift when the effects of the stabilization program were noticed, i.e. when inflation was reduced to zero in 1994. According to Hodžić (2002), the results of a 1996 survey showed that Croatia had reached the level of a highly industrial country, in contrast to being a highly rural country in the past.

After 2000, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted a strategy for macroeconomic development, which indicated that Croatia could achieve the transition process in a rational time with decisive and rapid actions to accelerate the process of economic integration and expansion of the open market, by means of accelerated implementation of reforms as well as by accelerating the processes necessary for enterprise restructuring, implementing quality education programs and similar factors (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2002). According to Čavrak (2003), one of the key steps in the active role of the central government in regional development and its policy is the adoption of the Law on Regional Development and the establishment of the Regional Development Fund, whose main purpose was to encourage the balanced regional development of the country in accordance with the Regional Development Program of the Republic of Croatia.

#### **3.1. Agricultural products market**

According to Grahovac (2005), domestic production is the most important source of supply formation in the Croatian market, but it is not the only one. In addition to domestic production, foreign trade is another source of supply, since imports increase and exports reduce the supply of each individual product, which leads to an imbalance in supply and demand of domestic products. In agricultural terms, exports are one of the main factors of every country. It is necessary to achieve the highest possible foreign exchange inflow which would finance the import of other agricultural and other products. This is a very significant task for the Republic of Croatia and other countries with relatively low per capita income and great importance of agriculture in the economy.

The European Commission closely monitors the situation and price movements in the markets of agricultural products and food and publishes monthly reports on an annual basis. In February, June and September, short-term prospects are published, which include the markets for field crops and meat and dairy products in the EU (European Commission 2021).

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia in the foreign trade of agricultural and food products, exports have increased by 3.2% in the first eight months of 2020 compared to the same period last year and imports of the same products decreased by 7, 6%, while cereals were highlighted as the most important export product in the agricultural and food sector of the Republic of Croatia (Ministry of Agriculture 2020). When looking at the whole of 2020, imports of agricultural and food products were lower by 5.8% than in the previous year, while exports were higher by 8.8%, which means that the coverage of imports by exports increased from 64 to 74% (Croatian Chamber of Commerce 2021). It should be noted that these trends emerged as a consequence in the decline of tourism, as well as due to the reduction in consumption of agricultural and food products due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

Another parameter that shows the importance of agriculture for the Republic of Croatia is the representation of agricultural products in foreign trade. In 2019, Croatia thus exported HRK 2.15 billion of agri-food products, that accounts for 1.9% of total exports in the total amount of exports of HRK 113 billion (Central Bureau of Statistics 2020).

When it comes to the internal market of agricultural products, it should be noted that part of these products is used for further distribution of agricultural production, i.e. for seeds, livestock, animal feed, fertilizers etc., while the other part is used for direct personal consumption, mostly food consumption (so called natural consumption), and the third remaining part of production is surplus, i.e. it makes up the supply of agricultural products (Grahovac 2005).

### **3.2. Analysis of agricultural performance indicators in the Republic of Croatia**

This chapter analyses some of the indicators on the basis of which the importance of agriculture in the Republic of Croatia for the period of three years – from 2017 to 2019 – can be seen, and they are shown in Table 1. As it can be seen, the value of agricultural production recorded a slight increase every year; an increase of 5.5% in 2018 compared to 2017, as well as an increase in the value of agricultural production by 4% in 2019 compared to the previous year.

The number of people employed in agriculture in 2017 was 36,640, and a year later that number increased by a slight 0.03%, or 36,651 employees in the agricultural sector in 2018, while in 2019 the number of employees increased by 3% compared to the previous year. According to the data of the Ministry of Agriculture, out of the total number of employees in the Republic of Croatia, 2.6% refers to employees in the agricultural sector in 2018, while in 2019 this share amounted to 2.4%. Furthermore, the average net salary per person employed in agriculture in 2017 amounted to HRK 4,717, while in 2018 it amounted to HRK 5,056, which is an increase of 7.2%, and in 2019 it increased by another 3.3% compared to previous year, i.e. by HRK 5,222 per employee.

If the number of active farmers from 2019 is put in relation to the total population (4.078 million), then it can be concluded that 0.93% of the population in the Republic of Croatia are farmers (Worldometers 2021).

Indices of food products in 2017 recorded a growth of 2.9% compared to the previous year, in 2018 this index increased by 1%, and in 2019 it decreased by 0.1%, which shows that in the last analysed year the prices of goods and services for personal consumption have only slightly reduced compared to previous years.

The last parameter shown in Table 1 is the export of agri-food products. As can be seen, total exports in 2017 amounted to HRK 14 billion, while 13.3% of them related to exports of agricultural products, or HRK 1.86 billion. In 2018, total exports amounted to HRK 14.5 billion, and 14.3% of that was the share of agricultural products, or HRK 2.07 billion. In 2019, total exports amounted to HRK 15.2 billion, of which HRK 2.15 billion was exports of the agricultural sector, or 14.3%.

**Table 1. Indicators of Croatian agriculture in a three - year period**

	2017	2018	2019
Value of agricultural production (billion)	16.4	17.3	18.0
Number of employees in agriculture	36,640	36,651	37,774
Average net salary per employee in agriculture	HRK 4,717	HRK 5,056	HRK 5,222
Food product indexes	2.9%↑	1%↑	0.1%↓
Exports of agri-food products (billion)	1.86	2.07	2.15

Source: author's work according to the data of the Ministry of Agriculture 2017, 2018, 2019

If the previous analysis is taken into account, according to the observed parameters, it is evident that agriculture of the Republic of Croatia has recorded its slow but sure growth and progress in recent years. If the measured parameters continue this trend, it can be concluded that Croatia has a bright future in agricultural production. Back in 2000, Franić (2000) concluded in her research that it is necessary to understand economic and technological laws for the quality calculation of indicators and their interpretation, as well as that multidisciplinary cooperation between agricultural policy makers and scientists is necessary to define the framework of state intervention.

#### **4. STATE, ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES OF CROATIAN AGRICULTURE**

In order for agriculture to be able to develop further, it is necessary to identify two major factors, namely: the current situation and the overall historical heritage as well as all measures that agricultural policy is taking and will take to promote agriculture (Grahovac 2003).

Land consolidation and management is identified as one of the issues in Croatian agriculture, since the fragmentation of land leads to a large loss of time, i.e. opportunity cost, since more fuel is used to get the farmer to some more distant lands. According to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia, the majority of farmers who manage the land is over 45 years old, and when it comes to keeping records on the farm, they leave the job to other institutions responsible for it (Ministry of Agriculture, 2020a). Also, in order for agriculture to be efficient and effective, agricultural land must be fully regulated in such a way that land registers are harmonized with the cadastre, because after 30 years of Croatia's independence there is still no fully settled data on agricultural land, although progress is visible.

In the near future, environmental sustainability in agricultural practice should be improved – in terms of renovating the water supply infrastructure and developing access to irrigation water, which is still limited, given that over time there will be problems with water pollution if people do not begin to consciously separate waste depending on its type and dispose of it in places and institutions that are prescribed and responsible for it (Ministry of Agriculture 2020a).

Thus, the future of agriculture should strive for organic production, which implies a management system of agricultural food production that combines environment, climate, great biodiversity, conservation of biological resources and application of standards in the welfare of animal and plant species. The Republic of Croatia records a large growth of agricultural entities and areas under organic production. In 2013, the total number of entities was 1,789, while in 2019 this number increased to 5,548, which is 310.18% of entities (Ministry of Agriculture 2021). The goals of organic agriculture are: responsible use of energy and natural resources, preserving the ecological balance in the regions, maintaining water quality, maintaining biodiversity and increasing soil fertility. These objectives are regulated by high-standard EU rules and regulations and provide a clear framework for the production of organic products throughout the EU (European Commission 2021a). Pejnović et.al. (2012) concluded based on the conducted research that market disorganization and insufficiently developed environmental awareness are limiting factors for a more rapid development of agriculture in the Republic of Croatia.

#### **4.1. Measures, Subsidies and Legal Basis in Agriculture**

In 2015, the European Commission approved the Rural Development Program of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2014-2020 which represents the end of a long process of preparation of the above-mentioned development program (European Agricultural Fund 2014). The program defines 19 measures aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Croatian agriculture, processing industry and forestry, and improving working and living conditions in urban and rural areas. As the years passed and the system upgraded, the number of measures increased to 21. Some of the measures to help the Croatian economy include quality systems for agricultural products and food, investment in physical assets, development of farms and businesses, investment in forest development and sustainability forests, establishment of producer groups and organizations, organic farming, animal welfare, risk management, cooperation, agriculture, environment and climate change and many others (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 2021).

All the mentioned measures, including some others, contribute greatly to the development of the Croatian economy and lead to an increase in market competitiveness which also leads to the implementation of a better agricultural policy and an improved acquaintance of farmers with development measures and the obligations that each measure brings.

Unlike EU measures, the state support for agriculture refers to state grants through various forms of assistance to the agricultural sector. In practice, every developed country has its own measures of supporting farmers, as more and more young people today want to pursue occupations not related to agriculture but to technology and countries are looking for ways to attract young people to agriculture by means such as grants or majority funding. “The purpose of direct state support is to ensure the long-term sustainability of active farmers engaged in agricultural activities. The supports are allocated for the production, breeding, or planting of agricultural products, for the breeding or keeping of livestock as well as for maintaining agricultural land in a condition suitable for grazing or breeding.” (Agency for Payments in Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development 2021).

The Law on Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia contains all the foundations of agricultural policy, the forms in which rural and regional areas will be developed, information on what grants are paid and in what way, how markets for agricultural products will be regulated or organized and other measures to achieve goals in agricultural policy (Law on Agriculture OG 118/2018). Laws related to the agricultural sector in the Republic of Croatia are prone to numerous alterations and adjustments, and it is thus extremely difficult for farmers to comply with them.

Another issue in the state is the practice of allocating state land in a non-transparent manner. Moreover, milk producers are faced with the problem of high milk prices. Table 2 shows the milk price indices in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2005-2020.

**Table 2. Milk price indices (2015=100)**

2005	2007	2009	2011	2012	2014	2015	2018	2019	2020
77.3	7.7	8.1	100.3	96.4	109.2	10.0	98.7	100.3	102.1

Source: author's work according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (Central Bureau of Statistics 2021)

According to these indices, it can be concluded that the price of milk was very low before the financial crisis and has risen since the 2008 financial crisis. Also, it can be seen that after Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013, prices did not deviate greatly, and are stable due to various state and European interventions.

Given that 2014 has been declared the International Year of Family Farms, it is evident that the importance of agriculture was emphasized globally, with the aim of raising the awareness about the importance and role of reducing poverty and hunger in the world, ensuring food safety and nutrition, environmental protection, sustainable management of natural resources and achieving sustainable development of rural areas (International Fund for Agricultural Development 2014).



Another area that needs to be regulated relates to family farming, which is regulated by the Family Farming Act, which states the purpose of the conditions for performing economic activities of agriculture, and related additional activities performed in rural family farms as an organizational form. The methods and conditions in the Register of Family Farms, as well as the responsibility of the rights and obligations of the holder are determined by the competent authorities (Family Farming Act OG 29/2018).

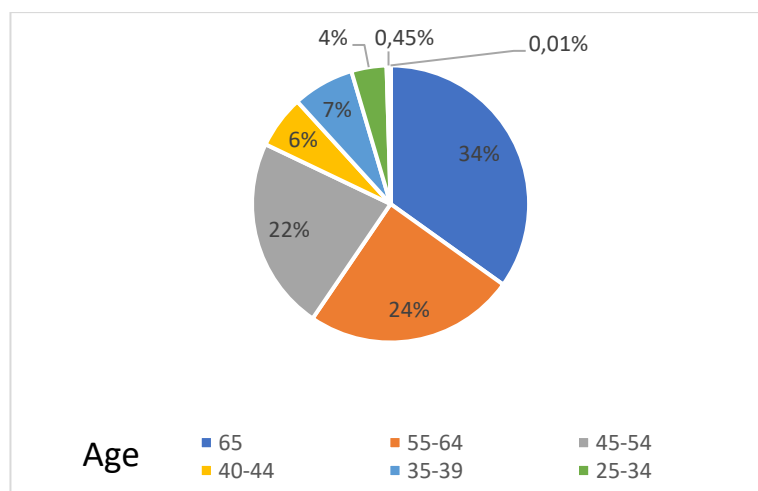
In June 2021, a reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was agreed upon at EU level, the implementation of which will begin in early 2023 with the aim of a fairer distribution of aid to farmers (European Commission 2021a).

#### 4.2. Young People in Agriculture

One of the current problems that Croatia is facing is the exodus of young people who are leaving the country for better incomes and working conditions or seeking jobs in other non-agricultural sectors, while older farmers who remain in the Republic of Croatia mostly possess small and fragmented lands that they cultivate with outdated technology and in addition to that also require health and social care (Jerić 2019).

According to the European Commission (2016), young farmers in the EU are considered to be under 40 years of age and there is 11% of them in the EU. Motivating young people to engage in agriculture is pointed as a great challenge. Therefore, the EU strives to provide assistance to young farmers in starting businesses through grants when setting up new businesses, as well as offering income support and continuous training. The results of a survey conducted by the European Commission in 2016 at the EU-28 level, which relate to the representation of farmers in the agricultural sector by age are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Representation of farmers according to age



Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/young-farmers\\_hr](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/young-farmers_hr) (2 August 2021)

It can be concluded that almost 80% of farmers are older than 45, which means that young farmers comprise a very small proportion in the overall number of farmers. The European Union provides financial assistance through income support measures to motivate the young farmers to engage in agriculture more, better, and more frequently and provides additional measures to young farmers in the form of grants under the rural development program, guarantees or loans to encourage rural development.

In particular, the EU seeks to help young farmers invest in agriculture through a program launched in 2013 (European Commission 2016a). This measure seeks to increase the production of agricultural products, as well as natural cultivation, which would simultaneously take care of the landscape and its natural diversity, and thus help in the fight against climate change. Special emphasis should be placed on Measure 6, which refers to the development of agricultural holdings and businesses, its sub-measure 6.1. that refers to support for young farmers, whose beneficiaries are persons between 18 and 40 years of age. Under this measure, the beneficiaries can apply for support in the amount of 8,000 to 49,999 EUR, while this cost includes the purchase of domestic animals, restructuring of existing plantations, equipping of facilities for agricultural production, purchase of machinery, equipment, and tools, etc. (European Agricultural Fund for rural development 2022).

This measure is extremely important for young farmers, given the possibility of family heritage in the form of land, and the start of production and processing of agricultural products with the help of these grants for the further development of agriculture.

According to the results of the research, Čop and Hadelan (2020) concluded that the key to the success of Croatian agriculture lies in strengthened exports, growth and implementation of innovations, stimulating education and the financial perspective of business.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The subject of this paper is aimed at emphasizing the importance of the agricultural sector on the Croatian economy. In addition to the listed historical features and conditions necessary for the development of agriculture, the paper describes the key issues that the agricultural sector is facing, as well as perspectives and guidelines towards which agriculture should be directed.

This primarily refers to the promotion of regional and rural development through the implementation of agricultural strategies and policies defined by the Republic of Croatia and the European Union. This emphasized the importance of using measures, incentives, grants, and directing young people to engage in agriculture.

If issues in agriculture such as frequent changes in the law, better implementation of agricultural policy and more active involvement of young people continue to be solved, Croatian agriculture would be enabled to have a sustainable growth and development, the country's economy would rise to a higher level and Croatia could make its products competent not only in the European but also in the world market. In conclusion, it can

be added that this paper sought to point out the key aspects of agriculture in the Republic of Croatia since agriculture is the "driver" of the population and its development results in the well-being of the whole community.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR FOR THE ECONOMY OF CROATIA

**Danijela Vakanjac**  
**Kristian Šimunija**  
**Mladena Bedeković**

### **Abstract**

Agriculture has a significant impact on the economy of every country, including Croatia. Its three primary functions are to feed the domicile population, to supply all the industries requiring so with raw materials, and to export production surplus. For any country, agriculture is one of the fundamental activities to be mastered to enable further development and progress. Natural resources and a capable labour force are the key prerequisites for agricultural development and expansion. Croatia has highly favourable conditions for the development of agriculture, due to the intertwining of two different climatic regions, namely the Mediterranean one, being a temperately warm and humid climate with hot summers, and the humid snow forest climate with cooler summers. The aim of this paper is to explore and present the importance of the agricultural sector for the Croatian economy, specifying some basic issues such as outdated agricultural machinery and facilities, insufficient land consolidation and irrigation and drainage infrastructure, lack of interest of young people in agriculture, insufficiently educated agricultural population, etc. In addition to presenting the situation and current issues based on statistical indicators, the paper also illustrates the measures that the European Union provides and the grant opportunities which most of young people successfully use today, thus defining new standards for their agricultural holdings which is extremely important for the future of Croatian agriculture.

**Keywords:** agricultural issues, agricultural policy, natural resources

### **Danijela Vakanjac, mag.oec., pred.**

Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
Matije Gupca 78, Virovitica  
E-mail: danijela.vakanjac@vuv.hr

### **Kristian Šimunija**

Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
Matije Gupca 78, Virovitica  
E-mail: kristian.simunija@vuv.hr

### **dr.sc. Mladena Bedeković, v.pred.**

Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
Matije Gupca 78, Virovitica  
E-mail: mladena.bedekovic@vuv.hr

## EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN THE FUNCTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

**Draženka Birkić**  
**Andreja Primužak**  
**Željko Fanjak**

### **Abstract**

Increased interest in horses and riding is evident worldwide, both in Europe and in Croatia. In economically developed countries and in countries where an increase in economic standards has been observed, dealing with horses has become a reflection of the way and quality of life. The main assets of this type of tourism in rural, sparsely populated, economically underdeveloped areas are untouched and preserved nature, rich watercourses, indigenous villages with traditional lifestyles, rich rural architecture, picturesque landscape, and a large number of family farms, often abandoned.

The aim of this paper is to determine the possibilities and perspectives of equestrian tourism development in underdeveloped rural areas on the example of Karlovac County. Encouraging the development of equestrian tourism can significantly influence the development of entrepreneurial activities through direct and indirect activities that rely on equestrian tourism. For the purposes of this paper, field research was conducted in the form of interviews and questionnaires with ranch owners who offer some of the activities that include horses.

The results of the research indicate the key activities that need to be carried out in order to encourage entrepreneurship in equestrian tourism and the development of economically underdeveloped rural areas.

Although this is still an unrecognizable form of tourism in Karlovac County, equestrian tourism, along with certain development guidelines, has significant potential to raise the quality of life in rural areas and create a recognizable, sustainable, and competitive tourist destination.

**Keywords:** equestrian tourism, entrepreneurship, rural areas

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In economically developed countries and in countries where an increase in economic standards has been observed, dealing with horses has become a reflection of the way and quality of life (Čačić 2009; Kozak 2013; Plea 2015; Tomljenović 2018; Notzke 2019; Dashper 2020; Cioban Coca 2021). The main advantages of this type of tourism in rural, sparsely populated, economically underdeveloped areas are untouched and preserved nature, rich watercourses, indigenous villages with traditional lifestyles, rich rural architecture, picturesque landscape, and a large number of family farms, often abandoned. Trail riding is a popular horse-based touristic activity and can provide business opportunities for rural entrepreneurs (Pickel-Chevalier 2015; Kozak 2017). The development of equestrian tourism in rural areas can activate the economic development of the area, initiate entrepreneurial activities, which further encourage the preservation of local identity, traditions, and customs, and protects environmental and cultural resources. After the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, there is a change in trends in tourism and a more permanent change in our values, attitudes, and lifestyles (Telišman-Košuta 2020: 1). It is estimated that about 25% of international tourists are attracted by equestrian tourism. Equestrian tourism is one of the specific forms of rural tourism for which Karlovac County has all the necessary predispositions.

The aim of this paper is to determine the possibilities and perspectives of equestrian tourism development in underdeveloped rural areas on the example of Karlovac County. For the needs of research and this article, field research was carried out in the form of an interview and a questionnaire with the owners of Equestrian Tourism Centers, which offer some of the activities that include horses.

The results of the research indicate the key activities that need to be carried out in order to encourage entrepreneurship in equestrian tourism and the development of economically underdeveloped rural areas.

Effects of equestrian tourism in Karlovac County must force decision-makers in this field to create a strong image or brand for this form of tourism, because a compelling message is needed to attract tourists from the country and abroad.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural areas around the world are facing increasingly complex problems of land use and development. It's characterized by a small number of mostly elderly people, small family farms, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Smolčić Jurdana et al. 2018). This indicates the need to establish such an economic orientation that will result in the revitalization of rural areas, but also the retention of local people in rural areas. It is the development of equestrian tourism in rural areas that can activate the economic development of the area, which can further encourage the preservation of local identity, traditions, and customs, and protect environmental and cultural resources. Rural tourism according to Jafari (2000: 514) is defined as part of the overall tourist offer in which the village is the main attribute of attraction, visited by the city population for outdoor recreation and enjoyment of leisure and peace. It includes tourist valorisation of agricultural areas, natural resources, cultural heritage, rural settlements, local traditional customs, and products through specially designed tourist products that mark the identity of the area and meet the needs of guests in accommodation, food, beverage, recreation, and activities, animation, and other services, with the aim of sustainable local development (Bartoluci 2013: 190). After the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, there is a change in tourism trends and a more permanent change of our values, attitudes, and lifestyles, according to Telišman-Košuta 2020: 1), they are reflected in the following:

1. The most common forms of tourism are those in which personal contact of participants is minimized;
2. Market segments, members of the Millennium Generation and Generation X are looking for additional experience and activities when traveling. Couples with young children choose tourist destinations very carefully and thoughtfully, giving preference to staying in nature, on farms with the possibility of sightseeing or participating in activities involving animals;
3. The trend of *staycation* has intensified (i.e. *Stay at home vacation* ) and destinations closer to home are more preferable;
4. Health security of travel and accommodation is a crucial element in making travel decisions;
5. The advantage is on the side of smaller, more intimate spaces for a few people or spacious open areas in nature where it is possible to be "together-alone"

6. Authenticity is required (local, real, true, original), and the spaces in which they are carried out should be intimate, arranged, and clean (Ivandić 2020: 4).

In economically developed countries, but also in countries where an increase in economic standards has been observed, it is becoming a medium that represents an increase in quality of life (Čačić 2009; Paniccia and Baiocco, 2020), and dealing with horses (sports, breeding, recreation, etc.) becomes a reflection of lifestyle and quality of life. Trail riding is a popular horse-based touristic activity and can provide business opportunities for rural entrepreneurs (Kozak 2013; Pickel-Chevalier 2015) Horses involved in the tourism industry are not just objects to be consumed by paying guests, but individual creatures with wants, needs and fears, and with the capacity to shape tourism experiences alongside human guests and tourism workers (Dashper and Buchman 2019; Dashper 2020).

According to the Croatian Equestrian Tourism Association (HSKT), equestrian tourism means "the inclusion of all equestrian potentials regardless of breed characteristics, which can be used appropriately and acceptably through horse rental, horse riding, equestrian events, races, sporting events, exhibitions and shows, parades, animation games, one-day or multi-day organized trekking, panoramic and off-road riding and many other activities innovatively designed for target groups of visitors or tourists." According to the National Association of Equestrian Tourist Guides (ENGEA Croatia), recreational riding is not a sports discipline but the lifestyle of those who will discover new landscapes by riding, admiring nature, learning about local history and culture, and all this with the help of certified equestrian tour guides.

Equestrian tourism is a form of tourism that has begun to develop in recent decades and is accessed by more and more people. We specify that this type of tourism is realized due to the existence of natural and anthropic resources, due to the presence of different forms of relief, due to the increasing number of riding centers, equestrian pensions, equestrian tourism guides and state and private stud farms ( Dashper 2017; Dashper and Bryaner 2019; Dasper 2020; Cioban and Coca 2021) There are about 20 million riders in the world, of which six million in Europe (EUquees project 2015). It is estimated that two percent of the European population practices horseback riding. The largest number of riders, around 2.4 million, is in the United Kingdom, followed by 2.2 million in France (Tomljenović et al. 2018). The number of riders in Croatia is estimated at about three thousand (Tomljenović et al. 2018), and it is estimated that about 24 thousand riding horses are registered in Croatia (Croatian Equestrian Tourism Association).

According to the largest German equestrian association FN (Fédération Equestre Nationale) there are over 11,000 commercial equestrian clubs and stables in Germany, however, not all members of the FN. According to their estimates, 1,200,000 people over the age of 14 are actively involved in equestrian activities, and with young people under the age of 14, that number rises to 1,700,000.<sup>1</sup> According to FN, equestrian sports are practiced with special enthusiasm by women, who make up 75% of the total membership.

In accordance with the above, it is interesting to consider the structure of visitors to Karlovac County according to emitting markets due to the COVID 19 pandemic

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.euroequestrian.eu/files/2/11/Horse\\_Sports\\_and\\_Breeding\\_Juli\\_2014.pdf](http://www.euroequestrian.eu/files/2/11/Horse_Sports_and_Breeding_Juli_2014.pdf)



The most important individual emitting market of Karlovac County is Germany, which in the total structure of guests in 2019 participated with 47,020 overnight stays, and in 2021 even with 93,515 overnight stays in the first 10 months. They are followed by tourists from the territory of the Republic of Croatia with 90,294 overnight stays, i.e. with a share of 22.8%. If we compare the emitting markets before the pandemic (2019) and during the pandemic (2021), we will notice that the trends created by the Covid 19 pandemic are recognized here, and that is the trend of *staycation*( *Stay at home vacation* ) preferences will be given to destinations closer to home, i.e. in your own country and those in neighbouring countries, but also those that offer the opportunity to be together and be alone. There has also been a change in the ranking of the top 10 destinations. The Netherlands and Poland climbed significantly from 6th and 7th place in 2019 to 3rd and 4th place in 2021. with an increased number of nights, France, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are entering the top 10, which was not the case in 2019. From the aspect of equestrian tourism development, we can conclude that this is a very favorable structure of emitting markets because these are economically developed countries, but also countries where there is an increase in economic standards.

According to Tomljenović et al (2018), it is estimated that about 25% of international tourists are attracted by equestrian tourism, about 30% of them come for horseback riding, and 25% come for activities related to horses (fairs, competitions), and 7% come for horseback riding on longer routes. According to the Institute of Tourism (2018), about 3.5% of visitors along the Adriatic coast participate in activities related to horses and horseback riding. In coastal destinations that have a developed network of equestrian trails and where visitors from Italy, Austria, Great Britain, and France are dominant, there are almost 9% of visitors who take part in equestrian tourism.

The ecological aspect of equestrian tourism is manifested through the emphasis on a healthy lifestyle, staying in nature and doing sports activities (Čačić 2009; Nieminea 2014; Schmudd 2015; Nottle 2019). It should be noted that pasture horse breeding, and livestock in general, is one of the basic elements in preserving protected landscapes, the authenticity of the Croatian countryside, and biodiversity.

Encouraging equestrian tourism can significantly influence the development of entrepreneurial activities through direct and indirect, i.e., supporting activities. Equestrian tourism offers great opportunities in seasonal and self-employment (Čačić 209). The impact of equestrian tourism on direct employment is not great because ranch owners in most cases do everything themselves up to a certain volume of business and then are forced to hire labor in animal care and implementation of agreed tourist arrangements. Direct employment includes, for example, breeders, riders, drivers, coaches, riding instructors, stable workers (so-called horsemen), blacksmiths, veterinarians and veterinary technicians, physical therapists, horse walkers, and others. A much more significant impact of equestrian tourism is employment in indirect and supportive activities as it supports the development of other forms of tourism in rural areas (tourist rural family farms, tasting rooms, wine shops, interpretation centres, stop-over shelters for horses and riders). Visiting family farms, tasting and buying their authentic products, visiting wineries, tasting and buying excellent quality wines, learning about culture and tradition and natural landmarks of the area. It also encourages the development of infrastructure necessary for its development and networking and provides a unique tourist experience. but also encourages the development of

infrastructure necessary for the development of equestrian tourism (construction and maintenance of equestrian trails, arrangement of local roads, construction of tourist infrastructure. According to FN, there are approximately 10,000 people in Germany who work as amateur or professional riding instructors.

Encouraging and developing equestrian tourism also contributes to the realization of the goals of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and the Croatian Strategic Vision for Agriculture, but also to the development and implementation of the concept of smart villages.

### **3. STUDY AREA - KARLOVAC COUNTY**

Karlovac County is located in central Croatia, with an area of 3,626 km<sup>2</sup> and 112,596 inhabitants, with a population density of 31.09 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (CBS, 2022). The county has important traffic and geostrategic position. It is the intersection and the hub of important national and European roads, close to urban centers such as Zagreb, Rijeka, Pula, Zadar, Ljubljana.

The county is characterized by pronounced biodiversity as well as protected areas, among which are the Plitvice Lakes National Park and the Žumberak-Samobor Highlands Nature Park. The recognizability and attractiveness of Karlovac County are in the richness of the rivers Kupa, Korana, Mrežnica, and Dobra.

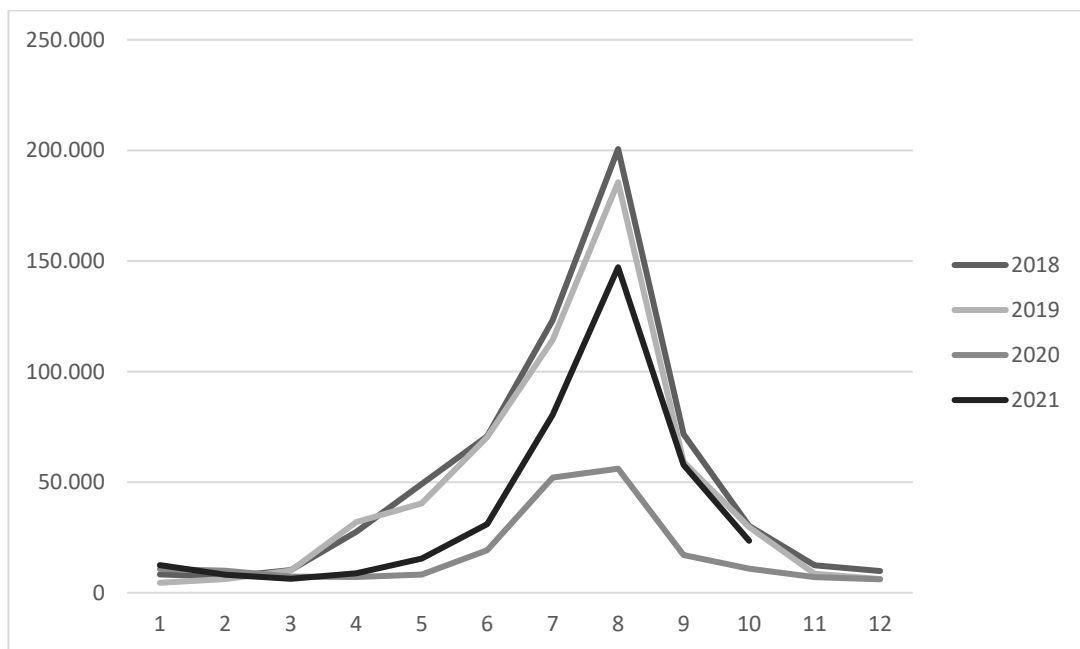
Equestrian tourism is one of the specific forms of rural tourism for which Karlovac County has all the necessary predispositions.

In Karlovac County there are 10 ranches registered which offer equestrian tourism services. They have a total of 51 horses, with an average of 6 horses per ranch, with the exception of Ranch Terra and Equu Igri Ranch, which have 12 and 11 horses, respectively. Fany and Contesa have 2 and 4 horses respectively. Karlovac County is not recognizable as a destination for equestrian tourism. Today in Karlovac County there is an upward trend of turning classic, often abandoned households into farms/ranches that offer various activities with horses, horseback riding.

In terms of the number of realized tourist arrivals and overnight stays in continental Croatia, Karlovac County is in the lead and in 2021 achieved the largest number of tourist arrivals - 220,803, i.e. 410,286 overnight stays (CNTB, 2022). The average number of days of stay per guest in Karlovac County is 1.85 days

As for the tourist traffic in Karlovac County, it is extremely seasonal, which can be seen from the graphic presentation of tourist traffic in Karlovac County per year from 2018 to 2021 (first 10 months) in Graph 1.

**Graph 1: Tourist traffic in Karlovac County per month and per year from 2018. until 2021 (first 10 months)**



Source: authors

The seasonality of tourist traffic indicates the fact that 77% of total overnight stays in the County are realized from June to September, while July and August alone generate 55% of overnight stays. Such seasonality indicates a strong reliance on transit guests in the summer months, and the shorter retention time of guests on average (1.85 days) is a combination of relatively poor destination offers of additional experiences (except Plitvice Lakes National Park).

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of research and writing this paper, primary and secondary research was conducted. The secondary survey was conducted using the desk method, and data were collected from official statistical reports, scientific and professional articles by domestic and foreign authors, and relevant websites. The primary research was conducted using a structured survey questionnaire, composed of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The results of the research are based on information obtained from the owners of Equestrian Tourism Centres. In November 2021, the authors of this paper conducted field research, to have face-to-face conversations with ranch owners about the opportunities and prospects for equestrian tourism in Karlovac County. The working group visited 7 ranches, and the remaining three ranches were communicated by telephone and sent a questionnaire by e-mail, with a request to participate in the research and thus contribute to this research. All 10 ranch owners responded to the survey and so became respondents in the following text.

The research consisted of a pre-prepared structured questionnaire according to the researcher's areas of interest. The interview was of an open type, topics for discussion were identified, but the fixed format of the survey questionnaire was not followed. The initial question was always when and how the business was started, which in most cases led to telling a story about the business, problems, and challenges. If the respondents themselves did not mention other topics provided by the questionnaire, the researchers encouraged them in that direction through conversation. During the interview, other topics were touched upon that were not initially foreseen by the questionnaire, such as planning, financing, safety measures. The final question for the respondents was to express their ideas for the improvement of equestrian tourism in their area, i.e. in the area of Karlovac County. After completing survey data were processed. This paper contains an in-depth focus on the perspective of equestrian tourism development in Karlovac County.

## **5. RESEARCH RESULTS**

According to the results of this research, ranch owners are mostly people who are great enthusiasts for horses and have spent part of their life and work with horses and decided to turn their hobby into a business. Leave cities and come to live in rural areas of Karlovac County and open their equestrian clubs offering basic boarding services for horses, riding school, recreational riding accompanied by professional persons or field riding.

Of the total number of ranches, 60% of ranches have 2 family members, 20% of ranches have 1 member of the farm, 10% have three family members and 10% of the farm have 4 members on the farm. According to the results of this research, 60% of farms have 6 horses, 20% of farms have 11 or 12 horses, and 20% of farms have less than 6 horses. Since horses are social animals, this research shows that 6 horses for a two-member family are the ideal number of horses that the family can take care of on their own.

When asked who participates in farm activities that include caring for horses, 50% of respondents said that they take care of themselves with the help of friends, 30% of respondents said that they take care of themselves with the help of family, and 20% of respondents said that they take care of themselves, but with employee assistance. These results can also be directly related to the number of horses on the farm. Most demanding and responsible activities include, among other things, jobs in the field of horse health care.

All respondents answered that they have their veterinarian, but they do everything they can on their own when it comes to animal health. In 90% of cases, ranches are open all year round. Ranch owners in most cases do everything themselves or with the help of their families, but as the volume of business increases, they are forced to occasionally hire additional manpower to take care of the animals and carry out the agreed activities.

The development of eco-tourism and adventure tourism on the one hand and the development of rural or agrotourism on the other are considered to be potentials for basic products based on equestrian tourism in Karlovac County.

Equestrian tourism includes recreational riding in equestrian centres, and in the field, short walks (lasting 1 to 4 hours, at a distance of 7 to 30 km, longer excursions (distance from 30

to 70 km). Horses can be used in hippotherapy, i.e. rehabilitation of disabled people with physical or mental injuries. The most common programmes in equestrian tourism are riding schools, carriage rides, sports and recreational riding, equestrian competitions, equestrian games and demonstrations, therapeutic riding, equestrian educational camps, natural horsemanship, and visits to stud farms.. When asked what their "core business" is, i.e. the main activity within the operation of the ranch, the respondents had the opportunity to choose several options. The results are below (Table 1).

Table 1: **Core business on the ranches**

<b>Name of activity</b>	<b>Share</b>
Horse rental for tourists, recreational riding accompanied by ranch staff	100%
Field riding with expert guidance	70%
Sightseeing of the farm	100%
Riding school	30%
Natural horsemanship	20%
Carriage ride	10%
Musical stage performances	10%
Horse boarding house	10%
Renting apartments	40%

Source: authors

According to the respondents, the main motivation for tourists to come to the estates is to stay in nature, ride and test their abilities, escape from stress and develop their personalities. They are attracted by natural beauties, diverse landscapes, and rich cultural heritage. Accommodation should be comfortable, but not necessarily luxurious. The food and drinks served should be traditional and of good quality. Safety, comfort, and authenticity are required. The results of the research show also that horses on farms are mostly used for renting for recreational, field riding with professional guidance, and for riding schools. Also, an increasing number of respondents, property owners, are resorting to ancillary activities, namely the construction and rental of tourist accommodation apartments. Regarding the possibility of accommodation and longer stay on the property, 80% of respondents stated that they have the possibility of accommodation and multi-day stay on the property. In most cases, they rent one to two apartments and accommodate a maximum of 4 people per apartment. Only one ranch can accommodate up to 15 people. Respondents also stated, 70% of them, that they are thinking about expanding accommodation capacities and expanding the offer in that sense because it perfectly complements the main tourist product.

The research confirmed that visitors come to the destination on purpose to use the services on the property, but also the properties themselves perfectly complement the offer of the tourist destination or many tourist entities such as nearby camps and resorts. When asked how many visitors have experience with horses, 70% of respondents said that most visitors have no experience at all or the experience is extremely modest, which poses a serious safety risk to business owners which they are exposed. Only 30% of respondents stated that their visitors in most cases have satisfactory experience and knowledge of handling horses.

When asked which services visitors who have experience with horses use the most, the answers are as follows.

All visitors who come to the farms and have experience in working with horses and are experienced riders are primarily interested in multi-day riding tours. Given that equestrian tourism is relatively new, the rapidly growing form of recreation is suitable for a wide group of visitors. Regarding the structure of visitors, the respondent stated that it is very diverse ranging from individual visitors, who have no experience working with horses, to active riders and parents with small children, novice riders, hikers.

All respondents confirmed that they are satisfied with the current state of their own equipment and infrastructure and pointed out that they continuously invest in equipment and property within their own financial capabilities.

When asked about income from equestrian tourism, 60% of respondents said that working with horses is not their only source of income and that income is significant, 10% of respondents said that working with horses is not their only source of income and that income is not significant, and 30% of respondents stated that these are their only sources of income and that they are significant to them.

There are no officially marked equestrian riding trails in Karlovac County, so field riding instructors who organize equestrian excursions, in most cases farm owners, use hiking, mountaineering, and, partly, cycling trails. They often lead a group on unmarked paths which they break through on their own, or worse, they lead a group with horses along the road and they never know how a horse will react to the sound of an engine or the sudden arrival of a vehicle.

Regarding communication and marketing of their own services, the respondents stated that they have their own websites, i.e. that they use social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. A review of social networks and their own websites shows that the pages are not maintained regularly, and the respondents themselves point out that the most important thing for them is word of mouth and that they also use flyers for advertising. None of the respondents uses the Tik Tok application, which is intended for young people and whose use is on the rise. Video reels are also not present.

As a final question, respondents were asked to comment on ideas for improving equestrian tourism in their area and explained the limitations of the development of equestrian tourism, and the results of these findings follow below.

Respondents point out the lack of marked equestrian trails and poor tourist infrastructure, the lack of events that would contribute to the popularization of equestrian tourism and the lack of cooperation between equestrian tourism holders, and the lack of cooperation with public local government. Also, emphasize the shortcoming easy access to reliable and up-to-date information is necessary for the modern tourist, so it is necessary to create a unique information system that uses new technologies (GPS) or interactive maps. Ultimately, this should contribute to the improvement of promotional activities, the creation of quality and recognizable tourism products centered on horses, and also the development of a strategy for the development of equestrian tourism or pointing to its role in existing strategic

documents. According to the results of this research, we can conclude that the attitude of respondents that members of all stakeholders of the local community must participate in the process of planning tourism development in their community and that such an approach is a prerequisite for successful tourism development. In doing so, the tourism industry in its development must take into account the views of stakeholders within the community. The problem is if interest groups within the local community are given certain opportunities to express their views, but they are approached formally, attitudes are not taken into account in the final development of strategic plans and are thus marginalizing the attitude of the respondents (Birkić et al. 2019) thereby losing interest in participating.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Croatian horse breeding has a long tradition, and it is this tradition that opens up opportunities for the development of equestrian tourism in the whole of Croatia, including Karlovac County. Preserved nature, expertly run equestrian ranches, professional care for the well-being of horses, family farms offering local gastronomy, extremely interesting cultural and historical heritage are all exceptional resources on which the development of equestrian tourism can rest. With the synergy of everyone in the chain, even the most demanding guest can receive superior service and experience. All this together can contribute to the revitalization of the Croatian countryside and demographic renewal. Regardless of the category of consumers and the form of consumption, business related to horses is of great importance in the economy of rural areas, through direct and indirect employment. Construction and maintenance of marked equestrian trails and accompanying tourist infrastructure, organizing promotional tourist activities and events centered on horses, counselling, connecting interest groups and organizations, coordination and promotion of equestrian tourist trails, and equestrian tourism in general, are necessary prerequisites for equestrian tourism Karlovac counties.

It is necessary to emphasize, and which is scientifically proven, that the importance of the equestrian industry is on the rise, and that the implementation of quality tourism products and/or services centered around horses undoubtedly contributes to the tourist offer of the destination and the building of a recognizable and competitive image. It is extremely important to consider all aspects of equestrian tourism and respect its specifics, as well as to work on educating owners of ranches in order to master the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to successfully run a business. What sells in "equestrian tourism" are not necessarily high-quality catering services and expensive horses, but the existence and quality of riding trails, accompanying tourist infrastructure, training, and reliability of horses for work, natural and cultural heritage that should be properly interpreted. Given the findings obtained, it seems that an integral element of the development of equestrian tourism in the analysed area of Karlovac County is the necessity of collaboration between the centres, as well as with local governments and associations, which could contribute to the formation of a cross-border cluster promoting this form of activity. Another significant aspect is the enhancement of promotional actions showing the advantages of the analysed regions as areas that are well conditioned for equestrian tourism. These actions should be complex, consistent, and long-term, which implies e.g. establishing a development strategy for equestrian tourism or indicating its role in existing strategic documents. Effects of equestrian tourism must force decision-makers in this field to create a strong image or brand

for this form of tourism, because a compelling message is needed to attract tourists from the country and abroad.

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**EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN THE FUNCTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS**

**Draženka Birkić**  
**Andreja Primužak**  
**Željko Fanjak**

**Abstract**

Increased interest in horses and riding is evident worldwide, both in Europe and in Croatia. In economically developed countries and in countries where an increase in economic standards has been observed, dealing with horses has become a reflection of the way and quality of life. The main assets of this type of tourism in rural, sparsely populated, economically underdeveloped areas are untouched and preserved nature, rich watercourses, indigenous villages with traditional lifestyles, rich rural architecture, picturesque landscape, and a large number of family farms, often abandoned.

The aim of this paper is to determine the possibilities and perspectives of equestrian tourism development in underdeveloped rural areas on the example of Karlovac County. Encouraging the development of equestrian tourism can significantly influence the development of entrepreneurial activities through direct and indirect activities that rely on equestrian tourism. For the purposes of this paper, field research was conducted in the form of interviews and questionnaires with ranch owners who offer some of the activities that include horses.

The results of the research indicate the key activities that need to be carried out in order to encourage entrepreneurship in equestrian tourism and the development of economically underdeveloped rural areas.

Although this is still an unrecognizable form of tourism in Karlovac County, equestrian tourism, along with certain development guidelines, has significant potential to raise the quality of life in rural areas and create a recognizable, sustainable, and competitive tourist destination.

**Keywords:** equestrian tourism, entrepreneurship, rural areas

**Dr. Sc. Birkić Draženka, senior lecturer**

Karlovac University of Applied Sciences  
E-mail: dbirkic@vuka.hr  
Trg J.J. Strossmayera 9  
Karlovac

**Primužak Andreja, B. Sc. in Economics, senior lecturer**

Karlovac University of Applied Sciences  
E-mail: andreja.primuzak@vuka.hr  
Trg J.J. Strossmayera 9  
Karlovac

**Fanjak Željko, Director of the Regional Tourist Board of Karlovac County**

Regional Tourist Board of Karlovac County  
E-mail: zeljko.fanjak@tzkz.hr  
Haulikova 14  
Karlovac

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN SLAVONIA AND BARANJA'S RURAL AREA

**Pamela Đukić**  
**Ivana Šmit**  
**dr.sc. Anita Prelas Kovačević**

### Abstract

This paper analyzes the fundamental changes in the development of the population of Slavonia and Baranja's rural area in the period from the year 2001 to the year 2021. The following factors were analyzed: the natural population growth rate, changes in the population number, and the underlying indicators of change in the gender, age, and economic structure of the population. The image of rural areas has significantly changed in the last 20 years owing to the intensive depopulation process, which is confirmed when analyzing the population growth rate. All municipalities, and even towns are recording a negative difference between birth and death rates, and even a negative migration balance. Such negative rates of growth forecast an ageing of the population which might cause an even further depopulation of rural areas. The demographic developments of the last population census should be a warning to the entire society, and an incentive to implement a new, more long-term demographic policy.

**Keywords:** Demographic developments; birth rate; death rate; population growth; depopulation process; age structure

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The term *rural* is used to describe especially important transformative features of rural communities, including the economic and social aspects of rural areas which are under the influence of industrialisation and urbanisation (Lukić 2010). In other words, *rural area* is any area that is not urban, i.e., an area which has things that cannot be found in urban areas, e.g., farm animals, agriculture, arable lands, greenery and finally an area which offers an escape from reality.

According to the studies from the rural development programme, around 80% of the continental area is classified as a mostly rural area, which is higher than the EU average of 51,3%.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, according to Eurostat, around 79,10% of Croatia is classified as a land area, 19,80% as hybrid, while 1,1% is classified as a predominantly urban area<sup>2</sup>.

According to the Eurostat data, in contrast to the European Union, which has for decades been putting a lot of attention towards rural areas, the Croatian rural areas, if looked from a societal and scientific perspective, had been ignored until the European funds began to be used for developing rural areas. Croatia has been, with the help of the European funds, greatly encouraging farmers, entrepreneurs, and the tourism sector with the goal of

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<sup>1</sup> Europski poljoprivredni fond za ruralni razvoj (EAFRD): Program ruralnog razvoja Republike Hrvatske za razdoblje 2014. - 2020., dostupno na: <https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/files/documents/Program-ruralnog-razvoja-Republike-Hrvatske-za-razdoblje-2014.-2020.-ver.-5.3.pdf> (10.03.2022.)

<sup>2</sup> EUROSTAT: Territorial typologies for European cities and metropolitan regions, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics\\_on\\_rural\\_areas\\_in\\_the\\_EU&oldid=391832](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU&oldid=391832) (10.03.2022.)

developing Slavonia and Baranja, such as with the Rural Tourism Development Fund from which users can raise up to 1,5 million kunas, and the European Agricultural Fund, from which farmers can raise up to 630 million kunas which are some of the ways the European Union encourages the development of rural areas (Europski poljoprivredni fond za ruralni razvoj - EAFRD).

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines three types of rural areas, differentiated by the share of the region's population living in the local rural areas<sup>3</sup>:

1. predominantly rural regions – more than 50% of the population lives in local rural areas,
2. intermediate regions – from 15% to 50% of the population lives in local rural areas
3. predominantly urban regions – less than 15% of the population lives in local rural areas (OECD 2011).

The area of Slavonia and Baranja has a wide variety of terrain, climate, water areas, transport infrastructure, which makes it very distinctive compared to other Croatian regions. And it is this variety that is the largest advantage of this region for settlement and life in general. Despite the multiple advantage-s of this area, in the last twenty years the social-economic processes have stalled due to the large-scale population decline. According to the last population census, the population of Slavonia and Baranja makes up only 17,22 % of the total population of the Republic of Croatia. (CBS; Population Census 2021).

Furthermore, the rapid rate of industrialisation has greatly affected Croatia's rural areas, which lead to a cessation of agricultural production, causing wide-scale abandonment of rural areas, i.e., of villages. The population development in Slavonia and Baranja is also significantly burdened by the spacious population polarisation between urban and rural areas, which greatly impacts the stability of the societal, economic, and regional development of these areas.<sup>4</sup>.

The goal of this paper is to highlight the demographic characteristics of Slavonia and Baranja's rural areas and population changes from 2001 to 2021. Moreover, the paper also aims to establish important features of the natural population dynamic between the years 2001 and 2021, analyse the changes in the structure of the rural population, specifically age, gender, birth rate, mortality rate, the economic structure of the population, and the proportion of older people in the population.

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<sup>3</sup> This classification was considered during data analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Institut za turizam: Regionalni razvoj, razvoj sustava naselja, urbani i ruralni razvoj i transformacija prostora, 2014. dostupno na:  
[https://mpgi.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/Prostorno/StrategijaPR//Regionalni\\_razvoj.pdf](https://mpgi.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/Prostorno/StrategijaPR//Regionalni_razvoj.pdf)  
(03.03.2022.)

## 2. METHODOLOGY

During the 2001 population census, a new internationally prescribed census methodology was applied whereby only the present population is counted towards the total population. „By applying international demographic-statistical standards and criteria, an inhabitant of Croatia in the 2001 census was considered to be: (1) all persons who have residence in Croatia, but are not away from their residence longer than a year; (2) persons who have lived in Croatia for more than a year, but have no registered residence, such as exiles from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, (exceptions to this rule are foreign diplomats, representatives of international organisations, members of foreign military, and some other smaller categories) ; (3) persons – Croatian citizens who have lived form more than a year abroad but ‘‘have a close economic, transport, recurring connection with their household and family in the RoC‘‘ (NN 26/2001).

Secondary data and reports were collected from websites of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, World Bank, Institute for Tourism, Ministry for Regional Development and EU Funds and used for data analysis. The paper used the following methods: analysis, synthesis, description, comparison, and deduction and the MS Excel programme (2019) was used for the statistical analysis of the data.

## 3. DEMOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP OF SLAVONIA AND BARANJA- AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE

Out of the total number of Slavonia and Baranja inhabitants (891 259), according to the data of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics for 2001, 38,0% is rural population (Table1). In the observed period (from 2001 to 2021) there is a discernible continuous population decline in Croatia. This negative trend is present in both the urban and rural population (Table1).

**Table 1. Changes in the total population of Slavonia and Baranja in the years 2001 and 2021**

Census year	Total population	Vt	St	Urban population	Vt	St	Rural population	Vt	St
2001.	891.259	-	-	479.992	-		<b>341.267</b>	-	-
2011.	805.998	90,43	-9,57	453.988	94,58	-5,42	327.521	95,97	-4,03
2021.	680.747	84,46	-15,54	378.891	83,46	-16,54	303.856	86,32	-13,68

Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021

When it comes to the movements of Slavonia and Baranja’s rural population in the period from 2001 to 2021, there is a visible and drastic population decline in all counties, and

the largest negative population movement trend is observed in the Vukovar-Srijem county (Table 2).

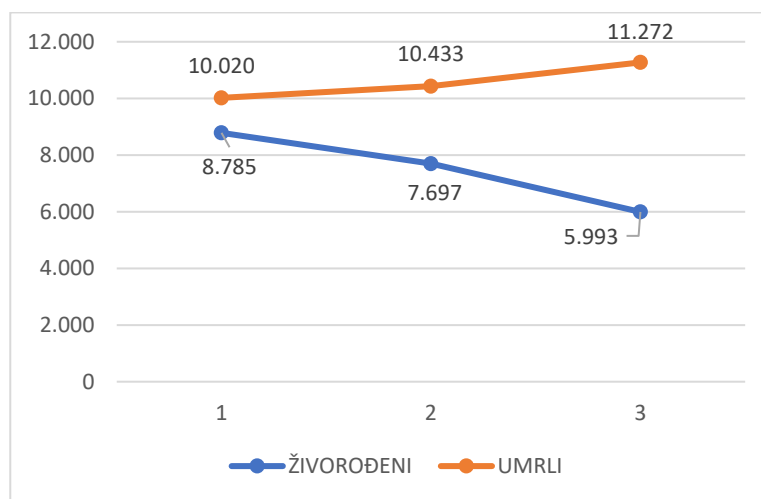
**Table 2. Movements of Slavonia and Baranja's rural population by counties between 2001 and 2021**

COUNTIES	POKAZATELJ	2001.	2011.	Vt	St	2021.	Vt	St
Brod-Posavina	Number of inhabitants	176.765	158.575	89,71	-10,29	134.283	84,68	-15,32
Osijek-Baranja	Number of inhabitants	330.506	305.032	92,29	-7,71	262.852	86,17	-13,83
Vukovar-Srymia	Number of inhabitants	204.768	179.521	87,67	-12,33	147.022	81,90	-18,10
Virovitica-Podravina	Number of inhabitants	93.389	84.836	90,84	-9,16	71.432	84,20	-15,80
Požega-Slavonia	Number of inhabitants	85.831	78.034	90,92	-9,08	65.158	83,50	-16,50

Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021

The imbalance of the demographic relations in Slavonia and Baranja's rural areas demonstrates the dynamic between birth rates and natural change. The birth rates of Slavonia and Baranja's rural population in the observed period from 2001 to 2021 are in a continuous decline (Graph 2). In 2001, the number of live births was around 8,785 while in 2021 the number of live births declined to 5,993, meaning that in 2021 the number of live births declined by an astonishing 2,792 births (Table 3).

**Graph 2. Natural movements of Slavonia and Baranja's rural population from 2001 to 2020**



Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS-a for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021

**Table 3. Natural movements of Slavonia and Baranja's rural population from 2001 to 2020**

Year	Type of settlement	Live births	Deaths	Natural increase
2001.	Total rural	8.785	10.020	-1.235
2011.	Total rural	7.697	10.433	-2.736
2021.	Total rural	5.993	11.272	-5.279

Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS-a (DZS) for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021.

The death rates in rural areas are growing year in, year out. This is seen in the period from 2001 to 2021 where the number of deaths increased from 10,020 to 11,272. The lowest number of live births was observed in 2021 (5,993), whereby in comparison to 2011 (8,785) the number of birth rates declined by 35.6%, which shows that fertility in these areas declined by a quarter (Table 3). Considering that death rates have been on a yearly basis higher than 10,000 deaths, it is understandable that population decline would be a continuous bio-reproduction process, not only on the level of Slavonia and Baranja, but also on the level of individual eastern Croatian counties. A population decline affects population movements which can cause significant imbalances in demographic development, which all leads to a rapid ageing of the population which negatively affects the development of society and economy of an entire region. Low birth rates lead to a decreasing population influx at the early age, and later in the childbearing years. This brings about a decline of younger age groups and weakens the groups which contribute to birth rates and population reproduction. A comparative time sequence of births and deaths was established to evaluate the current level of population decline (Table 3).

When it comes to the age-sex structure of the Slavonia and Baranja's population in the period from 2001 to 2021, the number of inhabitants in the 0-19 age group had nearly halved in rural areas from 221,808 to 128,940 (Table 4), and their share in the total population (youth coefficient) declined from 24,88 % to 18,94%. The number of

inhabitants aged sixty and up increased in the observed period from 185,991 to 203,377. The ageing index, which shows the relationship between the younger and older population, also increased from 90.7 to 157.73.

**Table 4. Age-sex structure of Slavonia and Baranja's rural population for 2001, 2011, and 2021**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>2001.</b>	<b>2011.</b>	<b>2021.</b>
0-19	221.808	183.038	128.940
20-60	471.730	436.427	337.464
60 years and more	185.991	174.932	203.377
Number of men	429.178	389.552	324.360
Number of women	462.081	416.446	345.421
Masculinity coefficient	107,67	106,90	106,50
Feminity coefficient	92,88	93,54	93,90
Youth coefficient	24,88	22,71	18,94
Age ratio	20,87	0,22	29,88
Ageing index	90,7	115,7	157,73

Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS-a (DZS) for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021

When the age-sex structure is disrupted, this not only negatively affects a population's growth rate, but also significantly affects the rate and dynamic of births and fertility, including the population's migration movements. A demographic ageing with a decline or fall in birth rates directly impacts the younger generation of rural areas up to their working age. This undeniably puts a lot of pressure on the pension system, i.e., increases the dependency of the elderly on the working-age population. The changes in the dynamic of the socio-economic development of Slavonia and Baranja have likewise affected the changes in the economic structure of the rural population. To that end, the deagrarization process has turned into the most important process in the socio-economic transformation of the rural population.

When it comes to demographic consequences, ageing functions something like this: a) slows down population growth, b) decreases birth rates, c) increases death rates, d) decreases population migration, e) causes even further disruption in the age-sex structure (feminisation of older age groups), d) affects the ageing of the working population (Wertheimer-Baletić 2001). Other than demographic, there are also a multitude of social, economic, political, and other consequences stemming from future demographic changes. Depopulation and ageing will also worsen the ratio of retirees and employees. This puts into question the financial sustainability of the pension system, whereby the most vulnerable systems are the ones that are founded on the credo of generational solidarity. And Croatia's pension system is such a system. The dependency ratio in the pension system (number of retirees/number of people who contribute to the pension fund) is already unsustainable. When the number of elderly increases, the need for different types of healthcare follows. A reduced number of children in the family



shortens the circle of primary caregivers. In this area there is a higher ratio of the elderly population. With them dying out many places will become little more than places on a map (NN 97/2003). Therefore, on such rural areas there is decline of economic activity, but likewise of the social and cultural life. The period after the ageing threshold has been passed is marked by numerous production and other characteristics, such as: lower maintenance of estates-households, less investment in the estates, reduced cultivation of the land, reduction in livestock, lower maintenance of economic and living facilities (Vuković 2005).

The level of activity of the total population is considered an important indicator for the economic structure of the population, as well as for the economic development of a country. Based on the economic structure of the population, it can be seen how demography and economic development are interdependent. It is necessary to mention that data on the economic activity of the country's population can be found in Table 5. In the observed period, in 2001 there were around 1,785,000 million active inhabitants, while in 2021 there were 1,818,000 active inhabitants (Table 5). In the observed period from 2001 to 2021 the total number of active inhabitants rose by 33,000. This result indicates a positive movement in economic development. The number of inactive inhabitants in the period between 2001 and 2021 decreased by 183,000 inhabitants (Table 5).

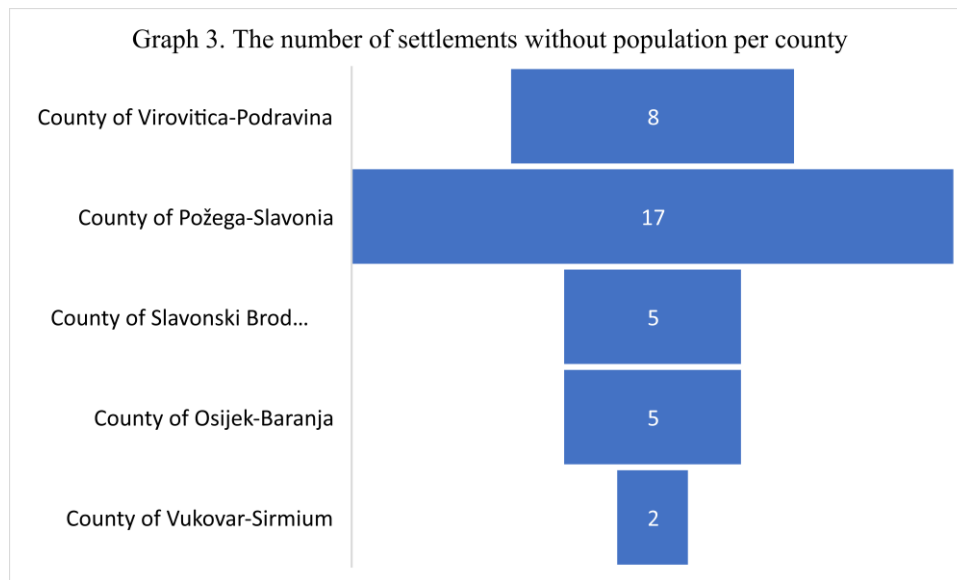
**Table 5. Economic population structure**

	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>
ACTIVE POPULATION	<b>1. 785.000</b>	<b>1.867.000</b>	<b>1.818.000</b>
EMPLOYED	<b>1. 614.000</b>	<b>1.611.000</b>	<b>1.705.000</b>
INACTIVE POPULATION	<b>1. 872.000</b>	<b>256.000</b>	<b>1.689.000</b>
UNEMPLOYED	<b>171.000</b>	<b>1.764.000</b>	<b>113.000</b>

Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS-a for the periods 2001, 2011 and 2021

It is worthwhile to mention that certain settlements in Slavonia and Baranja have become completely *extinct*. According to the last population census (2021), thirty-seven settlements were recorded that did not have a single inhabitant. The largest number of such cases was recorded in Požega-Slavonia County (Graph 3).

**Graph 3. The number of settlements without population per country**



Source: Made by authors according to the data from CBS: (Population census 2021)

#### 4. DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS OF CROATIA BY 2030

Demographic projections are one of the most important baselines for reshaping the current state and forming a complete strategy for a societal and economic development of a territorial unit. The demographic structure is one of the fundamental factors for planning the economic, educational, medical, spatial, and other capacities of an area. Therefore, projections of future demographic processes and structures have multiple practical implications (Akrap and Grizelj 2011).

Table 6. Structural-demographic population indicators for 2030 by counties

County	0-14 (%)	65+ (%)	80+ (%)	Ageing index
Primorje-Gorski Kotar	10,8	29,2	7,7	269,8
Sisak-Moslavina	11,2	29,2	7,3	261,8
Karlovac	11,4	28,6	6,8	250,2
Istria	11,5	28,0	7,1	243,9
Šibenik-Knin	12,7	29,6	8,5	232,7
Lika-Senj	13,1	26,9	7,3	205,4
Varaždin	12,3	23,8	5,4	193,0
Republic of Croatia	13,1	25,0	6,2	191,4
<b>Osijek-Baranja</b>	<b>13,3</b>	<b>24,5</b>	<b>5,2</b>	<b>184,7</b>
The City of Zagreb	13,0	23,7	6,3	182,6

Bjelovar-Bilogora	14,0	25,3	5,5	180,7
Split-Dalmatia	13,6	24,5	6,3	180,4
Zadar	14,1	25,4	7,4	180,2
Krapina-Zagorje	12,9	23,1	4,9	179,1
<b>Vukovar-Srymia</b>	<b>13,7</b>	<b>24,2</b>	<b>5,4</b>	<b>176,4</b>
Zagreb	13,3	23,3	5,3	175,2
Dubrovnik-Neretva	14,5	25,2	6,8	174,2
Koprivnica-Križevci	14,1	23,9	5,4	169,3
<b>Virovitica-Podravina</b>	<b>14,2</b>	<b>23,9</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>168,4</b>
<b>Brod-Posavina</b>	<b>15,0</b>	<b>24,2</b>	<b>5,8</b>	<b>161,6</b>
<b>Požega-Slavonia</b>	<b>14,7</b>	<b>23,4</b>	<b>5,2</b>	<b>159,2</b>
Međimurje	14,6	22,8	5,1	156,0

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics (DZS), www.dzs.hr (05 March.2022)

According to the projection above, if we observe the total population decline in Slavonia and Baranja's five counties and their largest urban centres, Osijek-Baranja County is in the direst position, since its population is projected to decrease by 15% by the year 2030. There will also be significant changes in the age structure.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The demographic development of rural areas is defined by three demographic processes: complete depopulation or population decline, natural depopulation (higher number of deaths than births), and demographic ageing. It is apparent that birth rates are falling, while death rates are rising extremely quickly. Low birth rates lead to an increasingly lower population influx in the younger, and later in the fertile age. This is why there are less people in the younger age group, which even further desecrates the age groups which contribute to the birth rates and the future reproduction of the population.

Demographic projections indicate that the number of inhabitants in Croatia will decrease from 3.888.529 to 3.461.000 inhabitants as soon as 2030 thus bringing Croatia into the circle of European countries who are threatened by a complete demographic collapse. Negative demographic trends, not helped by extensive emigration, are a red flag that cannot be ignored. They will, as warned by economists, have negative consequences for the entire economy, especially for the sustainability of the pension and medical system that we have today. Long-term consequences will be even more severe. Other than a workforce deficit, which will bring about a state where higher salaries will not lead to higher productivity and a decrease in competitiveness, the population decline will lead to lower savings, as well as lower spending. This will in the end lead to lower investments and slower economic development (Državni zavod za statistiku 2014).

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## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN SLAVONIA AND BARANJA'S RURAL AREA

**Pamela Đukić**  
**Ivana Šmit**  
**dr.sc. Anita Prelas Kovačević**

### Abstract

This paper analyzes the fundamental changes in the development of the population of Slavonia and Baranja's rural area in the period from the year 2001 to the year 2021. The following factors were analyzed: the natural population growth rate, changes in the population number, and the underlying indicators of change in the gender, age, and economic structure of the population. The image of rural areas has significantly changed in the last 20 years owing to the intensive depopulation process, which is confirmed when analyzing the population growth rate. All municipalities, and even towns are recording a negative difference between birth and death rates, and even a negative migration balance. Such negative rates of growth forecast an ageing of the population which might cause an even further depopulation of rural areas. The demographic developments of the last population census should be a warning to the entire society, and an incentive to implement a new, more long-term demographic policy.

**Keywords:** Demographic developments; birth rate; death rate; population growth; depopulation process; age structure

**Pamela Đukić**  
studentica 2. godine diplomskog studija Menadžment malih i srednjih poduzeća  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78  
E-mail: pamela.dukic@vuv.hr

**Ivana Šmit**  
studentica 2. godine diplomskog studija Menadžment malih i srednjih poduzeća  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78  
E-mail: ivana.smit@vuv.hr

**dr.sc. Anita Prelas Kovačević**  
profesor visoke škole  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78  
E-mail: anita.prelas.kovacevic@vuv.hr

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM IN PARKS OF CROATIA

**Božidar Jaković**  
**Katarina Međurečan**  
**Dijana Katica**

### **Abstract**

The development of tourism in protected areas dates to the establishment of national parks through which visitors connect, experience, and learn about natural and cultural heritage. Considering its area, Croatia stands out with many attractive PAs with impressive biodiversity and preserved ecosystems. Parks of Croatia are the generators of local development and the leaders of sustainable tourism, which attract many visitors throughout the year. Parks of Croatia consists of national parks and nature parks, which are the most visited PAs in Croatia. Regardless of the focus on the tourism of PAs, the growing interest of people to visit PAs around the world will inevitably lead to "tourism happening" or, conversely, effectively managed to achieve sustainable tourism goals. Given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) that affected the tourism industry, it was considered justified to examine the state of tourism in Parks of Croatia at the time of travel and movement restrictions and further prospects after easing measures and re-intensifying human movement. Given the number of visits, it can be noticed that the Parks of Croatia were also significantly affected by the pandemic, with some exceptions, even though they were in a better position compared to other destinations in terms of epidemiological requirements (outdoor stays, the distance between visitors, etc.). In accordance with the presented assumption, this paper aims to determine the extent to which the pandemic has affected tourism in Parks of Croatia and opportunities for the development of tourism in parks in the post-pandemic period.

**Keywords:** the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in protected areas, Parks of Croatia, national parks, nature parks

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Countries around the world have extensive systems of protected areas (PAs) that differ significantly, depending on national needs and priorities, and differences in legislative, institutional, and financial resources. PAs can be found in various environments from mountains to the sea, across deserts, forests, freshwater lakes, and even state borders (territories). Furthermore, PAs are necessary for the conservation of biological diversity, they are the basis of national and international conservation strategies, maintain the functioning of ecosystems and act as refuges for many endemic and endangered species. These are places where people can gain a sense of peace in a busy world, places that represent a commitment to future generations, interact with nature, and empower the human spirit (Dudley 2008). The importance of PAs is recognized around the world for their role in biodiversity conservation, which is even more pronounced through nature-based tourism, thus contributing to socio-economic development goals (Thapa 2013).

To better understand the topic, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of PAs in international tourism before the global pandemic COVID-19. Although tourism and PAs seem to be mutually exclusive, PAs attract many visitors and encourage tourism in various PAs around the world (Nayak, et. Al. 2018). Moreover, many PAs, relying on visitors and tourism, provide financial support to avoid a "paper park" phenomenon. Equally, current partnerships between conservation and tourism are increasingly contributing to changes in attitudes about biodiversity conservation issues and environmentally responsible business practices (Bushell and Bicker 2016). Considering the accelerated growth of the nature-based tourism market and the huge opportunities for entrepreneurship and socio-economic development, the business practice of unacceptable impacts on natural resources in creating a tourism product is expanding. Many of these natural resources lie within the formal boundaries of national parks and other PAs, thus contributing to biodiversity conservation goals (Bosak 2016).

PAs are a key component of tourism, and on the other hand, tourism is a key and unique way to encourage visitors to connect with the values of PAs. Visitors directly or indirectly encounter issues of nature and environmental protection during a visit to PAs initiated by various motives, from passive enjoyment of silence, outside crowds, and staying outdoors in the fresh air, to various educational activities and outdoor recreation (Minciu et. al. 2012). As tourism in PAs shows a continuous increase in the number of visitors and is based on sensitive resources and values, natural and cultural preservation is imperative. Accordingly, the negative impact on PAs needs to be minimized to encourage positive attitudes and support for tourism by key stakeholders. Acceptance and a positive attitude toward tourism by the locals are key factors in the success of the management of tourism and PAs. However, with the strengthening of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a change in the tourism market in PAs.

As mentioned in the literature, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has created several restrictions on movement around the world. The crisis caused by the pandemic has hit the tourism sector hard, as measures introduced to combat the virus have led to an almost complete cessation of tourism activities around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has had several consequences for tourism due to a sharp drop in demand and numerous travel restrictions, with tourist destinations around the world experiencing a decline in international arrivals. Before the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in PAs was a rapidly growing segment in the global travel and tourism industry. However, the spread of COVID-19 and several travel restrictions have seriously affected tourism in PAs as well (Bhammar et al. 2021).

The favourable epidemiological situation in Croatia leads to a relaxation of measures and an increase in tourist arrivals during the summer months, which are crucial for Croatian tourism. Although Croatia proved to be a safe tourist destination, it also felt the consequences of restrictions and measures introduced to combat the virus, which ultimately resulted in a decline in tourist arrivals and overnight stays. Although Parks of Croatia (POCs) have gained momentum in exploiting their potential through sustainable tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. has stopped the positive trend of increasing the number of visits. Therefore, it was justified to determine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected tourism in POCs and opportunities for the development of tourism in parks in the post-pandemic period.

## **2. PROTECTED AREAS AND TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROATIA**

The beginning of the tourism development in PAs is related to the establishment of national parks and is a process in which visitors connect, experience, and get acquainted with the natural and cultural heritage. Tourism development in PAs brings multiple benefits to all stakeholders but can be extremely harmful to the sensitive natural environment, so it should be managed in a sustainable way (Golub and Jaković 2019). Tourists' interest in such areas encourages tourism development and brings economic benefits (increased income, opening new businesses, new jobs for local people, improving living standards, etc.), environmental benefits (protection of ecological processes and water, biodiversity, cultural heritage, etc.) and social benefits (encourages infrastructure development, environmental education for visitors and locals, encourages the development of culture, crafts and arts, increases the level of education of locals and teaches them the language and culture of tourists, but to value their culture and environment) (Eagles et al. 2002).

The negative impacts of tourism on PA's environment are related to the construction of general infrastructures, such as roads and airports, and tourist facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, golf courses, etc. Negative impacts of tourism on the environment occur when the level of visitor use is higher than the ability of the environment to cope with that use. Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses a potential threat to many PAs around the world. It can create enormous pressure on the area and lead to negative impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea, loss of natural habitat, increased pressure on endangered species, and increased susceptibility to forest fires (Stainton 2021). Tourism in PAs can only be sustainable if it is carefully managed so as not to allow potential negative effects to affect the local community and the environment. Tourism can certainly be a great source of income and boost the economy if the community can manage it effectively (Maplestone 2020). Although the relationship is complex and sometimes rival, tourism is always a key component to consider when establishing and managing PAs (Eagles et al. 2002).

The IUCN categorization of PAs is based on management goals, which means that the category of a particular area is determined primarily by how it is planned to be "handled" in the future. IUCN recommends that each country expand the definition of PA categories and adapt it to its circumstances and nature protection system.<sup>1</sup> PAs in Croatia that are in the Strict Reserve, National Park, Special Reserve, and Nature Park are regulated by separate Ordinances on protection and conservation that prescribe conditions and measures for protection, conservation, improvement, and use of each PAs. Other categories of PAs are regulated by Decisions on measures for protection, conservation, improvement, and use of PAs. In addition, for national parks and nature

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<sup>1</sup>Institute for Environmental and Nature Protection, Protected areas categories, available at: [www.haop.hr/hr/tematska-podrucja/zasticena-podrucja/zasticena-podrucja/kategorije-zasticenih-podrucja](http://www.haop.hr/hr/tematska-podrucja/zasticena-podrucja/zasticena-podrucja/kategorije-zasticenih-podrucja) (22.10.2021.)



parks, Spatial plans of areas of special characteristics are adopted, which regulate the organization of space, the manner of use, arrangement, and protection of space.<sup>2</sup> Although most of the PAs of Croatia are intended for tourist and recreational activities, Jaković and Golub (2018) state that certain areas in Croatia (e.g., nature parks and regional parks) have fewer international interests, and thus generate lower incomes and shorter stays of visitors compared to national parks. One of the reasons can be considered incomplete compliance of Croatian with IUCN categories of PAs. The following is a correlation between IUCN and Croatian categories of PAs (*Table 1*).

**Table 1. The correlation between the PAs categories of IUCN and PAs categories in Croatia**

IUCN categories	Categories in Croatia
Ia Strict Nature Reserve	Strict Reserve
Ib Wilderness Area	Special Reserve
II National Park	National Park
III Natural Monument or Feature	Nature Monument Park-forest Park Architecture Monument
IV Habitat/Species Management Area	N/A ( <i>i.e.</i> , <i>EU network Natura 2000</i> )
V Protected Landscape/ Seascape	Significant Landscape
VI Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources	Nature Park Regional Park

Source: Jaković, B., Tubić, D., Bakan, R. (2019): Tourism challenges of protected areas in Croatia. In: Leko Šimić, M., Crnković, B. (eds.), 8th International scientific symposium economy of eastern Croatia – vision and growth, Osijek: Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek, pp. 736.

By comparing the national categorization system of PAs with the other countries, Bulat (2012) confirms the existence of terminological differences to describe the same category of PAs. The author emphasizes that unique names for the same PAs at the international level, defined regarding the purpose and diversity of management objectives, should be primarily established, and used. Such a thing would enable easier data collection and processing, as well as easier understanding and better communication between countries.

Considering its area, Croatia stands out, both with a large share of protected areas and their attractiveness with impressive biodiversity and preserved nature. The added value of national parks and nature parks is their encouragement and contribution to the tourism development of surrounding, underdeveloped areas (Glojnarčić 2016). Great potential in underdeveloped tourist areas is represented by the tourist valorisation of areas located along rivers, lakes, and other inland waters. In addition to natural attractions related to the coast, such as the national parks Brijuni, Kornati, and Mljet, Croatia has several attractions related to karst phenomena such as waterfalls and travertine barriers Plitvice Lakes and Krka River, Velebit rocks, caves, abysses, and other karst attractions, and

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Protected areas, available at: <https://mingor.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu-1065/djelokrug/uprava-za-zastitu-prirode-1180/zasticena-podrucja/1188>, (23.10.2021)

many unique national parks and nature parks in the continental area such as Risnjak, Žumberak, Lonjsko polje, Papuk, and Kopački rit.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. PARKS OF CROATIA, TOURISM, AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2014, Croatian national parks and nature parks were united under the common brand "Parks of Croatia". The establishment of a single platform was aimed at creating a new visual identity for better tourism promotion and equal recognition of all parks globally.<sup>4</sup> The visual identity of POCs was designed through the implementation of the Agreement on Design and Interpretation of Nature within the "EU Natura 2000 Integration Project". The main basis of this project is the Nature Protection Act which introduced improvements in the park management system with measures to create and implement a unified policy for the management of PAs at the national level.<sup>5</sup> The visual identity of POCs is designed so that each park's identity functions separately, but they are all derived from the same graphic language and derive from the umbrella sign of nature protection.<sup>6</sup>

POCs include eight national parks and twelve nature parks located throughout Croatia. The main difference between national parks and nature parks is that in national parks the economic use of natural resources is prohibited, while in nature parks economic and other activities and interventions that do not jeopardize its essential features and role are allowed (Nature Protection Act, NN 80/13, 15/18, 14/19, 127/19). Within the POCs, thanks to their value and preservation, many parks are recognized as internationally valuable areas. Accordingly, Plitvice Lakes National Park is included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Paklenica National Park, Northern Velebit National Park, and Nature Park Velebit are part of the UNESCO scientific program "Man and the Biosphere-MaB", while on the List of internationally valuable wetlands of the Ramsar Convention are three nature parks (Kopački rit, Lonjsko polje, and Vransko jezero). In addition, the Papuk Nature Park is part of the UNESCO World Geoparks Network (Jaković et al. 2021).

The POCs are generators of local development and leaders in sustainable tourism. With their uniqueness, they attract an increasing number of visitors every year, which is why it rightly bears the title of the most attractive protected areas in Croatia. The primary purpose of the POCs is to protect natural resources, but also to enable visitors to enjoy them. In recent years, more than ever before, investments have been made in visitor management, because, unlike former sporadic nature admirers' visits, today there are mass visits with many different motives and interests. In this case, the goal is not for

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<sup>3</sup> Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2020, available at: [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013\\_05\\_55\\_1119.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013_05_55_1119.html), (02.11.2021.)

<sup>4</sup> Dnevnik.hr, All Croatian parks are united in one brand, available at: <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/svi-hrvatski-parkovi-objedinuju-se-u-jedan-brend---348613.html>, (28.10.2021.)

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Protected areas, available at: <https://mingor.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu-1065/djelokrug/uprava-za-zastitu-prirode-1180/zasticena-podrucja/1188>, (23.10.2021)

<sup>6</sup> Dulist, New park's identity, available at: <https://dulist.hr/novi-identitet-parkova-pogledajte-kako-izgleda-logo-mljeta/167190/>, (28.10.2021.)

visitors to just walk through the parks, but it is important that visitors understand their natural values and why it is important to preserve biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in the conditions of mass visits, the maintenance of the primary goal is endangered, i.e., the protection and preservation of POCs, so it is necessary to sustainably manage tourism and visitors.

POCs have great potential for the development of ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, year-round excursion tourism, and mountain tourism, while in some areas there is potential for the sustainable development of hunting tourism.<sup>8</sup> The tourism supply of the parks is in line with the principles of sustainable tourism and it should continue to provide a memorable, sustainable experience that will meet the needs of visitors without a negative impact on the environment and local community (Šparavec 2020). POCs have contributed to the better sustainability of parks through the electronic payment system, ticket control, and the newly launched web shop. POCs have a better control mechanism and information for managing visitors thanks to the new tools. As a result, the level of service quality has been raised, and visitors can obtain tickets in advance and on time to visit the desired park. With the quality of visitor management and the parks themselves, POCs want to establish sustainable visits, which will ensure a pressure reduction in the parks that are most visited.<sup>9</sup>

POCs located on or near the Adriatic coast have the highest visitation. The Plitvice Lakes National Park and the Krka National Park lead the list of popularity as absolute Croatian favourites, which are visited annually by 75% of the total number of visitors to PAs in Croatia. The POCs platform seeks to connect high-ranking areas with lower-known areas and to redirect interests toward them as much as possible (Jaković et. Al. 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has halted the positive trend in the number of visitors to POCs, with a significant decrease in the number of visitors in 2020 compared to 2019 (Table 2). Data on visits to the Dinara Nature Park are not represented, given that it was declared at the beginning of 2021.

**Table 2. Number of visitors to national parks and nature parks in 2019 and 2020**

Protected area	Number of visitors in 2019	Number of visitors in 2020
Brijuni National Park	152,522	74,135
Kornati National Park	242,321	8,521
Krka National Park	1,364,000	423,010
Mljet National Park	148,395	37,844
Paklenica National Park	144,681	64,924
Plitvice Lakes National Park	1,771,523	445,841
Risnjak National Park	31,074	14,580

<sup>7</sup> City time: Parks of Croatia are making efforts to develop sustainable tourism, available at: <https://www.citytime.hr/parkovi-hrvatske-ulazu-napore-u-razvoj-odrzivog-turizma/>, (02.11.2021.)

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia, Development Strategy of Croatian Tourism until 2010, available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//2016/Sjednice/Arhiva//73.%20-%201.3.pdf>, (02.11.2021)

<sup>9</sup> City time: Parks of Croatia are making efforts to develop sustainable tourism, available at: <https://www.citytime.hr/parkovi-hrvatske-ulazu-napore-u-razvoj-odrzivog-turizma/>, (02.11.2021.)

Northern Velebit National Park	21,636	19,691
Kopački Rit Nature Park	70,000	18,418
Lastovo Archipelago Nature Park	39,338	5,936
Lonja Field Nature Park	18,779	4,862
Telašćica Nature Park	123,516	49,773
Učka Nature Park	30,000	30,000
Velebit Nature Park	50,904	27,486
Vrana Lake Nature Park	125,000	34,818
Žumberak-Samobor Highlands Nature Park	54,678	51,000
Medvednica Nature Park	316,373	203,339
Papuk Nature Park	52,633	45,048
Biokovo Nature Park	68,000	119,453
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,825,373</b>	<b>1,678,679</b>

Source: Jaković, B., Tubić, D., Bakan, R. (2021): Position of adventure tourism within nature park tourism of Continental Croatia. In: Leko Šimić, M., Crnković, B. (eds.), 10th International scientific symposium Region, entrepreneurship, development, Osijek: Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek, pp. 114.

Based on the data from Table 2, a total decrease in the number of visitors in 2020 by 3,146,694 can be seen, which is 65% fewer visitors compared to 2019. Judging by epidemiological measures, with fewer visitors and a limited number of visits, POCs have been relieved of the large crowds, accompanied by lower revenues from ticket sales, souvenirs, etc. (Radić 2020). Jaković et. al. (2021) believes that although staying outdoors had the best perspective of all other tourist trends in 2020, it is evident that tourism in PAs of Croatia is highly dependent on tourists staying in 3S destinations. They also believe that, if Croatia wants to develop year-round nature-based tourism, it must change the development concept while adopting a clear development plan.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

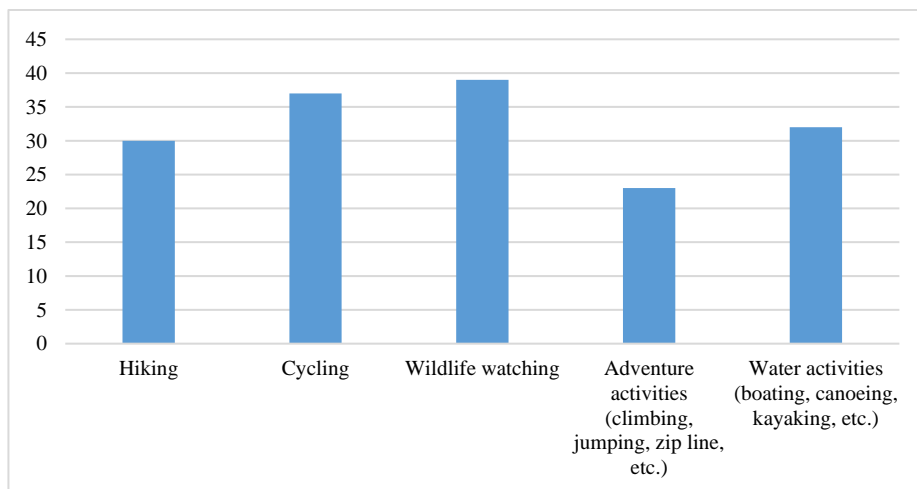
The research concept is aimed at determining the state of tourism in POCs, primarily during the first travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, given the immediately previous period. The research was directed at persons who manage parks, in which 11 out of 19 respondents/representatives of POCs participated, representing a return rate of 58%. Dinara Nature Park is excluded from the sample, considering that it was declared a nature park only at the beginning of 2021. In accordance with the basic goal, two main research tasks have been defined. First, measures taken within Croatian Parks to combat the spread of the pandemic have been identified. Second, the level of satisfaction of the park management with the implementation of measures, new working conditions, and visitors' interest in visiting parks, as well as the economic and environmental sustainability of tourism in parks and the surrounding area were identified.

A questionnaire with a combination of closed and open questions was used to conduct the primary research. The survey questionnaire consisted of nine questions in which respondents were asked to indicate the structure of visitors before the pandemic, rank activities according to demand before and during the pandemic, and highlight measures implemented within the park to combat coronavirus spread. Using the Likert scale with five levels of intensity, respondents were asked to point out the degree of satisfaction with their actions and the effects of tourism during a pandemic. The survey was conducted by e-mail and telephone in August 2021.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The structure of visitors before the COVID-19 pandemic was first determined, given the visitors' residence and the park visit organization. According to the results obtained, POCs were visited by 56% of domestic and 44% of foreign visitors before the pandemic, of which 61% are individual, while 31% are group visitors. Furthermore, to determine the demand of visitors for certain activities before the outbreak of the pandemic, the respondents ranked the activities in accordance with the demand of visitors within the parks (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Activities by representation before the COVID-19 pandemic



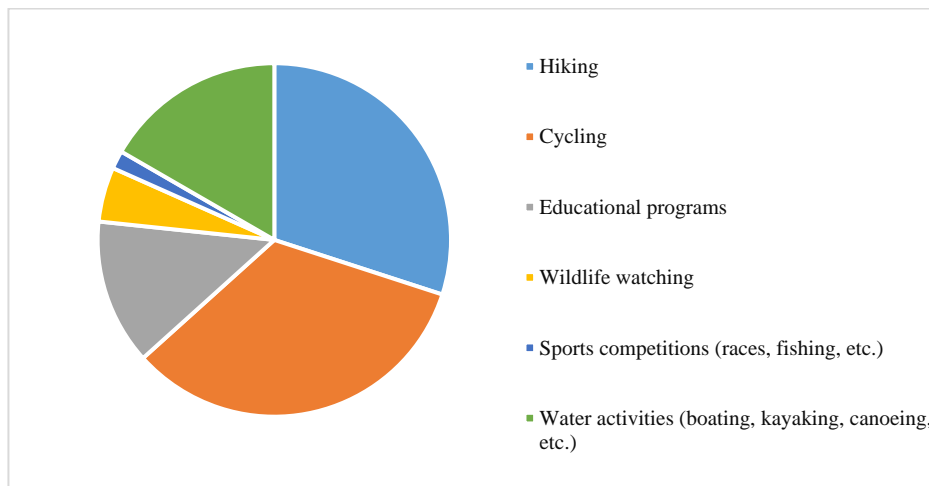
Source: Authors, according to the conducted research

The activities of wildlife watching are the most represented (most sought after), while adrenaline (adventure) activities are ranked as the least represented activities in POCs (Graph 1). When asked about the decline in demand for the use of tourist facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, 82% of respondents said they did not notice a decline in demand while 18% said they noticed a certain decline in demand.

Among respondents who noticed a decline in demand (18% of respondents) were found to have taken certain measures to expand and improve supply, such as an educational

program with expert guidance for individual visitors, guided kayak and electric bicycle tours for individual visitors, specialized education programs for flora and fauna admirers and additional excursions for individual visitors. To determine which activities in the parks were the most sought after during the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents were asked to list the activities, ranking them from the most to the least sought after (Graph 3).

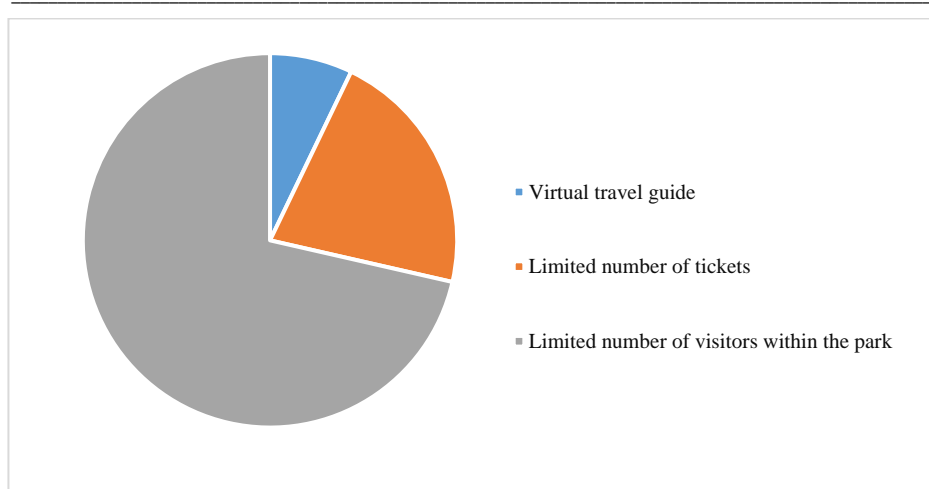
Graph 3. Tourist demand activities during the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Authors, according to the conducted research

Although the same activities are still most prevalent in POCs, certain changes in the demand during the pandemic are observed. Unlike before the pandemic, when wildlife watching was the most prevalent activity, during the pandemic, visitors were most interested in outdoor recreation activities in the parks, primarily hiking and biking. It can be said that the scenario is expected, given that these are activities that disperse visitors outside the main visitor points/localities in the parks, thus ensuring a prioritized social distance. The next issue concerned the conservation measures taken by the parks during the COVID-19 pandemic, given the situation and recommendations regarding the control of the spread of coronavirus. Among the measures to combat the spread of coronavirus, as expected, a limited number of visitors within the park has proved to be the most prevalent (Graph 4).

Graph 4. Contents and measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Authors, according to the conducted research

Despite the limitations faced by the parks, none of them introduced a new tourism product as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, or a change in visitor behaviour. Using descriptive statistics based on mean analysis, the respondents' satisfaction with certain measures to combat the spread of coronavirus, working conditions, visitor response, and ecological and socio-economic sustainability of park tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic were determined (Table 3).

**Table 3. Parks' management satisfaction with tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Satisfaction variables	Mean
Satisfaction with the implementation of measures in the parks during the pandemic.	4,27
Satisfaction with working conditions during a pandemic	3,64
Satisfaction with the number of visits during the pandemic.	3,64
Satisfaction with the ecological sustainability of tourism within the park and the surrounding area during the pandemic.	4,18
Satisfaction with the socio-economic sustainability of tourism within the park and the surrounding area during the pandemic.	2,91

Source: Authors, according to the conducted research

Among the five variables by which satisfaction was measured, the parks' management were most satisfied with the measures taken to combat the spread of coronavirus among visitors and the local community (mean = 4.27), followed by satisfaction with the environmental sustainability of parks' tourism (mean = 4.18). They are least satisfied with the socio-economic effects of tourism, assessing the economic sustainability of tourism as relatively unsatisfactory (mean = 2,91). In general, taking into account the satisfaction assessment, it can be noticed that the park management did not show any concern about the state of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, nor about the new circumstances in which the visits take place.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The crisis caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the tourism industry hard, given the measures introduced to restrict travel completely or partially. POCs are an important component of Croatian tourism, which had just under 5 million visitors before the COVID-19 pandemic (2019). POCs recorded an increase in attendance from year to year, but the outbreak of the pandemic showed that tourism POCs are significantly associated with international arrivals on the Croatian coast. In this sense, the pandemic had the greatest impact on the number of visitors to parks located in the Adriatic region.

An analysis of the results of the empirical research shows that POCs are generally not dissatisfied with the visits and state of tourism within the parks during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite numerous restrictions imposed by it. In addition, the preferences of visitors to POCs have not changed too. The study found that POCs continued to operate successfully, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and a significant drop in visitors and revenue. Reduced tourist movements have also resulted in fewer potential tourists who would visit some of the POCs during their travels/stays in one of the nearby destinations. To combat the spread of coronavirus and reduce the increased concentration of visitors at the main reception points, the parks have further limited the number of visitors and tickets, in addition to recommendations and standard epidemiological measures. In addition to these restrictions, some of the parks have introduced virtual tourist guides, which certainly make a promising product in the future of POCs. Such a product (virtual tourist guide) would allow potential visitors a virtual tour of the parks, which would increase the likelihood of physical arrival and tour of a particular park.

Although each park received the status of a protected area precisely because of the uniqueness of the area in which it was formed and its natural values, almost all POCs offer the same or similar tourism facilities and products. The research found "slow" creativity and innovation (uniform, standardized offer, absence of new, "hot-trend" products, etc.). As nothing significant has been done in the parks during the pandemic and reduced workload (e.g., creating new products), such a scenario could have a negative impact on tourism in the future given the expected changes in visitor preferences conditioned by the pandemic. Therefore, future research may consider the possibilities and wider application of tourism products that came to life during the COVID-19 pandemic in parks around the world (such as virtual tours, etc.). It would be especially useful to examine the possible economic implications of such products on parks and the local community. In addition, determining visitor behaviour through such products and content would be a valuable contribution, etc.

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## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM IN PARKS OF CROATIA

**Božidar Jaković**  
**Katarina Međurečan**  
**Dijana Katica**

### **Abstract**

The development of tourism in protected areas dates to the establishment of national parks through which visitors connect, experience, and learn about natural and cultural heritage. Considering its area, Croatia stands out with many attractive PAs with impressive biodiversity and preserved ecosystems. Parks of Croatia are the generators of local development and the leaders of sustainable tourism, which attract many visitors throughout the year. Parks of Croatia consists of national parks and nature parks, which are the most visited PAs in Croatia. Regardless of the focus on the tourism of PAs, the growing interest of people to visit PAs around the world will inevitably lead to “tourism happening” or, conversely, effectively managed to achieve sustainable tourism goals. Given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) that affected the tourism industry, it was considered justified to examine the state of tourism in Parks of Croatia at the time of travel and movement restrictions and further prospects after easing measures and re-intensifying human movement. Given the number of visits, it can be noticed that the Parks of Croatia were also significantly affected by the pandemic, with some exceptions, even though they were in a better position compared to other destinations in terms of epidemiological requirements (outdoor stays, the distance between visitors, etc.). In accordance with the presented assumption, this paper aims to determine the extent to which the pandemic has affected tourism in Parks of Croatia and opportunities for the development of tourism in parks in the post-pandemic period.

**Keywords:** the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in protected areas, Parks of Croatia, national parks, nature parks

**Božidar Jaković**  
Master of Science in Economics  
Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
Matije Gupca 78, Virovitica  
E-mail: bozidar.jakovic@vuv.hr

**Katarina Međurečan**  
Master of Applied Sciences in Economics  
Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
Matije Gupca 78, Virovitica  
E-mail: katarina.medurecan@vuv.hr

**Dijana Katica**  
Master of Science  
Croatian Association for Tourism and Rural Development “The Village Membership Club”  
Kaptol 29, Zagreb

## THE ROLE OF SELF-REGULATORY INSTRUMENTS IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM

**Kristina Afrić Rakitovac**  
**Nataša Urošević**  
**Alen Belullo**

### **Abstract**

Rural areas in the EU cover about half of the population and just over 80 percent of the EU's territory. They face many demographic, development, infrastructural, social and environmental challenges. The paper discusses development opportunities arising from the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism. The research was focused on sustainability standards, as self-regulatory instruments that enable the systematic application of the principle of sustainability in business practice. The aim of this paper was to analyse the impact/importance of sustainability standards on the sustainable development of rural tourism. The research was focused on the evaluation of the Eco Domus program, intended for small tourist accommodation facilities with the aim of encouraging private renters to diversify and raise the quality of accommodation through the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism. The program has been implemented in the Istria County since 2016. Owners of small tourist accommodation certified through the Eco Domus program were involved in the research. The methodology includes three pillars of sustainability: the impact on competitiveness, local community development and environmental protection. The preliminary results confirmed the research hypotheses that the implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the reduction of environmental impacts of the facility and to environmental awareness of other business subjects in the local community and positively influence the environmental awareness of tourists and that sustainability standards contributes to the social sustainability of rural areas.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, sustainable development, sustainability labels, competitiveness, community development, Istria county

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the turbulent global context, rural areas, the agricultural sector and rural tourism are gaining in increasing importance. Current multiple crises have contributed to the re-evaluation of rural culture, traditional lifestyles and economic self-sufficiency, especially in agriculture, as a counterbalance to accelerated globalization, urbanization and industrialization. Like much of Europe, Croatia has significant agricultural capital and the potential to revitalize the rural areas. For rural communities, development of sustainable tourism could be an opportunity to diversify their economies and revitalize territories and identities. Defined as “that tourist activity in rural areas, structured by an integrated offer of leisure, and directed to a reasoned request through contact with the native environment and with a relationship with local society” (Ivona 2021, 2) rural tourism could be seen as a chance to promote local development, thus representing an economic activity that involves a sustainable change in rural area. Since, according to UNWTO (2020), sustainable rural tourism should “find the correct harmony in the relationship established between the needs of the visitor, the place and the receiving community”, its main functions are connected with economic and social revitalization of rural areas and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources, by promoting integration of the local communities into tourism to improve their quality of life. As a reaction to the sudden and uncontrolled growth of mass tourism, some European regions

are successfully developing rural and agritourism and have established themselves as examples of good practice in sustainable tourism. They valorise unique local resources, strengthening local identities and economies and bringing life back to villages deserted due to rapid industrialization and urbanization, create new jobs and enable the marketing of local products. In that way, by connecting the goals of protection of eco-sphere, stable economic development and equality in distribution of life chances, as well as values of sustainability and diversity (Cifrić 2003), rural tourism enables sustainable development and modernisation of rural areas.

This paper discusses development opportunities arising from the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism. The research was focused on sustainability standards, as self-regulatory instruments that enable the systematic application of the principle of sustainability in business practice. The aim of the research was to analyse the impact of sustainability standards on the sustainable development of rural tourism. The research was focused on the evaluation of the Eco Domus program, intended for small tourist accommodation facilities in the Istria County from 2016, with the aim of encouraging private renters to diversify and raise the quality of accommodation through the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism.

After introduction and the literature review related to concepts of sustainability and eco-certification as a tool for sustainable rural development, in the next chapter the authors elaborated ecolabeling in Croatia and especially in the Istria County as the most developed Croatian tourism region. In the following section the research methodology was presented: the research involved owners of small tourist accommodation certified through the Eco Domus program. The methodology included three pillars of sustainability: the impact on competitiveness, local community development and environmental protection. In the next chapter research results were presented and elaborated. The detailed analysis of research results is followed by discussion of the research results and conclusion as well as the list of references.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate development opportunities arising from the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism in rural areas. The research was focused on sustainability standards, as self-regulatory instruments that enable the systematic application of the principle of sustainability in business practice. Since the main aim of the research was to analyze the impact of sustainability standards on the sustainable development of rural tourism, the theoretical framework includes literature review related to concepts of sustainability in rural tourism as well as sustainability standards and eco-certification as a tool for sustainable tourism development.

Sustainability of rural tourism is an important concept analyzed quite often in recent research. According to Ivona (2021), the key issues in sustainable rural tourism are environmental protection, economic assets and efficiency, and cultural awareness. Rural tourism could be considered as tool important part of creating employment opportunities and increasing household income for locals in terms of the economy, as well as

maintaining the environment with regard to environmental protection, strengthening communities, and preserving traditional cultural heritage in terms of social factors. In an extensive review of the recent literature, An and Alarcon (2020) elaborated articles associated with sustainable rural tourism found on the Web of Science database over a 10-year span from 2009 to 2019. The 76 articles that were selected for their inclusion of the concept of sustainable rural tourism were listed in a comprehensive table, thereby revealing the research purpose, topics, detailed topics, research methods, and data source of the articles. The findings indicated that many papers on sustainable rural tourism were written from a holistic sustainability perspective without being biased towards any one of the environmental, economic, and social aspects. On the other hand, in the field of rural tourism, it is essential to pay attention to interactions in all aspects of the environment, economy, and society, and to analyze them overall. In addition, this study confirmed that efforts to understand sustainable rural tourism from the customer perspective have been increased since customer loyalty is considered important for sustainability. The main aim of sustainable rural tourism is "to find the correct harmony in the relationship established between the needs of the visitor, the place and the receiving community" (Countryside Commission 1995). The main functions of rural tourism are: developing agriculture, recovering the traditional architectural heritage, managing natural and cultural resources and promoting the integration of the local population to tourism to improve their quality of life. Furthermore, rural tourism should generate additional revenue, contribute to the economic revitalization of depressed areas, promote the maintenance of agriculture, and incorporate women in paid work (López Palomeque and Vera Rebollo 2001).

Rural tourism has been considered as a chance to promote local development, thus representing an economic activity that involves a change in rural areas. Consequently, marketing activities begin to play a very important role, and selling rural tourism means selling activities in a rural space (for instance, walking, climbing, hunting, adventure, sport and health tourism, educational travel, arts, and heritage), thus showing its main facets. This is an economic activity with potential social, economic, and environmental impacts that are highly dependent on the local characteristics of a region, and it has the potential to stimulate rural economies with positive effects on farm income. However, the extent of the financial benefits and economic impact is still contested due to conservative estimates. European best practice in sustainable rural tourism was analyzed in the specific thematic guide *Developing Sustainable Rural tourism* (Dower and Papageorgiou 2003).

According to UNWTO (2020), rural tourism has a high potential to stimulate local economic growth and social change because of its complementarity with other economic activities, its contribution to GDP and job creation, and its capacity to promote the dispersal of demand in time (fight seasonality) and along a wider territory. UNWTO understands rural tourism as "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing. Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle" (UNWTO 2020). The sustainability of tourism in rural areas will only be successful if a comprehensive, inclusive planning strategy is

adopted and implemented based on a multi-action and multi-stakeholder participatory approach. The UNWTO Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development aim to support governments at various levels, as well as the private sector and the international community developing tourism in rural territories in a way that contributes to inclusive, sustainable and resilient development (UNWTO 2020).

Development of sustainable rural tourism in Croatia in European and global context, with a special emphasis on Adriatic and continental part of the country was the common topic of the research focused on ecological, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability (Demonja, Ružić 2010; Tubić 2019). According to Demonja (2014), in rural Croatia, which accounts for 91.6% of the total area, 44.4% of the population is directly or indirectly related to agriculture. Bearing in mind the growing trend of demand for rural tourism and the natural and cultural diversity of Croatia region, a rich offer of tourist attractions, well-preserved nature and several hundred registered rural households, Croatia has all the prerequisites for the development of rural tourism and all forms of tourism related to rural areas.

Sustainable rural development is based on the preservation and balanced development of environmental, social and economic capital. Self-regulatory instruments comprise standards (e.g. ISO standards 14001, European Management and Auditing Scheme – EMAS, etc.) and ecolabels (e.g. European ecolabel for tourism accommodation services). The paper is focused on ecolabels for accommodations implemented in rural tourism, as useful tools in the process of transition towards more sustainable rural tourism. The concept of eco-accommodation includes the environmental dimension (water management, waste management, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, sustainable constructing materials, sustainable materials in interior design, impacts on guests' environmental awareness, etc.), the social dimension (educational and experiential perspectives, ethical principles, collaboration with the host community) and the economic dimension (increased goodwill, reduced operating costs, higher labour productivity, strengthening competitiveness, long-term financial stability, etc.).

Currently, there are more than 60 different labels worldwide targeting different aspects of the tourism industry: beaches, hotels, camps, marinas and events. (<https://www.ecolabelindex.com>, 2022). Bučar, Van Rheenen and Hendija (2019) describe the emergence and hyper production of ecolabels in the global tourism market, with few rules and regulations, “as a kind of jungle difficult for tourists to navigate”. As they note, although the ecolabeling trend may be good for the global efforts to increase local sustainable development, without a standardized certification process. One of the oldest European ecolabels for tourist accommodations facilities and rural tourism enterprises in rural tourism still in operation is the Latvian ecolabel Green certificate, introduced in 1999. The empirical research conducted by Smalinskis and Auzina (2019) on the impacts of the implementation of the Green Certificate indicate that the major group respondents (45%) confirmed that the status of Green Certificate brings additional customers to the company. Eco-certification as a tool for sustainable tourism was elaborated in several case studies related to specific European countries, such as the Czech Republic (Ryglóva 2007). The author conducted a research in order to determine the approaches to environmental certification by 114 accommodation providers in Czech Republic. The research, realized in 2006, has indicated that at that time sustainable

tourism was neglected and undervalued. The author pointed out the necessity of creation of a complex system of supporting sustainable tourism in the country. Bradić et al (2017) concluded, according to the survey which was addressed on rural tourists' perception of eco labels for accommodation facilities in rural areas of Vojvodina, Serbia, the most convenient and most feasible form of promotion of environmental responsibility in hotel industry is through the implementation of ecolabels.

### 3. ECOLABELING IN CROATIA

Croatia is a Mediterranean country with a long tradition as a host country. In 2019 (a pre-corona crises year), it has realized 19.6 million tourists and 91.2 million overnights. In the same year it employed 7.8 % of total employees and earned approximately 19.5 % of the GDP (Ministry of Tourism 2020). According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Index for 2019, Croatian tourism was ranked 27<sup>th</sup> out of 140 (WEF 2019). Tourism is considered as one of Croatia's most competitive economic sectors.

There are different ecolabels implemented in Croatian tourism. The Sustainable Hotel Certificate - a project of the Association of Entrepreneurs/Employers in the Croatian Hotel Industry, guarantees that the facilities in their business and daily activities follow global trends in sustainable business, such as energy efficiency, environmental protection, saving water and energy, controlling CO2 emissions, employee education, procurement, sales, marketing and PR. There are 41 hotels certified with the label. Travelife - an independent and affordable system that helps tour operators, travel agencies and hotels to manage and improve social and environmental performance by adhering to sustainability criteria (<https://www.travelife.info>). There are twelve tour operators or travel agents in Croatia certified by it. The Blue Flag for beaches and marinas is an international environmental program for the protection of the marine and coastal environment, whose primary goal is the sustainable management and governance of the sea and the coastal zone. In 2022 there are 69 beaches and 28 marinas in Croatia labeled with it. (<https://www.blueflag.global>). Green Beach is an ecological or sustainable recreational beach that implements aspects of sustainability into management frameworks enabling quality leisure time, balance preservation of natural and cultural heritage and economic development. The label was created within the project INTERREG Mediterranean MITOMED + (<https://mitomed-plus.interreg-med.eu>). The ecolabel has been implemented for three beaches in Croatia. Besides, there is the Village for all – label for accessible tourism camps. The label is implemented in five camps in Croatia, seven camps in San Marino and 31 camps in Italy (<https://www.villageforall.net/>).

The focus of this paper is on Istria County, one of the most developed counties in Croatia. It is situated in the north-west part of Croatia. It embraces a large part of Istria, the largest Croatian peninsula. It had 195.794 inhabitants in 2021, i.e. a 5.0 % of the total inhabitants of Croatia. The GDP/per capita has been approximately 25% higher than Croatian average for the last 30 years. Also, according to the Regional Competitiveness Index measured in 2007, 2010 and 2013 (Singer, S. et al, 2014) it is one of the most competitive counties in Croatia. In 2019 it has realised more than 4.4 million arrivals and 26.4 million overnights (Ministry of Tourism 2020). In the last 30 years, it has realised one quarter of

all tourism arrivals and one third of all overnights in Croatia. Also, one quarter of the total accommodation capacities and almost one quarter of the hotel beds are in this County. The County has a favourable geographical position near several Central European countries. Two-thirds of all tourists arrive from four countries: Germany, Slovenia, Austria and Italy. Besides, twenty percent of all employees are employed in hotels and restaurants (Financial Agency 2022). Considering the complexity of tourism supply, the number of inhabitants of this County involved in tourism supply either directly or indirectly is certainly much bigger. Although the County is part of a relatively small peninsula of only 2,820 km<sup>2</sup>, there are still significant differences between the levels of tourism development in the coastal area compared to its mainland. The tourism product called “sun and sea” dominates in the tourism structure. Namely, about 90% of visitors and 87% of overnights are realised in the coastal part. The coastal area is well developed, with mass tourism offer mostly based on experiencing the benefits of the Adriatic Sea. The inland part, until mid-1990 was underdeveloped, faced with depopulation, deruralisation, an ageing population and the loss of traditional heritage. As contemporary tourists are interested in a more refined and authentic experience, the rural parts of Istria have great potential for tourism development. Rural tourism in Istria has been developing since 1996, when the public sector, ie the County of Istria, the Department of Tourism and the Tourist Board of the County of Istria, encouraged the development of the private sector both financially and conceptually and marketing. In 2022 in the area of central Istria operates about 200 households with more than 1,500 beds different categories: agritourism, rural holiday homes, rural family hotels, rooms and apartments in rural households ([www.istra-istria.hr](http://www.istra-istria.hr)).

In the Istrian county there is a wide supply of environmentally aware facilities: eco accommodation Eco Domus (46 facilities), hotels with the international ecolabel Travelife (28 hotels), camps with the EU Ecolabel label (10 camps), certified organic food producers (35 producers), beaches with Blue flags (46 beaches) and Green flags (three beaches), e-charging stations for electric vehicles and bicycles, different eco events representing ecological and indigenous products or environmental activities ([www.istraecoexperience.com](http://www.istraecoexperience.com)). In the County there are many protected areas being part of the Natura 2000 ecological network, eco-museums and thematic parks, etc. The development of responsible and sustainable tourism is one of the horizontal goals set by the Master Plan for the Development of Istrian Tourism 2015-2025. Planning, the implementation and monitoring of the stated objectives is carried out by the Regional Department of Tourism of the Istrian County. ECO DOMUS is a labeling program implemented by the Department of Tourism with the aim of increasing social and environmental responsibility in tourism. The aim of the program is to encourage private renters in the County of Istria to diversify and raise the quality of accommodation through respect for the principles of sustainable tourism. The facilities bearing the Eco Domus label have met at least 50 basic criteria in 12 categories such as: social and environmental responsibility, integrated environmental and health protection, use of eco certified washing and cleaning agents, use of eco certified toiletries, use of natural materials, water saving technology, energy saving technology, and waste sorting and recycling. (Istrian county 2022) The certification process is voluntarily and free of charge for users. The expenditures are paid by the Department of tourism.



#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the empirical research was to analyse the impact of the Eco Domus program on the more sustainable tourism development in rural areas of Istria County. At the end of 2021 there were 47 small tourist accommodation facilities certified by the Eco Domus program.

The research hypotheses were as follows:

- The implementation of sustainability standards in small tourist accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the reduction of environmental impact, strengthens the environmental awareness of tourists and entrepreneurs in the local community.
- The implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas increase their attractiveness and competitiveness on the tourism market and foster the local economy.
- The implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the social sustainability of rural areas.

The research instrument for the analysis of respondents' attitudes was a survey questionnaire consisting of 41 questions. The survey was conducted in February and March 2022. The questionnaire was sent to owners of all certified facilities. 29 of them, i.e. 67.4% fully completed the questionnaire. There were 18 female (62.0%) and 11 (38.0%) male respondents.

**Table 1. Sample structure (in %) Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in the following table.**

		Level of education						
		Age	Elementary	Secondary	Bachelor degree	Master degree	Doctoral degree	Total
Gender	Male	41-50	-	25,0	-	75,0	-	100,0
		51-64	-	25,0	50,0	25,0	-	100,0
	Female	18-30	-	-	100,0	-	-	100,0
		31-40	-	-	-	100,0	-	100,0
		41-50	-	-	20,0	60,0	20,0	100,0
		51-64	12,5	37,5	25,0	25,0	-	100,0
		65 and more	-	100,0	-	-	-	100,0

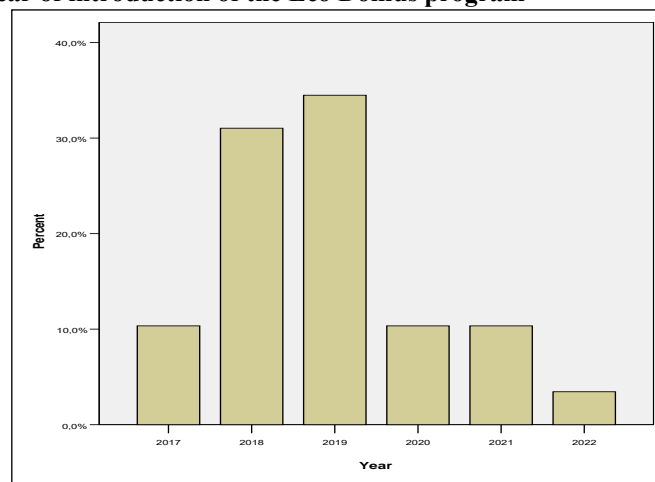
Source: Authors' research

In the group of male respondents, in the age group 41-50 there were three quarters of them with the master degree and one quarter with the secondary degree. In the older age group (51-64) there were half respondents with the bachelor degree, one quarter with the secondary education and one quarter with the master degree. In the group of female respondents, all respondents in the group 18-30 has the bachelor degree, in the age group 31-40 the master degree, in the group 41-50 the majority (60%) with the master degree, in the age group there was a variety of respondents, while in the oldest group (65 and more) all of them had the secondary education.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The Eco Domus program was introduced in the period between 2017 and 2022 (Graph 1). Most facilities were certified in the pre-corona crises period. The one certificated facility introduced in 2022 was not considered in the analysis, due to the short period of implementation.

Graph 1. Year of introduction of the Eco Domus program



Source: Authors' research

The next question was related to motives for the introduction of the Eco Domus program. (Table 2) The most important motive was the reduction of negative impact on the environment (4.86), advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community (4.72), energy savings (4.72), water savings (4.72), health protection (4.65), contribution to the recognizability of the destination (4.41), a source of information on sustainable business (4.24) and increasing the recognizability of the facility on the market (4.17).

**Table 2. The reasons for certifying the facility (answers 1 to 5, 1 - unimportant, 5 extremely important)**

<b>Answers:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Reduction of negative impact on the environment</b>	4,86	0.441
<b>Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community</b>	4,72	0.648
<b>Water savings</b>	4,72	0.528
<b>Energy savings</b>	4,72	0.528
<b>Health protection</b>	4,65	0.613
<b>Contribution to the recognizability of the destination</b>	4,41	0.824
<b>A source of information on sustainable business</b>	4.24	1.023
<b>Increasing the recognizability of the facility on the market</b>	4.17	0.889

Source: Authors' research

The following question was related to the main sources of information that prompted the certification of the facility. The most important sources were the presentations of the Eco Domus program by the Regional department for Tourism (51.7%), the web page of the Istrian county (13.8%), printed media (10.3%), on line platforms (6.9%), the experiences of other renters (6.9%) and other sources (10.3%).

Respondents were asked to compare their perceptions of the program before and after the implementation. Mostly respondents declare that “The program provides many more benefits than those mentioned in the program announcement”, Eco Domus has become our lifestyle”, but also “the certificate should be improved on a higher level”, etc.

In the next question respondents were asked to assess the benefits gained after facility certification (Table 3). The most important were the contribution to global efforts to reduce negative impacts on the environment (4.48), the health protection of involved stakeholders (4.41), the contribution to the creation of a green and sustainable identity of the Istrian County (4.31), the reduction of operating costs due to water savings (4.13), it contributes to greater environmental awareness of tourists (4.13).

**Table 3. The benefits gained after the certification of the facility (answers 1 to 5, 1 - irrelevant, 5 extremely important)**

<b>Answers</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Contribution to the reduction the negative impacts on the environment</b>	4.48	0.949
<b>Contribution to the protection of owners and guest health</b>	4.41	1.018
<b>Build a reputation for a green and sustainable identity of the Istrian County</b>	4.31	1.039
<b>Reduction of operating costs due to water savings</b>	4.14	1.060
<b>Greater environmental awareness of tourists</b>	4.14	0.875
<b>Reduction of operating costs due to energy savings</b>	3.93	1.252

<b>Better recognition of the facility on the market</b>	3.72	1.131
<b>Increased guest satisfaction</b>	3.66	1.173

Source: Authors' research

Differences in mean ranks of the two related samples are tested by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests (Table 4). There are “statistically significant differences in mean ranks at 5% level for Reduction of negative impact on the environment”, “Energy savings” and “Water savings”. The data indicate that the initial expectations were higher compared to the obtained results. The difference can be explained by the short period from the beginning of the implementation. For “Increasing the recognizability of the facility on the market” the difference is significant only at 10% significance level.

**Table 4. Differences between the reasons for implementations and obtained benefits of certification**

Item	Mean		Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test z (p)
	Reasons	Benefits	
<b>Reduction of negative impact on the environment</b>	4.86	4.48	-1.994** (0.046)
<b>Health protection</b>	4.65	4.41	-1.512 (0.131)
<b>Energy savings</b>	4.72	3.93	-3.337** (0.001)
<b>Water savings</b>	4.72	4.14	-3.220** (0.001)
<b>Increasing the recognizability of the facility on the market</b>	4.17	3.72	-1.772* (0.076)
<b>Contribution to the recognizability of the destination</b>	4.41	4.31	-0.511 (0.609)

**Bold:** significant at 5% significance level

Source: Authors' research

When asked if their guests recognize the value of the certificate Eco Domus, the majority of respondents (62.1%) were not able to estimate it, one third (31.0%) confirmed it, while the rest (6.9%) consider guests do not recognize it.

According to the Eco Domus propositions, each facility has to present the Sustainability Policy to their guests. When asked whether guests noticed it in the facility, 72.4% confirmed that. Besides, most respondents (65.5%) consider that there is no need for additional advices for improving the implementation of the certificate after the initial consultation.

When asked if they are conducting a guest satisfaction survey, 51.7% confirmed that. One third (34.5%) were not able to answer, pointing out some related problems: guests are not interested in fulfilling it, they would prefer on line questionnaires, they just want to have some rest on holidays, etc.

In the next six questions respondents were asked to estimate the guests' interest for different aspects of local socio-cultural and natural environment. (Table 5) Most respondents (75.9%) consider that guests are interested in receiving information materials about local cultural and historical heritage in the surroundings. When asked to give some examples, most respondents pointed out that tourists are interested in visiting larger, already tourist-valued cities in the region (Pula, Poreč, Rovinj). They pointed out their efforts to to introduce guests to lesser-known places - small local places in the surroundings (Grožnjan, Labin, Beram, Kaštel Grimani, Dvigrad, Motovun, Oprtalj, Parenzana, Hum – Glagolitic scripts, etc.). The hosts offer them printed information leaflets. The hosts offer them printed information leaflets. They propose the creation of an online interactive tourist map that would represent the cultural and historical heritage of the region.

Most respondents (69.0%) confirmed guests' interest in information materials on local natural heritage in the surroundings. The hosts usually offer printed materials and oral suggestions about the local heritage. When asked to give some examples, they mentioned natural beaches, hiking, climbing, nature walks, caves, etc.

The majority of respondents (79.3%) confirmed the interest of guests to buy traditional products and souvenirs. Significantly fewer respondents, although still the majority (58.6%) consider that guests are interested in getting to know and / or participating in traditional customs

The majority of respondents (75.9%) confirmed the interest of guests in buying domestic and eco-certified food and beverages. When asked whether guests are interested in visiting fairs and festivals in the surroundings, most respondents (65.5%) confirmed this. They mentioned local fairs with organic products, medieval festivals, food festivals (cheese, figs, truffles, wine, olive oil, etc.), film festivals in Pula and Motovun, etc.

**Table 5. Valorisation of local values**

<b>Answers</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unable to answer</b>
<b>Guests interest in informative materials about the local cultural and historical heritage in the immediate vicinity</b>	75.9	6.9	17.2
<b>Guests interest in informative materials about local natural values in the immediate vicinity</b>	69.0	6.9	24.1
<b>Guests interest in buying traditional products and souvenirs</b>	79.3	0	20.7
<b>Guests interest in getting to know and/or participating in traditional customs</b>	58.6	6.9	34.5
<b>Guests interested for local and eco-certified food and beverage products</b>	75.9	17.2	6.9
<b>Guests interest in fairs and festivals taking place nearby</b>	65.5	10.3	24.2

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Source: Authors' research

Almost all respondents (93.1%) recommend the use of tap water to their guests. Only a third of them (31.0%) confirmed the interest of guests in saving water during their stay, the majority was unable to estimate it (65.5%). Water savings were observed from reduced water bills.

The majority of respondents (69.0%) confirmed that the price of eco products for washing, cleaning and disinfection, often higher than conventional products, justifies the quality of the product. 13.8% respondents disagree, while 17.2% were not able to answer. However, when asked to compare the efficiency of eco products with conventional products, the majority of respondents (55.2%) were not able to answer. The higher efficiency was confirmed by 24.1% of respondents, while 24.1% disagree on that.

The majority of respondents (86.2%) do not encounter any difficulties/obstacles in sorting waste. The rest (17.2%) indicate some challenges related to unwillingness of some guests to participate and the insufficiently frequent waste collection in some local communities. The majority of respondents (93,1%) do not encounter obstacles in composting bio waste.

Only one third of respondents (34.5%) have a built-in system for the use of renewable energy sources. The structure of implemented renewable energy sources is as follows: sun (81.8%), gas (9.1%) and geothermal energy (9.1%). Renewable energy sources are used for hot water heating (80%), electricity generation (26.7%) and outdoor solar lighting (3.3%). When asked if their facility produces at least 10% of electricity from renewable sources, only a quarter of respondents confirmed. Usually these were solar power plants, electric hobs, heat pumps.

Respondents were asked if guests were interested in using public transportation. One fifth of the respondents confirmed (17.2%), the majority emphasized that public transport was not organized in their environment (62.1%), the rest (20.7%) could not estimate. The majority of respondents (79.3%) confirmed that guests are interested in buying domestic products by bike or on foot. Even more respondents (86.2%) say that guests are satisfied with the quality of domestic products.

In the next three questions respondents were asked to assess the complexity of the changes made in the interior of the facility (Likert scale, from 1 to 5, 1- not demanding, 5 – very demanding). Cessation of the use of synthetic paints and varnishes was rated at 1.79 on average, Replacement of existing textiles with natural materials was rated at 1.59 on average and Procurement of environmentally friendly products for the maintenance of greenery in the garden was rated at 1.59 on average. As the respondents pointed out, the process was properly managed and the transition was not complicated. When asked to name labels that indicate environmentally friendly materials, the most common answers were: OEKO-TEX STANDARD 100, 100% cotton, Eco label, ECO guarantee, ECO CERT, EcoLabel, GreenLabel, Der Blue Engel, EcoCert, FSC, Friend of the environment (in Croatian Prijatelj okoliša), bio cotton, organic cotton, etc.

The majority of respondents (93.1%) did not faced light pollution.

The majority of respondents (68.9%) noticed positive comments in their communities regarding the implementation of Eco Domus. However, only one third of the respondents determined the interest of other renters in the implementation of the Eco Domus program.

When asked about the participation of respondents in local initiatives to increase social cooperation and integration, more than a third confirmed (41.4%), others did not participate (31.3%) or could not answer (27.6%). Respondents pointed out the participation in local fairs of organic products, by participation in Youth council, through the tourism board, different activities organized by the tourism offices and utility companies.

The majority of respondents (55.2%) actively advocate the principles of sustainable development in the wider community, a fifth (20.7%) do not, while others (17.2%) could not answer. The advocacy was realized through the membership in the municipal council, by encouraging the discussions and reflections on sustainability issues in the local community, in sharing experiences with the wider family, neighbors and other renters, through the Youth council, through preparing the master thesis, through media (local newspapers, on line portals) and conferences related to tourism.

In the next question, respondents were asked about the support of the local tourism board regarding the implementation of Eco Domus program. The majority of respondents (55.2%) stated they do not has such support. Those who were supported (44.8%) stated that they received various information on sustainability issues, cultural events and local events, the Eco Domus label was immediately indicated on the board's website, the program was recommended to other renters, some received digital instead leaflet printed, participation in the SouthIstria Pet Friendly program, etc.

In the next question the respondents were asked to evaluate some general aspects regarding the Eco Domus program (Table 6). The most important contribution of Eco Domus was related to the acquisition of new knowledge for personal use, while the less important was related to the impact on the tourists' environmental awareness.

**Table 6. Reflections on Eco Domus (answers 1 to 5, 1 - disagree, 5 strongly agree)**

<b>Answers:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>The Eco Domus program has contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge for personal use</b>	4.32	1.056
<b>The Eco Domus program has contributed to changes in one's own household or changes in the extended family</b>	4.21	0.995
<b>The Eco Domus program has contributed to the awareness of tourists</b>	3.85	0.989

Source: Authors' research

Kruskal-Walis test was used for testing the difference in mean ranks between different educational groups. There are differences for T2 (10% significance level) and T3 (5% significance level) (Table 7).

**Table 7. Reflections on the Eco Domus program analyzed by the level of respondents' education**

Answers	Education					K-W $\chi^2$ (p)
	1	2	3	4	5	
The Eco Domus program has contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge for personal use	5	4.83	3.8 3	4.43	2	7.058 (0.13 3)
The Eco Domus program has contributed to changes in one's own household or changes in the extended family	5	4.83	3.3 3	4.21	5	8.524 * (0.07 4)
The Eco Domus program has contributed to the awareness of tourists	5	4.5	2.8	3.78	5	11.24 3** (0.02 4)

\* significant at 10% level

\*\* significant at 5% level

Legend: 1. Elementary; 2. Secondary; 3. Bachelors degree; 5. Masters degree; 7. Doctoral degree

Source: Authors' research

The statement "Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community" (Table 2) was compared to statements from the Table 6. The results indicate that the rank means for statements from the Table 6 were statistically different compared to the mean of "Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community" (mean=4.72), for T2 i T3 at 5% significance level and for T1 at 10% significance level (Table 8).

**Table 8. Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community (difference in means rank in two dependent samples)**

Answers	Mean	Wilcoxon signed rank test z (p)
The Eco Domus program has contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge for personal use	4.32	-1.923* (0.054)
The Eco Domus program has contributed to changes in one's own household or changes in the extended family	4.21	-2.210** (0.027)
The Eco Domus program has contributed to the awareness of tourists	3.85	-3.289** (0.027)



\* significant at 10% level

\*\* significant at 5% level

Source: Authors' research

The following table compares the Reasons for facility certification with the Eco Domus program (Table 2), Benefits gained after certification (Table 3) and Reflections on the Eco Domus program (Table 6) analyzed by year of implementation (Table 9). Based on Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test for independent samples we cannot reject the hypothesis at 5% significance level that there is no difference in mean rank between different years. At the 10% level of significance we can reject this hypothesis only for “The Eco Domus certificate has contributed to greater environmental awareness of tourists”.

**Table 9. The Reasons of introduction, Benefits and Reflections on Eco Domus analyzed by the year of introduction**

	Answers	Year of introduction (mean)						K-W $\chi^2$ (p)
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Reduction of negative impact on the environment</b>	5.00	4.89	4.90	5.00	4.33	5.00	2.776 (0.734)
	<b>Health protection</b>	4.67	4.67	4.70	5.00	4.33	4.00	3.424 (0.635)
	<b>Water savings</b>	4.67	4.78	4.80	4.67	4.33	5.00	1.069 (0.957)
	<b>Energy savings</b>	4.67	4.78	4.80	4.67	4.33	5.00	1.069 (0.957)
	<b>Increasing the recognizability of the facility on the market</b>	4.33	3.89	4.20	4.67	4.33	4.00	2.141 (0.829)
	<b>Contribution to the recognizability of the destination</b>	5.00	4.00	4.50	5.00	4.33	4.00	8.131 (0.149)
	<b>Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community</b>	5.00	4.78	4.80	5.00	3.67	5.00	6.246 (0.283)
	<b>A source of information on sustainable business</b>	4.00	4.11	4.60	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.458 (0.630)
<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Better recognition of the facility on the market</b>	4.00	3.00	4.30	3.33	4.00	4.00	7.539 (0.184)
	<b>Increased guest satisfaction</b>	3.67	3.11	3.80	4.33	4.00	4.00	4.623 (0.464)
	<b>Reduction of operating costs due to energy savings</b>	4.67	3.89	4.30	3.67	4.00	5.00	3.092 (0.686)
	<b>Reduction of operating costs due to water savings</b>	4.00	3.78	4.00	3.67	4.00	5.00	2.009 (0.848)
	<b>Greater environmental awareness of tourists</b>	4.67	3.56	4.50	3.67	4.33	5.00	<b>9.258</b> <b>(0.099)</b>
	<b>Build a reputation for a green and sustainable identity of the Istrian County</b>	5.00	4.22	4.30	4.00	4.00	5.00	3.030 (0.695)
	<b>Contribution to the protection of owners and guest health</b>	5.00	4.33	4.50	4.00	4.33	4.00	4.734 (0.449)
	<b>Greater environmental awareness of tourists</b>	5.00	4.22	4.60	4.33	4.33	5.00	2.848 (0.723)

<b>Reflections on the</b>	<b>The program has contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge for personal use</b>	3.33	4.67	4.56	3.67	4.00	5.00	4.747 (0.448)
	<b>The program has contributed to changes in one's own household or changes in the extended family</b>	3.67	4.11	4.56	3.67	4.33	5.00	2.815 (0.729)
	<b>The program has contributed to the awareness of tourists</b>	3.67	3.78	4.13	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.38 (0.496)

Bold: significant at 10%

Source: Authors' research

In the last question, respondents were asked about the differences in conscious behavior among tourists, with regard to the country of origin. Almost half of the respondents (48.3%) observed it, the rest could not answer (41.4%) or did not notice it (10.3%). Those who come from Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland were most often recognized as aware tourists.

In the Table 10 the difference in education is tested for the Reasons for facility certification with the Eco Domus program (Table 2), Benefits gained after certification (Table 3) and Reflections on the Eco Domus program (Table 6) by using non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. At 10% significance level differences are found in mean rank only for "Health protection" (Table 2) ( $\chi^2=9.763$ ,  $p=0.045$ ) and "Guest satisfaction" (Table 3) ( $\chi^2=9.433$ ,  $p=0.051$ ).

**Table 10. The difference in the education level for Reasons for Introduction, Benefits and Reflections on Eco Domus**

	Mean					
	1	2	3	5	7	Total
<b>R Health protection</b>	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000	4.3333	5.0000	4.6552
<b>P Guest satisfaction</b>	5.0000	4.6667	3.3333	3.2667	4.0000	3.3556

Legend: 1. Elementary; 2. Secondary; 3. Bachelors degree; 5. Masters degree; 7. Doctoral degree

Source: Authors' research

Regarding differences in Age and Gender, based on non-parametric tests Kruskal-Wallis (for k-independent samples, for Age groups) and Mann-Whitney test (for 2 independent samples, for Genders) are not found statistically significant differences in mean ranks for Reasons, Benefits and Reflections on the introduction of Eco Domus.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Sustainable rural tourism requires commitment and informed participation of all relevant stakeholders in the public, private and civil sector. The research was focused on owners of small tourism facilities in the rural part of the Istrian county certified by the Eco Domus program. The research has shown that the second most important reason for certifying their facility, after "Reduction of negative impacts on the environment", was the "Advocacy of sustainable development principles in the local community". Besides, the majority of respondents (55.2%) confirmed their willingness to actively advocate the

principles of sustainable development through membership in municipal council, by encouraging the discussion and reflections on sustainability issues in the local community, in sharing experience with the wider family, neighbors and other renters, through media and conferences related to tourism.

The first hypothesis proposed as “The implementation of sustainability standards in small tourist accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the reduction of environmental impact, strengthens the environmental awareness of tourists and entrepreneurs in the local community” was confirmed. The research has shown that the reduction of the negative impact on the environment was the main reason for certifying the facility, followed by water and energy saving. The reduced impact on the environment was the most important benefit gained after the facility certification. As indicated in the Table 4, the initial expectations were higher compared to obtained results, which can be explained by the short period since the start of implementation. Regarding the potential impact on tourists' environmental awareness, 74% of respondents confirmed that guests have noticed the Sustainability policy document. Respondents expect significant impact (mean 4.14, Table 3). The contribution of Eco Domus on tourists' awareness was perceived significantly differently when analyzed by the level of respondents' education. The biggest differences in mean rank were for respondents with the bachelor and master degree. However, most respondents (75.9%) consider tourists are interested in consuming eco-certified food and beverages. Also, the majority (69.0%) considers tourists are interested in local natural values. Regarding the contribution to environmental awareness of other business subjects, the majority of respondents (68.9%) noticed positive comments in their communities regarding the implementation of Eco Domus. However, only one third of the respondents determined the interest of other renters in the implementation of the Eco Domus program. The research has shown that the program has contributed to acquisition of new knowledge for personal use (mean rank 4.32, Table 6) and to changes in respondents' household (4.21, Table 6).

The second hypothesis, i.e “The implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas increase their attractiveness and competitiveness on the tourism market and foster the local economy” was confirmed. The research has shown the reduction of operating costs due to water and energy savings (mean rank 4.14/3.93, Table 3), contribution of the Eco Domus on the visibility on the market (mean rank 4.41, Table 2). According to the majority of respondents, guests are interested in local and eco-certified food (75.9%, Table 5) and to participate in local fairs and festivals (65.5%, Table 5).

The third hypothesis, i.e “The implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the social sustainability of rural areas” was confirmed. The research has shown that a large proportion of respondents (41.4%) have participated in local initiatives aimed at increasing social cooperation and integration. Most respondents consider that guests are interested in the local cultural and historical heritage in the vicinity (75.9%), in getting acquainted and/or participate in traditional customs (58.6%), in visiting local fairs and festivals.

The limitations of the research stem from the short implementation time of the Eco Domus program. It was first implemented in 2017, so the analysis covered only five years, two of which were affected by the corona crisis. Just three respondents have implemented the program since the beginning, while all others have shorter experiences. The total number of certified facilities at the end of 2021 were 47. The response rate was 67.4%, but the sample size was still small (29 fully completed questionnaires). Given the trends in the tourism market that indicate the growing environmental awareness and greater interest in sustainability issues by different stakeholders on the tourism market, the number of certified facilities under the Eco Domus program is expected to increase in the coming future. The deepening of the analysis will be contributed by a larger sample of respondents with longer experience with the Eco Domus certificate.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In the research presented in this paper, aiming to emphasize the importance of sustainability standards on the sustainable development of rural tourism, the Eco Domus program, intended for small tourist accommodation facilities in the Istria County with the aim of encouraging private renters to diversify and raise the quality of accommodation through the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism was evaluated. The survey which involved owners of small tourist accommodation certified through the Eco Domus program five years after its introduction indicated some important issues, such as the high level of ecological awareness and the willingness to reduce negative impact on the environment by water and energy savings and using sustainability standards. The survey also indicated the importance of quality environmental policies at the level of the local and regional government, since most of respondents were informed about the sustainability standards by the responsible regional department, which also contributed to a green and sustainable identity of the Istrian County. The research has shown that local stakeholders were very interested to contribute to global efforts to reduce negative impacts on the environment but also to reduce operating costs due to energy and water savings and influence greater environmental awareness and health protection of tourists too by using sustainability standards.

It is interesting to note that the survey showed that guests also were very interested in cultural, social and environmental sustainability, participation and preservation of unique cultural and natural values, by enjoying eco-certified food and traditional products through special interest outdoor activities. It is important that majority of respondents regularly selects waste and do not encounter obstacles in composting bio waste, but while showing awareness about predominant quality of eco-products for cleaning purpose, it is interesting that two thirds of respondents' guests don't have a clear position on the need of saving water. Two thirds of certified facilities don't have a built-in system for the use of renewable energy sources, and another third use mostly sun for water-heating. Regarding opportunities for green, sustainable and smart mobility, it is interesting to note that visitors are very interested to use the bike or public transport, but public transport was unfortunately not available in most cases!

The conducted research results confirmed the authors' hypotheses, indicating that the implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas could contribute to the reduction of environmental impacts of the facility as well as to environmental awareness of other business subjects in the local community and positively influence the environmental awareness of tourists. It also showed that the implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the social sustainability of rural areas.

Limitations of this research were connected mostly to the sample size and the short implementation time of the Eco-Domus program. Since the conducted research indicated some important issues related to perspectives of sustainable rural tourism development by using sustainability standards, the authors intend to continue and direct the analysis towards possible contribution of regional rural tourism facilities to global efforts to reduce negative impacts on the environment as well as to support local agricultural sector and its self-sufficiency through product marketing in rural tourism. Given the trends in the tourism market that indicate the growing environmental awareness and greater interest in sustainability issues by different stakeholders, the number of certified facilities under the Eco Domus program is expected to increase, so the authors expect a larger sample with longer experience in sustainability standards will contribute to a deeper analysis. Bearing in mind the mentioned turbulent global context and recent tourism trends related to return to nature and peaceful life in traditional countryside, we can conclude that high quality and well-developed rural tourism in Istria County, supported by sustainability standards and eco-certification already positioned itself as the best practice model for the neighbouring regions. Existing sustainability standards should be improved, and results of the conducted research could be used as a pilot-study which indicated the most important issues in the process of improving necessary infrastructure and organizing awareness raising campaigns directed towards sustainable rural development.

**To conclude:** it is important to point out that rural tourism development should be in harmony with the principles of sustainable tourism, in order to achieve a balance with the economic, social and environmental aspects of development.

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## **THE ROLE OF SELF-REGULATORY INSTRUMENTS IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM**

### **Abstract**

Rural areas in the EU cover about half of the population and just over 80 percent of the EU's territory. They face many demographic, development, infrastructural, social and environmental challenges. The paper discusses development opportunities arising from the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism. The research was focused on sustainability standards, as self-regulatory instruments that enable the systematic application of the principle of sustainability in business practice. The aim of this paper was to analyse the impact/importance of sustainability standards on the sustainable development of rural tourism. The research was focused on the evaluation of the Eco Domus program, intended for small tourist accommodation facilities with the aim of encouraging private renters to diversify and raise the quality of accommodation through the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism. The program has been implemented in the Istria County since 2016. Owners of small tourist accommodation certified through the Eco Domus program were involved in the research. The methodology includes three pillars of sustainability: the impact on competitiveness, local community development and environmental protection. The preliminary results confirmed the research hypotheses that the implementation of sustainability standards for small tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas contributes to the reduction of environmental impacts of the facility and to environmental awareness of other business subjects in the local community and positively influence the environmental awareness of tourists and that sustainability standards contributes to the social sustainability of rural areas.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, sustainable development, sustainability labels, competitiveness, community development, Istria county

### **Kristina Afrić Rakitovac**

Associate professor  
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula  
E-mail address: kafric@unipu.hr

### **Nataša Urošević**

Assistant professor  
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula  
E-mail address: natasa.urosevic@unipu.hr

### **Alen Belullo**

Associate professor  
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula  
E-mail address: alen.belullo@unipu.hr

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HOSPITALITY

**Ivana Vidak**  
**Martina Kovačević**  
**Ivona Kovač**

**Abstract:**

Effective and quality communication is more important than ever not only because of the greater demands of tourists, but also because of the growing competition. The theoretical part of the paper defines the concept of hotel management, the hotel as a business system and the importance of communication in the hospitality industry. The research part of the paper is based on the survey method on a sample of 55 respondents whose answers were interpreted by the descriptive analysis. The aim of this paper is to evaluate which communication and other skills of hotel employees are extremely important to future guests. The results of the survey suggest that professionalism comes first for guests, followed by courteousness and accessibility. Similarly, an intelligible manner of speaking is of paramount importance, as is the speed of service, while skills such as the knowledge of English and the ability to empathize with guests are of less importance. The paper's contribution is reflected in the development of the personality profile and communication skills of the staff employed in the hotel industry.

**Keywords:** hospitality, communication, communication skills

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication has always been a part of humanity and involves the exchange of thoughts, feelings and certain signs between two or more people. It means connecting people, since as many as 70% of people spend time in some form of communication daily. The aim of this paper is to prove how important appropriate and skilful communication is in hospitality, but not only communication as such, but also certain additional skills that are part of nonverbal communication such as smiling, remembering guest names, etc. "Hospitality, as an industry, is the activity of providing accommodation services in order to meet the needs of accommodation and other services provided in a hotel way. It encourages, enables, but also creates the development of resort, congress, health, religious, and other forms of tourism, regardless of whether the tourists were domestic or foreign " (Cerović 2003, 67-68). The hotel business consists of several subsystems that influence each other. In fact, there are interrelated elements that complement each other and where each has a specific role to play. According to Galić and Ivanović (2008), subsystems that are important for the operation of hotels are marketing, procurement, finance and accounting, human resources management, hotel maintenance and others. All these elements are part of the hotel business process and as such are interdependent.



## **2. THE CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE HOSPITALITY**

Today there are many generally accepted definitions of communication and for this reason there is no one universally accepted definition. There are different interpretations of communication, but it is important to point out that most definitions state that communication is a process, it takes time for this process to happen, this process is two-way, and the process is accompanied by interaction and feedback.

Several definitions do stand out:

“Communication is a process through which the persons involved jointly build the meaning of the messages they exchange and at the same time influence each other in a certain way and to a certain extent” (Žižak 2012, 24).

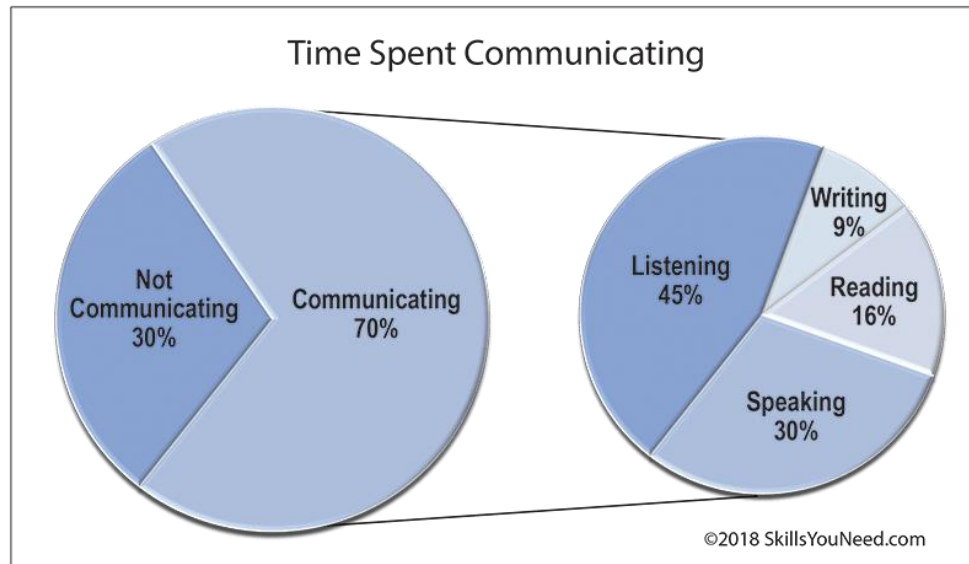
“Communication is the basis and condition of success of all interpersonal private and personal relationships, it plays a key role in creating favorable or unfavorable impressions about the individual and the organization, it influences the interlocutors” (Fox 2006).

According to Arambasic (2022), communication is a living "substance", something that is born, grows and develops, multiplies, and sometimes, unfortunately, dies irreversibly.

According to Vidak (2020) communication as a complex social process, is encompassed by an interdisciplinary approach, since psychology, sociology, and linguistics are penetrating the field of communication. Today, communication is predominantly done through various media, whether electronic or by telephone, without having the geographical location as an obstacle to successful communication.

Human communication is the process of transmitting information, ideas, opinions, and views from one individual to another or from one group to another. Generally, communication exists when a system, a source, influences the states and actions of another system. Communication is the transmission of a message by means of a code. The code refers to the syntactic and lexical selections of the message being built and conveyed. Social communication requires that any sender must acquire communicative competence. Genuine communication conveys a piece of information that had been, at some point in time, accessible to the sender and they must have made it accessible to the receiver, too. But the former should not forget that only communication that offers new knowledge has informative value. What is already known has no informative value. Or in the latter case some communication did take place, but no new information had occurred. (Chevereșan i Pădurean, 2009)

In the hospitality industry, communication is certainly two-way, but it aims to fulfil the saying the guest is always right, which implies from the very beginning that communication and feedback must be in favor of the guest. Any communication in the hotel industry that is polite and accurate will achieve a sense of satisfaction with the guest.

Figure 1. **Time Spent Communicating**

Source: Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001), *Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating* (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt

The previous Figure 1 shows the time spent communicating. Given that it was emphasized that communication is an important part of every individual's life, which is confirmed by the fact that adults spend an average of 70% of their time in some form of communication, 45% of which is actually listening; 30% speech; 16% reading and 9% writing. The data confirms that it is almost impossible to avoid communication and that it will always be an integral part of humanity.

### 2.1. Verbal communication in the hospitality industry

Verbal communication is divided into 2 basic forms: oral and written communication. Written and oral media have desirable and undesirable characteristics, so they are often used in tandem so that the desired characteristics can complement each other.

"Oral communication is an important form of communication in the business world, and it refers to conversations in which the spoken word is the main code of communication. The usual channels through which oral communication is transmitted are telephone, face-to-face conversation, meetings, video, television, radio and sound on the Internet, and these are speeches, discussions, telephone calls, meetings, etc." (Golja 2016, 311). Communication in which a message is conveyed in writing or in print is called written communication. "Written communication is planned and requires considerable creative effort. It is slower than verbal communication. Written communication leaves a mark: a record is a document and has legal

weight. The choice between written and oral communication depends on the nature and importance of the information. Writing is essential when we want a high-quality message: it allows us to plan, prepare and shape the message down to the smallest detail.” (Fox 2001, 65). Tourism employees come into contact with guests on a daily basis. If they do not know how to communicate well, they will certainly not be successful in their work. In addition to communication between the guest and the employee in tourism, internal communication within the tourism company is also important. According to Watson Wyatt, companies with a well-developed internal communication system have significantly lower employee turnover, 68% lower absenteeism, 69% higher customer satisfaction, 58% higher sales and 51% higher employee productivity (Golja 2016, 326).

"Communication indirectly realizes the basic needs of employees, such as a sense of belonging, a sense of security and respect. Workers who manage to meet these needs during their working hours are certainly more motivated in their work. An environment in which the truthfulness, relevance and timeliness of information are the basis of communication is an environment in which there is a positive communication climate” (Laškarin i Ažić, 2018, 209). The most common mistakes that companies make in managing employees are the lack of communication between staff and management (as many as 41%), then the lack of recognition and reimbursement (28%) and finally the lack of training and education (11%) (Golja 2016). In the hotel business, certain mistakes can often be made during working hours, which is why it is necessary to further educate employees about all the possible situations and instruct them on how to solve them in the easiest possible way.

## **2.2. Nonverbal communication in hospitality**

Nonverbal communication means communication that takes place beyond words. It can be said that it replaces, enhances, or complements verbal communication. There are several components that are considered part of nonverbal communication and are very important when talking to another person. The 9 components of nonverbal communication include the following: touch, body language, voice, appearance, eye contact, personal space, facial expression, silence, and smell. According to Laškarin Ažić (2018), factors that additionally affect the guest, and are considered part of nonverbal communication are: spatial communication (such as exterior and interior design, air quality, color, light, etc.), temporal communication (such as speed of response, speed movement, waiting time, time dedicated to the guest) and external circumstances (such as ambient noise).

People tend to believe in non-verbal signs more than spoken words because the signs on the body are very difficult to hide or change during a conversation so that the message might be understood differently. In some situations, it can happen that a person says one thing and her eyes say something completely different. When it is evident that body language and words are not harmonized, it can be surmised that the person is either lying or unsure of what they are saying. "Regardless of the meaning of individual messages or the position of the body, it is important to understand that non-verbal communication is often difficult to interpret accurately. However, most non-verbal communication in universal cultural circles is universal. All people everywhere use and understand the six basic facial expressions for

happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise” (Antolović and Sviličić, 2020, 111). Nonverbal communication is much more important than verbal and cannot be viewed separately because they intertwine with each other and thus create the process of communication.

### 3. COMMUNICATION WITH THE GUEST

Although hotel guests spend the least time in the hotel itself, this should not be an excuse for employees not to treat them as best they can. Once a guest is satisfied, they will always return to a particular hotel and most importantly they will start sharing their positive experiences with other people, and that is the best promotion a hotel can ask for. "The guest is the meaning of catering and tourism. The strategy for the development of tourism and hospitality is based on the needs and desires of guests, which are changing rapidly due to the growth and development of technology and industry. What is constantly in this living process is - the guest, around whom and because of which everything moves. It is important to be aware of the importance of the guest, whose desires we must surpass, not just satisfy; whose questions we must anticipate, not just answer those already posed; to whom we must show kindness so that he feels as if he is the only one, and not one of many." (Bareza et al. 2011, 7). Any action or behavior contrary to expectations of the guest may result in lower turnover, fewer guests and other material damage. "There are few occupations in which people live almost exclusively from their ability to communicate with other people - their guests. It is no exaggeration to say that etiquette is the essence of the profession of every caterer and most tourism professionals. Whether a person works in the kitchen or serves guests directly, or is at the counter of a travel agency - in all these cases, their existence depends on the correct attitude towards the users of its service " (Osredečki 2000, 252). The following Table 1 shows and explains some elements of effective verbal and nonverbal communication when approaching a guest.

Table 1. **Analysis of the importance of individual competencies of receptionists according to the respondents**

Workwear	“In tourism and hospitality, workwear (uniform) is a key factor in the process of personal sales and one of the most effective forms of communication with the consumer. The work uniform indicates not only the occupation, but also the social status of the individual. The clothing elements (details, colors, overall style) of the restaurant staff, for example, inform the guest about who is the waiter, who is the shift manager, and that is the restaurant manager” (Fox 2001, 174).
Smile	“In a tourist country, a smile must be part of business culture, because a smiling face sells pleasure. A smile as the most visible and most acceptable gesture of pleasure and joy gives valuable incentives in creating a pleasant atmosphere. It expresses interest and experiential

	attitude towards the one to whom it is addressed. The power of a smile is greater than one thinks because it breaks down fences, reduces aggression and disarms. It breaks the cold and increases the level of understanding” (Galičić and Ivanović 2008, 124).
Listening carefully	“Listening carefully is a message to the guest that he is respected, appreciated and that his wishes will be fulfilled exactly. Listening carefully allows you to avoid possible mistakes, which means better performance of tasks. Listening is an active process that requires participation. It is necessary to avoid premature conclusions about what the guest wants to say. It is often judged, approved or disapproved in advance instead of concentrating on understanding what the guest is really saying” (Bareza at. al. 2011, 35).
Remembering the name	“Employees in direct contact with the guest usually try to remember the names of important guests, thus showing respect for their social status. By using the name, the staff informs the guest that he is important, interesting, entertaining and deserves attention, which will certainly contribute to his positive impression of the service” (Fox 2001, 170).
Telephoning	According to Bareza at. al. (2011), it is important to improve the skill of telephoning because it is sometimes the only contact and also the first impression that an agency, hotel or restaurant leaves on a guest. The voice is the only thing a person has at that moment and considering that it can be very crucial in determining the quality of a catering facility or organization.

Source: author's work

#### 4. RESEARCH AND RESEARCH RESULTS

Empirical research was conducted using an online questionnaire for the purpose of fulfilling the aim of the paper. The purpose of the research was to find out more about the character traits and skills, i.e. competencies that would be desirable for the staff of a hotel and in tourism in general. The research also wanted to determine how important communication is for tourists who come into contact with hotel staff and to prove that it is crucial in the hotel business.

##### 4.1. Research results

The research was conducted on a sample of 55 respondents. The sample consisted of respondents from three counties: Virovitica - Podravina (12 respondents; 22%), Koprivnica - Križevci (38 respondents; 69%) and the city of Zagreb (5 respondents; 9%). The majority of respondents were women (28 respondents, 51%) and respondents aged 20 to 30 (25

respondents, 45%). The following subchapters will analyze the importance of certain characteristics of hotel staff and the importance of non-verbal communication.

#### 4.1.1. Analysis of the importance of the characteristics of hotel staff when talking to a guest

Hotel staff are in daily contact with guests. For this reason, it is important that they improve their communication and other skills on a daily basis. Below are the character traits and skills of receptionists, waiters and cleaners and an analysis of their importance.

##### *Analysis of the importance of character traits and skills of receptionists during work*

The following Table 2 shows the competencies of receptionists for whom respondents were able to express a level of importance. A total of 15 traits are listed that are considered to be important for every experienced and professional receptionist. On the Likert scale, respondents were able to assess whether certain traits are extremely important to them, quite important, important, not particularly important or do not represent any importance in the communication process.

**Table 2. Analysis of the importance of individual competencies of receptionists according to the respondents**

Ordinal Number	COMPETENCIES OF RECEPTIONISTS	Number of votes:				
		It doesn't matter at all	It doesn't really matter	Important	Very important	Extremely important
1.	Courteousness	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	7 12,7%	48 87,3%
2.	Availability	0 0%	0 0%	1 1,8%	9 16,4%	45 81,8%
3.	Professionalism	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	55 100%
4.	Positive attitude	0 0%	0 0%	5 9,1%	15 27,3%	35 63,6%
5.	Focus	0 0%	0 0%	10 18,2%	12 21,8%	33 60%
6.	Knowledge of English Language	0 0%	1 1,8%	4 7,3%	22 40%	28 50,9%
7.	Patience	0 0%	0 0%	34 61,8%	16 29,1%	5 9,1%
8.	Knowledge of local area and customs	3 5,5%	12 21,8%	32 58,2%	4 7,3%	4 7,3%

9.	Communication	0 0%	0 0%	31 56,4%	19 34,5%	5 9,1%
10.	Appearance		29 52,7%	23 41,8%	0 0%	0 0%
11.	Manner of expression	0 0%	35 63,6%	20 36,4%	0 0%	0 0%
12.	Composure	0 0%	7 12,7%	46 83,6%	2 3,6%	0 0%
13.	Knowledge of a foreign language (except English)	10 18,2%	24 43,7%	18 32,7%	3 5,5%	0 0%
14.	Forwarding phone calls	24 43,7%	24 43,7%	7 12,7%	0 0%	0 0%
15.	Mail delivery	3 5,5%	40 72,7%	11 20%	1 1,8%	0 0%

Source: author's work

From the results shown in Table 2, it can be seen that professionalism of the reception staff is extremely important to absolutely all respondents. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents identified the following character traits and skills as extremely important for the reception staff: courteousness, accessibility, positive attitude, focus, and knowledge of English. Most potential guests also think that it is important that they can find out some additional information about the local area from the reception, as well as local customs. What is not of great importance to the respondents are the skills in forwarding telephone calls and the knowledge of an additional foreign language (apart from English). This can be seen as a result of advances in technology where phones within the hotel are almost no longer used because of the emergence of mobile phones. Also, it is understood that English is an internationally recognized language and is considered to be used by most people and that guests can most easily communicate using that language.

The results are not so surprising if we consider the very nature of the work of receptionists, who are expected to be professional, since they are the ones who represent the hotel and its facilities. It is very important to leave a good first impression on the guest. Therefore, their performance requires extreme courteousness and availability so that the guests feel comfortable. Finally, it should be taken into account that the receptionist and the reception are the first and last points of meeting and interaction with guests and that the reception is said to be the "mirror" of the entire hotel.

#### *Analysis of the importance of character traits and skills of waiters*

The following Table 3 shows the competencies of waiters for which the respondents were able to express the level of importance. A total of 15 competencies are listed that are considered to be important for every experienced and professional waiter. On the Likert scale,

respondents were able to assess whether certain traits are extremely important to them, quite important, important, not particularly important or do not represent any importance in the communication process.

**Table 3. Analysis of the importance of certain competencies in waiters in the opinion of respondents**

Ordinal number	Competencies of waiters	Number of votes				
		It doesn't matter at all	It doesn't really matter	Important	Very important	Extremely important
1.	Good hearing and sight	0 0%	0 0%	24 43,6%	16 29,1%	15 27,3%
2.	Motor skills	0 0%	7 12,7%	20 36,4%	15 27,3%	13 23,6%
3.	Comprehensible speech	0 0%	0 0%	10 18,2%	25 45,5%	20 36,4%
4.	Resourcefulness	1 1,8%	8 14,5%	18 32,7%	20 36,4%	8 14,5%
5.	Tidiness	0 0%	0 0%	32 58,2%	15 27,3%	8 14,5%
6.	Extroversion	0 0%	0 0%	10 18,2%	10 18,2%	35 63,6%
7.	Adaptability to all requests and requirements	0 0%	0 0%	9 16,4%	12 21,8%	34 61,8%
8.	Politeness	0 0%	0 0%	19 34,5%	7 12,7%	29 52,7%
9.	Great memory	0 0%	0 0%	10 18,2%	20 36,4%	25 45,4%
10.	Knowledge of English Language	10 18,2%	20 36,4%	21 38,2%	4 7,3%	0 0%
11.	Precise language	0 0%	0 0%	14 25,5%	33 60%	8 14,5%
12.	Professionalism	0 0%	17 30,9%	14 25,5%	20 36,4%	4 7,3%
13.	Availability	0 0%	5 9,1%	28 50,9%	20 36,4%	2 3,6%
14.	Empathy	0 0%	8 14,5%	32 58,2%	15 27,3%	0 0%
15.	Speed of service	0 0%	2 3,6%	19 34,5%	22 40%	12 21,8%



Source: author's work

From Table 3 it can be concluded that openness, courtesness and adaptability to all the requests and requirements of guests are extremely important in the opinion of respondents. Motor skills are important to a larger number of respondents, as well as comprehensible speech and excellent memory. On the other hand, resourcefulness is not important to just one person, while 10 people think it doesn't matter to them that the waiter speaks English. This can be identified with the fact that the respondents are from Croatia and that they approached the research from the point of view of tourism in Croatia.

*Review of character traits and skills of housekeepers during work*

The following Table 4 shows the 7 competencies that are important for housekeepers. Respondents were also able to use this Likert scale to assess whether the listed competencies are extremely important for them, quite important, important, not particularly important or do not represent any importance in the communication process.

**Table 4. Analysis of the importance of housekeepers' competencies according to the respondents**

Ordinal number	Competencies of housekeepers	Number of votes				
		Not important at all	Not really important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
1.	Smile	1 1,8%	8 14,5%	36 65,5%	7 12,7%	3 5,5%
2.	Timely replacement of supplies	0 0%	0 0%	2 3,6%	10 18,2%	43 78,2%
3.	Speed of service	0 0%	0 0%	12 21,8%	24 43,6%	19 34,5%
4.	Professionalism	0 0%	27 49,1%	18 32,7%	5 9,1%	5 9,1%
5.	Knowledge of foreign language	6 10,9%	18 32,7%	24 43,6%	4 7,3%	3 5,5%
6.	Empathy	29 52,7%	19 34,5%	7 12,7%	0 0%	0 0%

7.	Greetings	3 5,5%	4 7,3%	38 69,1%	8 14,5%	2 3,6%
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Source: author's work

Through the analysis of Table 4, it can be concluded that it is extremely important for hotel guests to receive all the necessities at the right time, and this includes: replacement of clean towels, toilet paper, bed linen etc. Immediately after that, the speed of service is extremely important. On the other hand, a larger number of respondents stated that empathy is not important to them at all, which was to be expected given that housekeepers are not in frequent contact with guests. Knowledge of a foreign language is not particularly important to a large number of respondents, but greetings are very important. Probably because it makes them feel more comfortable and more accepted in the hotel itself.

#### 4.1.2. Analysis of the importance of nonverbal communication in the hotel business

Body language is a very powerful tool in nonverbal communication. He is unconscious, represents as much as 95% of communication, and includes: appearance (clothing, tidiness, posture), skin tension, redness, sweating, head position, facial expression, eye contact, shoulder position, arms, legs, feet, manner the course of that gesture. The mentioned elements of body language were offered within the second part of the research, where the respondents had to choose the level of their importance in the range from "not important at all" to "extremely important" using the Likert scale. importance according to the respondents.

Table 5. Analysis of the importance of nonverbal communication when talking to a guest

Ordinal number	Factors of non-verbal communication	Number of votes:				
		Not important at all	Not really important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
1.	Appearance (clothing, tidiness, posture)	3 5,5%	8 14,5%	30 54,5%	12 21,8%	2 3,6%
2.	Skin tension, redness, sweating	29 52,7%	13 23,6%	13 23,6%	0 0%	0 0%
3.	Head position	0 0%	25 45,5%	18 32,7%	9 16,4%	3 5,5%
4.	Face expression	0 0%	0 0%	13 23,6%	38 69,1%	4 7,3%
5.	Eye contact	0 0%	0 0%	2 3,6%	12 21,8%	41 74,5%

6.	Shoulder position, arm	11 20%	24 43,6%	19 34,5%	1 1,8%	0 0%
7.	Leg position	20 36,4%	20 36,4%	14 25,5%	1 1,8%	0 0%

Source: author's work

From Table 5 it can be concluded that external appearance is considered important in general in non-verbal communication and greatly impacts tourism. According to some research, just 7 seconds is enough to leave a first impression. For this reason, it is not surprising that more than half of the respondents stated that external appearance is considered important to quite important. For the factor "skin tension, redness", more than half of the respondents stated that it is not important to them at all, and it is the only item with 0 votes for quite and extremely important. The results of the survey show that in the opinion of the respondents, eye contact is definitely the most important item.

## 5. CONCLUSION

People communicate on a daily basis, either intentionally or unintentionally. However, communication is not effective if it is not well understood. It can be said that it achieves many goals and increases or decreases tensions between people. Apart from verbal communication, non-verbal communication is even more important because it cannot be faked and in general reveals the intentions of the other party during the conversation the best. The hotel as a business system is in charge of customer care and without effective communication skills of its employees it can not provide an adequate service.

The paper conducted a study from which it can be concluded that in the opinion of the respondents, professionalism is a very important skill for working in a hotel. This confirms the fact that guests want to get value for money. Immediately after that, the qualities that are desirable are courteousness, accessibility and focus because everyone wants to be understood and accepted if they find themselves in a new place, such as a hotel or similar catering facility. When it comes to waiters, it is also important that they speak intelligibly so that there are no distorted messages and ultimately wrong orders. Immediately after that, it is important for the respondents that the waiters greet them nicely and with a smile. We must not forget the housekeepers who are also part of the hotel staff, and who are in charge of cleaning and changing supplies on time. Respondents who participated in the survey were extremely happy when the housekeeper greeted them. The last part of the research included the analysis of non-verbal signs in hotel staff. It can be concluded that hotel guests care to a significant degree about appearance (clothing and other details) and eye contact because this confirms to the guest that they are being listened to by employees and that their request will be resolved as soon as possible.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HOSPITALITY

**Ivana Vidak**  
**Martina Kovačević**  
**Ivona Kovač**

**Abstract:**

Effective and quality communication is more important than ever not only because of the greater demands of tourists, but also because of the growing competition. The theoretical part of the paper defines the concept of hotel management, the hotel as a business system and the importance of communication in the hospitality industry. The research part of the paper is based on the survey method on a sample of 55 respondents whose answers were interpreted by the descriptive analysis. The aim of this paper is to evaluate which communication and other skills of hotel employees are extremely important to future guests. The results of the survey suggest that professionalism comes first for guests, followed by courteousness and accessibility. Similarly, an intelligible manner of speaking is of paramount importance, as is the speed of service, while skills such as the knowledge of English and the ability to empathize with guests are of less importance. The paper's contribution is reflected in the development of the personality profile and communication skills of the staff employed in the hotel industry.

**Keywords:** hospitality, communication, communication skills

**Ivana Vidak**  
Viši predavač  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78, 33 00 Virovitica  
E-mail: [ivana.vidak@vuv.hr](mailto:ivana.vidak@vuv.hr)

**Martina Kovačević**  
Asistent  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78, 33 00 Virovitica  
E-mail: [martina.kovacevic@vuv.hr](mailto:martina.kovacevic@vuv.hr)

**Ivona Kovač**  
Student  
Veleučilište u Virovitici  
Matije Gupca 78, 33 00 Virovitica  
E-mail: [ivona.kovac@vuv.hr](mailto:ivona.kovac@vuv.hr)

## HOW TO PREDICT AND BRIDGE CONFLICT IN RURAL AREAS?

**Sara Mikolič**  
**Nejc Bobovnik**  
**Lea Rebernik**  
**Barbara Lampič**  
**Irma Potočnik Slavič**

### **Abstract:**

In rural areas the overlapping of different functions creates spaces and places where activities and interests of various actors and stakeholders converge; herewith the potential for conflict arises. Based on extensive desk research (demographical, socio-economical and spatial analyses) and an e-questionnaire among Slovene municipalities we identified: (1) the areas with the highest potential for the conflict occurrence; (2) the most frequent types of conflict; (3) which actors/stakeholders are often involved in conflicts; and (4) practical solutions to the conflicts in surveyed municipalities. The prediction of conflicts in rural areas is of key importance for policy makers, but even more important is to develop an approach to prevent these conflicts. Paper presents several examples employed in Slovenian rural localities, which address the non-systematic practices used for bridging conflicts.

### **Keywords:**

Conflict, rural areas, Slovenia, actors, stakeholders.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Rural areas are places where many different interests (agriculture, manufacture, tourism and leisure activities, settlements, built infrastructure, etc.) of various stakeholders (inhabitants, farmers, local municipalities, regional and national authorities, investors, entrepreneurs, nature- and culture conservationists, etc.) meet and overlap (Guštin et al. 2015). Diverse people share the same space, but their representation on how rural space should be used could be quite different which might lead towards conflicts (Torre and Rallet, 2005). In this paper, we build on the following definition of conflict: “a one-off, repeated or multi-year disagreement between actors that arises from incompatible interests concerning a limited resource” (Guštin et al. 2015, 95).

Conflicts are usually perceived as something bad and negative, but the studies (Guštin, et al. 2020) in the south-western part of Slovenia have shown that conflicts:

- could be interpreted as an interface or meeting-point where people can learn something from them and that people, if they collaborate and communicate (Slee et al. 2014), can achieve much more than if they act alone;
- can act as catalysts and can speed up the process of creating the circumstances to reach an agreement or finding a solution;
- are important for encouraging the creation of a network of relations (Woods 1998) which seem to remain even after the conflict is solved;
- are also cause for creativity, innovation and development of society and of the individual (Dahrendorf 1959) because once they end, they leave behind “new local agreements, new modes of governance, new configurations of discussion forums as well

as new technical procedures (changes in direction, various adjustments, changes in planning documents, etc.), all arrived at during the negotiations” (Torre et al. 2014, 24).

Our research question addressed in this paper is twofold: (1) what kind of data has to be elaborated for better understanding the appearance, construction and resolution of conflict, (2) is it possible to predict the conflicts in rural areas and develop approach to prevent these conflicts.

## 2. METHODS AND DATA

To develop a systematic approach towards understanding the conflict appearance and their possible prediction we used several methods and data.

### 2.1. An identification of key processes (demographic, socio-economic and spatial fields) as a basis for a detailed analysis of changes which generate conflicts in rural areas

We used a broad array of indicators (Table 1) to assess the probability of conflict occurrence. Public available statistic data (on municipality level) for timeframe 2008–2020 was taken into consideration.

Table 1: A set of demographic, socio-economic and spatial indicators to assess the probability of conflict occurrence in Slovene (rural) municipalities.

No.	Name of indicator	Defining the indicator	Arithmetic mean and standard deviation
<i>Demographic indicators</i>			
1.	<b>Population density</b>	Ratio between number of inhabitants and size of municipality, 2020 (inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> )	$\bar{x} = 116,7; \sigma = 129,7$
2.	<b>Population dynamics</b>	Population change index, 2008, 2020 (index)	$\bar{x} = 101,7; \sigma = 7,8$
3.	<b>Net migration</b>	Average net migration in the period, 2008–2020 (in-migration/out-migration per 1000 inhabitants)	$\bar{x} = 1,2; \sigma = 5,9$
4.	<b>Age dependency ratio</b>	Ratio between the number of young (aged 0 to 14) and elderly (aged 65 or more) and the number of active	$\bar{x} = 54,8; \sigma = 4,8$

		population (aged between 15 in 64), multiplied with 100, 2020 (coefficient)	
<b>Socio-economic indicators</b>			
5.	<b>Tourist arrivals</b>	Number of domestic and foreign tourist arrivals, 2018	$\bar{x} = 29193,0$ ; $\sigma = 102710,7$
6.	<b>Number of homes/flats for holidays</b>	Number of homes/flats for holidays per 1000 inhabitants, 2018	$\bar{x} = 16,4$ ; $\sigma = 27,1$
7.	<b>Number of farms</b>	Number of agricultural holdings per size of municipality, 2018 (number/ km <sup>2</sup> )	$\bar{x} = 7,2$ ; $\sigma = 4,0$
8.	<b>Livestock intensity</b>	Number of livestock units (LU) per hectare of utilised agricultural area (UAA), 2020 (LU/ha UAA)	$\bar{x} = 0,8$ ; $\sigma = 0,3$
<b>Spatial indicators</b>			
9.	<b>Intensity of built-up areas</b>	Change in use of built-up areas (actual use ID 3000), 2012, 2021 (index)	$\bar{x} = 4,7$ ; $\sigma = 5,6$
10.	<b>Share of built-up areas</b>	Share of built-up areas compared to the size of municipality, 2021 (%)	$\bar{x} = 8,4$ ; $\sigma = 6,0$
11.	<b>Unbuilt building land</b>	Share of unbuilt building land compared to the size of building land in municipality, 2021 (%)	$\bar{x} = 40,6$ ; $\sigma = 9,7$
12.	<b>Issued building permits</b>	Issued building permits per 1000 inhabitants in municipality, 2020 (number of permits/1000 inhabitants)	$\bar{x} = 3,4$ ; $\sigma = 1,6$

Note:  $\bar{x}$  – arithmetic mean;  $\sigma$  – standard deviation.

Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2021.



*Demographic indicators.* We expect that higher *population density* causes more conflict between inhabitants and activities in space, as there are more contacts that can lead to conflicts. It should be noted that the density data can be misleading, as activities and inhabitants can be concentrated in a smaller part of the municipality, while most of the municipality is uninhabited (e.g. hilly or mountainous parts). *Population dynamics* coincides with the change in population density. The increased number of inhabitants indicates that the area is attractive for local population and immigration. Greater *net migration* (increase or decrease) can lead to more conflicts. The actual age structure (*age dependency ratio*) might reflect the past and present, but also indicate future conflict occurrence.

*Socio-economic indicators.* A shift in tourism development (*number of tourist arrivals*), attractiveness for second or holiday home concentration (*number of homes/flats for holidays*) might generate conflicts in rural communities and rural areas as a whole. We can expect the conflicts between the “traditional” (e. g. agriculture - *number of farms, livestock intensity*) and “novel” activities and practices in rural areas (e. g. recreational and leisure time, environmental protection, etc.), as well as among permanent and temporary residents.

*Spatial indicators.* To identify key spatial changes, we analysed data on the actual use of agricultural land in order to determine the actual changes in use (*change in intensity of built-up areas*), which indicates pressures on rural areas. Positive demographic trends in some rural areas are increasing the pressure of urbanization (*share of built-up areas*), which is causing additional conflicts, especially between farmers and non-farmers, and between the local population and investors, immigrants (*unbuilt building land, issued building permits*).

The indicated spatial changes were surveyed in connection with demographic and socio-economic indicators. It would be wrong to think that only by analysing indicators can we say with certainty in which municipalities we have higher probability of conflict occurrence. However, analysis and proper interpretation of the situation and changes in space might be acknowledged as an analytical tool to better understand the settings where conflicts occur.

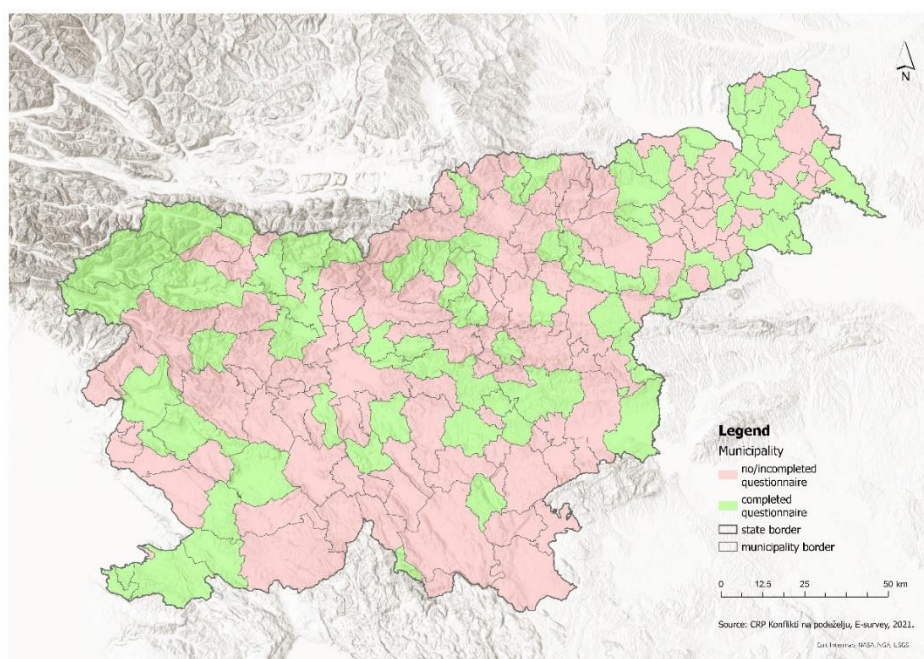
## **2.2. E-survey in slovenian municipalities on conflicts in rural areas**

In the e-environment, we designed a semi-structured questionnaire, which was shared with professional staff at the municipalities and open from April to June 2021. The e-survey aimed to identify the main types of conflicts and target groups that are most often involved in conflicts, as well as the ways of resolving conflicts.

Nearly 70 municipalities provided their answers in the first week of survey opening, later on we sent a reminder and several telephone requests. In total, 109 municipalities participated in the e-survey, and we received 120 (at least) partially completed questionnaires. After a thorough review, we combined the responses of the municipalities that completed the questionnaires twice and deleted the improperly completed questionnaires. Thus, 85 units were included in the analysis, which represents 40.09% of all Slovenian municipalities. Obalno-kraška statistical region is the best

represented, where 62.5% of municipalities in the region answered the questionnaire. They are followed by Pomurska (59.3%), Posavska (50%) and Zasavska (50%), while over 40% of municipalities responded in the Savinjska (45.2%) and Gorenjska (44.4%) statistical regions. In the Koroška statistical region, a quarter of municipalities answered the questionnaire, in Jugovzhodna Slovenija slightly less (23.8%), and the least answers were received from the Primorsko-Notranjska statistical region, where only 1 out of 6 municipalities completed the questionnaire; Figure 1).

Figure 1: Spatial distribution of municipalities, which participated in e-survey on conflicts in rural areas.



Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2021.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Rural areas with the highest potential for the conflict occurrence

According to the existing Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 (Program razvoja podeželja ..., 2022) the whole Slovenian territory (with the exception of towns with  $\geq 10,000$  inhabitants) is defined as rural. Since we wanted to explore also urban-rural relations, public accessible data for all 212 Slovenian municipalities were included in our survey. We started the search for potentially more conflicting areas by defining key indicators for the most relevant processes (demographical, socio-economic, spatial; Table 1). Based on this, we defined 12 indicators (which were additionally interpreted in terms of content) and classified municipalities into classes. We created four classes for

each indicator according to the range of data. For the boundary between the second and third class we used the value of the arithmetic mean (obtained from the values of all municipalities), and for the boundary between the first and second and third and fourth classes we used the value of one standard deviation from the arithmetic mean.

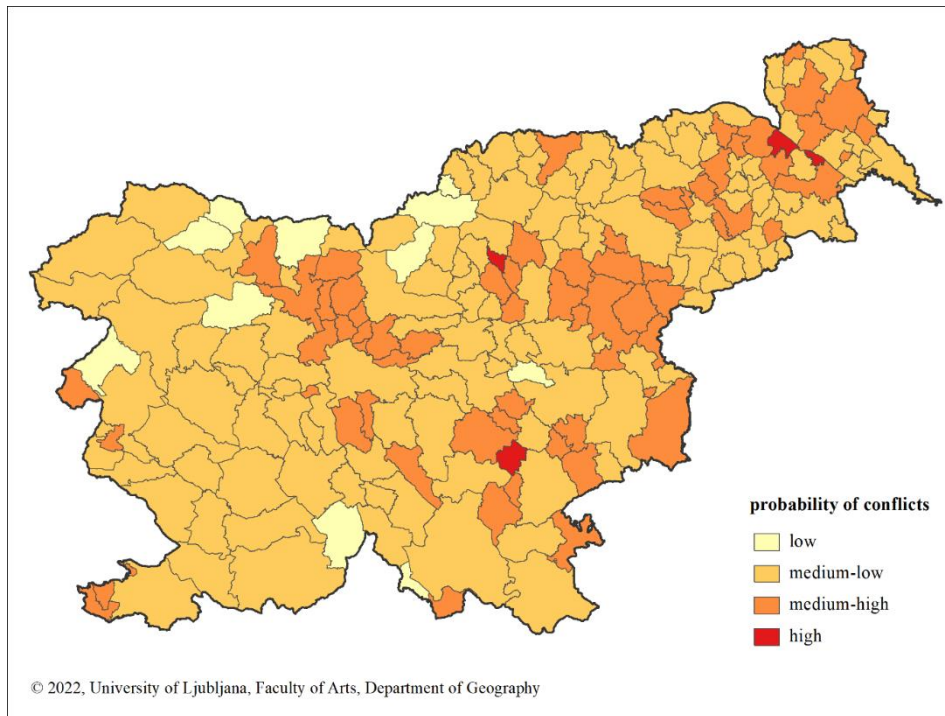
The first class included municipalities with the lowest potential for conflicts, while the fourth class included those with the highest potential. The classification into classes further made it possible to calculate the average value in the demographic, socio-economic and spatial fields. Thus, we can assess where we expect greater concentration of conflicts and what their potential origin is. According to the three fields and the overall assessment, the municipalities were divided into six groups with a range of 0.5 according to the probability of conflicts. The first group included municipalities with values from 1.01 to 1.50, and the sixth group included municipalities with values from 3.51 to 4.0. Municipalities represent the first class with a very low probability of conflicts, and the last class by municipalities with a very high probability of conflicts.

For each key process, we elaborated a separated analysis of the probability of conflict occurrence:

- from the demographic field, our analysis indicated the high probability of conflicts especially in suburban areas around major centres: as expected, Ljubljana stands out the most, and to a lesser extent the gravitational area of Maribor and Celje and the Littoral municipalities; and in the mentioned category with a very low or low probability of conflicts, we ranked 62 Slovenian municipalities;
- in socio-demographic field there were fewer municipalities that would deviate more strongly from the average, as the classes of medium to low and medium probability of conflict (157 municipalities) are strongly predominant; only four municipalities (mostly spa and sea tourism oriented municipalities - Brežice, Piran, Podčetrtek and Veržej) show a high probability of conflicts, and 51 municipalities show a very low or low probability of conflicts;
- our indicators of spatial field reflected that municipalities with a medium or high probability of conflict are located mainly in the eastern (Mirna Peč, Benedikt, Črenšovci, Hoče-Slivnica, Lenart, Odranci, Radenci, Šentjur, Šmartno ob Paki, Veržej) part of the county (lately being focused on construction of national- and regional road infrastructure), and on the other hand, municipalities with a very low or low probability of conflicts are located mainly in the northwest of the country.

In the overall assessment of the probability of conflicts among Slovenian municipalities, the differences between municipalities were expected to be smaller, so that as many as 197 municipalities (93%) are classified in the class of medium-low and medium-high probability (Figure 2). Only four municipalities (Mirna Peč, Radenci, Šmartno ob Paki and Veržej) are in the high probability class, while 11 municipalities are in the low probability class (Črna na Koroškem, Gorje, Jesenice, Kanal, Loška dolina, Luče, Mežica, Osilnica, Radeče, Tržič, Železniki). Several municipalities with a medium or high probability occur in the eastern part of Slovenia, while also some clusters occurred (Sava plain, Voglajna and Posotelje Hills and Slovenjske Gorice wine region. In these clusters, municipalities mostly achieve above-average values in all three fields or show a medium, high or very high probability of conflicts.

Figure 2: An overall assessment of the probability of conflict occurrence among Slovenian municipalities.



Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2021.

### 3.2. The most relevant conflicts in rural areas perceived by municipalities

In our e-survey, mostly municipal employees in the field of environment and spatial development (42) participated, later followed were by the directors of the municipal administration (18), and senior professional staff members – head of the departments, mayors, mayor-deputies, and counsellors (27).

#### 3.2.1. Self-described conflicts in rural areas

With an ice-breaking open-ended question, we wanted to offer respondents the opportunity to freely state (and self-describe) major conflicts in their municipality. We received 55 responses (Table 2) and identified the area of conflict (agriculture and forestry, land, economic public infrastructure, etc.), monitored their number and identified the cause (sometimes context) of conflict.

Table 2: Conflicts identified by surveyed Slovenian municipalities (self-description).

Field of conflict	Number of conflicts	Cause (or context) on conflict	
Agriculture and forestry	29	Intensive agriculture - smell, spraying (8)	
		Instalment of agricultural buildings in space (5)	Limitations to enlargement (2)
			Conflict with non-farmers (2)
			Instalment of building in the landscape (1)
		Agricultural land overgrowing (5)	
		Abandonment of agriculture (4)	
		Pressure on changes of agricultural land use (4)	
		Conflicts with non-farmers (3)	
		Inappropriate use of agricultural land (3)	Functionally relict areas (2)
			Recreation
			Advertising
		Damage on agricultural products (2)	
		Cohabitation with big wild animals (2)	
		Damage in forests	
Limitations to agriculture			
Conservation of field tracks			
Transformation of auxiliary agricultural buildings into residential building			
Land	22	Provision of land (8)	Construction of residential buildings (2)
			Construction of economic public infrastructure (3)
			Construction (3)
		Illegal use of land (5)	
		Getting the ownership or consensus for land use (4)	
		Owners of land (2)	
Degradation	17	Functional degradation of space (9)	Decayed/abandoned buildings (2)
			Deposits of construction material (2)
			Parking lots (2)
			Land overgrowing
		Waste disposal (7)	
		Threats to natural amenities/pollution (2)	
		Pressures on space due to recreation (2)	
Perish of fish			
Economic public infrastructure	13	Provision of land for construction (4)	
		Getting the ownership or consensus for land use (3)	
		Maintenance (2)	
		Construction (2)	

		Provision of economic public infrastructure due to dispersed settlement	
		Unsorted records on land ownership	
Legislation on spatial development	9	Pressure on changes of land use (6)	Construction of residential buildings (3)
			Tourism
		Long-lasting procedures of changing spatial regulations (2)	
		Spatial regulation is not taken into consideration	
Unsolved land/object ownership	8	Disputes on boundaries among plots (5)	
		Higher number of co-owners of plots as a consequence of inheritance	
		Decay of abandoned buildings due to unsolved ownership	
		Unsorted documentation on economic public infrastructure	
Tourism and recreation	8	Usage of not-owned plots for recreational purposes (3)	
		Usage of trails for recreational purposes	
		Space is overburdened	
		Agriculture abandonment and transformation into tourism	
		Noise and environmental degradation	
		Degradation due to the recreation	

Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2021.

Respondents most often brought forward conflicts related to agriculture and forestry (29; Table 2 specifies the causes of conflict in a selected area of conflict). This is followed by land conflicts (22), excluding agricultural land (covered in the area agriculture and forestry). 17 indications represented the area of degradation, followed by conflicts related to economic public infrastructure (13), spatial legislation (9). Respondents attributed eight statements to several areas of conflict: unregulated property relations, tourism and recreation, settlement, and illegal land use. Four entries were recorded in the following areas: neighborhood conflicts, protection and others.

### 3.2.2. Identification and ranking of the most frequent conflicts in rural areas

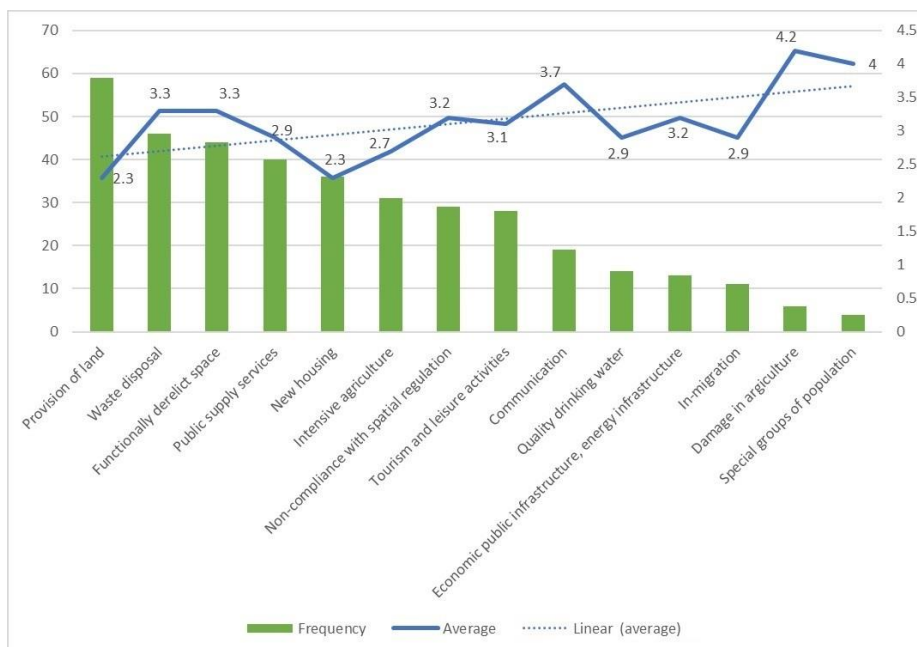
Afterwards, we moved from a self-description to a standardized query regarding the occurrence of conflicts in rural areas: we prepared a set of 14 conflicts (each municipality was asked to select top five from this list according to occurrence in their localities), which we identified in the professional literature and coordinated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (co-financing this research project).

Municipalities ranked the standardized conflicts as following:

- the most frequent conflict turns up due to difficulties in providing land for the construction/modernization of economic public infrastructure (59), which is also

- ranked the highest compared to the average (2.3 on scale of 5; whereas 1 represents the highest score);
- conflicts due to waste disposal in natural environment (46) and functionally derelict space (44) are also widespread, as they were detected in more than half of the participating municipalities, but they reached 3.3 in ranking;
  - conflicts over the lack/abolition of public supply services (40), over new housing, commercial and other facilities (36) and over the concentration, intensification and specialization of agricultural production (31, whereas the average of ranking scores less than 3, so the municipalities most often ranked them first or second in frequency);

**Figure 3: Frequency of conflict perception provided by municipalities participating in e-survey.**



Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2021.

- conflicts due to non-compliance with the provisions of spatial regulation in the field of protection of natural and cultural heritage (29; 3.2) and due to tourist, leisure, recreational and sports activities (28; 3.1) are somewhat lower, but still relatively frequently mentioned;
- among the less frequently mentioned conflicts, conflicts due to difficulties in accessing and providing quality drinking water (14) and immigration from towns (11, average less than 3) are unique exceptions, as they are perceived in a smaller number of municipalities, where they occur very often;
- conflicts are least common among municipalities due to the theft of agricultural products and damage to agricultural land (6) and the presence of special groups of



the population (4) - the municipalities that detected them ranked them lower (averages 4.2 and 4).

### **3.2.3. Relations among different stakeholders and actors in the development of conflict**

Each group of participants in conflicts (Figure 4) represents its own node, and the connections between them are burdened by the number of responses connecting each group of participants. The result is an unrelated graph; therefore, we interpreted the centrality of the participants only based on two measures of centrality (DC and BC – explained below), which rank four of the same among the five most central nodes.

*Degree Centrality (DC)* where node level presents the number of direct contacts that a particular node has with other nodes in the network. Nodes that are more central have a higher level or more contacts (Rogelj, 2003). In our calculations, we also took into account their weight in these contacts - how many times an individual contact is repeated in the responses of municipalities, and we normalized the rate calculations. The disadvantage of this measure is that it takes into account only direct connections between nodes, but not all other connections to other nodes in the network - it illustrates the degree of centrality at the local level, but not necessarily globally (Rogelj 2003).

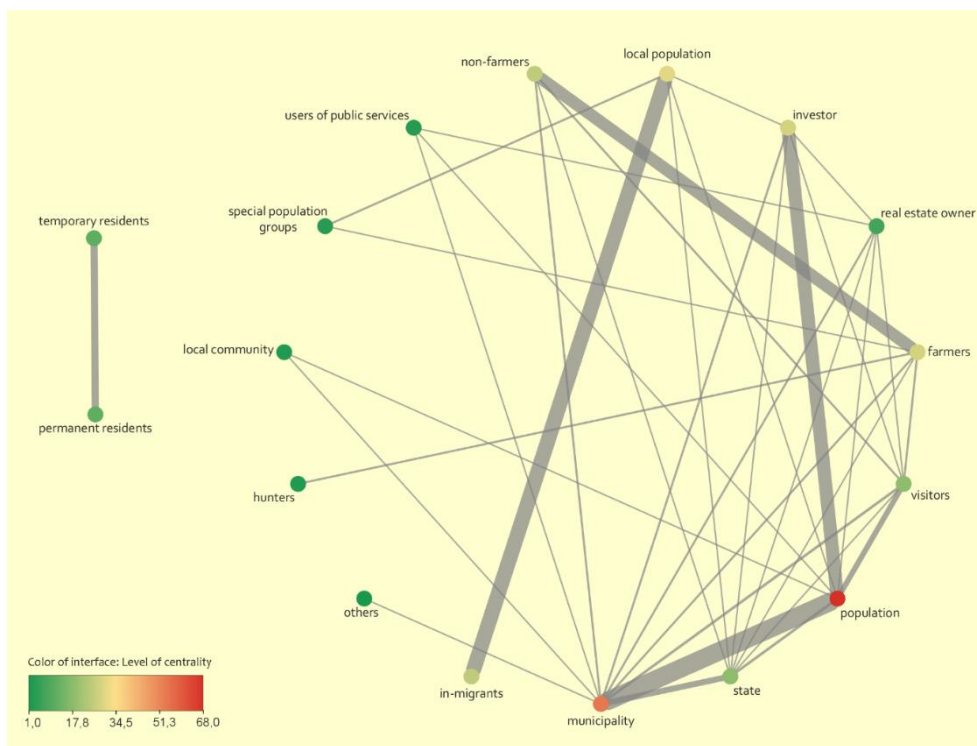
*Betweenness Centrality (BC)* is relevant in social networks, as it is also important to control the flow of information between pairs of nodes, which have nodes located on these connections - intermediate nodes. Mathematically, centrality with respect to intermediation is defined as the sum of the probabilities across all possible pairs of units that the shortest path between two other units will pass through the observed unit (Freeman 1979). This measure of centrality also depends on the size of the graph, so a relative measure is used for comparison (Rogelj 2003).

Residents and the municipality are most often in conflict with each other. Of the two, the municipality is the one that is in conflict with the most other participants (10), of which with the state slightly more often than with the others (3). Residents are also involved in conflicts with many other actors (7), in addition to municipalities, most often with investors (22) and visitors (8).

There are also (classic) conflicts between locals and immigrants (25) and between farmers and non-farmers (20), and they are even more common among residents with permanent and temporary residence (11). We can try to explain the disconnection of the conflict between the latter groups of participants with the others in the way that municipalities perceive the population as "residents" and do not separate them on the basis of residence, unless the conflict occurs explicitly between these two groups. In most cases, two groups of participants are involved in conflicts at the same time, and it is rare for municipalities to list three or more participants in an individual conflict.

**Figure 4: Relationships and frequency of participation in conflicts for actors and stakeholders in surveyed municipalities.**





Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2022.

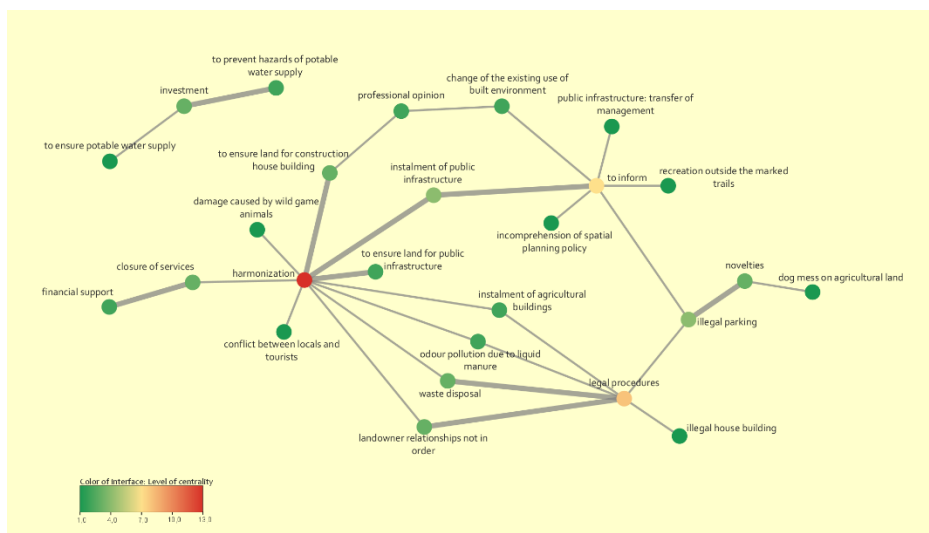
### 3.3. Conflicts and solutions

The aim was to find out which solutions are most often used to resolve conflicts and to which conflicts municipalities use several different solutions. We showed the connections for only 28 conflicts in which the surveyed municipalities provided solutions.

Again, the graph is not connected (Figure 5) and consequently it was possible to calculate above-mentioned two measures of centrality. The most common way of resolving conflicts is *coordination*, which is usually just one of several different methods used in municipalities. Coordination was used as the only solution in three cases: wildlife damage, conflict between locals and tourists, and the provision of land for economic public infrastructure. In the cases of the other seven conflicts in the municipalities, they were resolved in one of the other ways. Thus, due to the disposal of waste, unregulated ownership relations, the stench due to manure and the location of agricultural facilities in several municipalities, *official procedures* were carried out, which represent the second most central hub in the network. Coordination and formal procedures are both the most common and the most connected ways of resolving conflicts described by municipalities, and this connection indicates a different approach of municipalities to resolving the same or similar conflicts. Different methods of coordination use softer approaches and - if used in a timely manner - can prevent further conflicts from developing before they develop. On the other hand, various formal procedures work in a way that seeks to mitigate or eliminate the consequences of existing conflicts. They can

be used as an emergency exit or when municipalities feel that resolving the situation has exceeded their competences or capabilities.

Figure 5: **Relationships between conflicts and conflict resolution in rural areas of the surveyed municipalities.**



Source: CRP Konflikti na podeželju, 2020–2022, 2022.

The third highest level of centrality is shown by the node, which represents the resolution of conflicts through *information*. In this way, municipalities resolve conflicts due to a lack of understanding of spatial policy, due to the transfer of economic public infrastructure management to a private individual, and due to recreation outside the marked trails. Both information and coordination are used by municipalities in the event of the placement of economic public infrastructure in the area and try to prevent further development of conflicts in this area.

Introducing *innovations, giving expert opinions and investing* in infrastructure are the ways that municipalities use each to resolve two different conflicts. Investments are a kind of exception, as together with the conflicts over the threat to drinking water and the provision of drinking water supply, they represent their subgroup, which is not connected to the rest of the network. A special feature is the conflict due to illegal parking, which municipalities solve in three different ways, namely through information, official procedures and the introduction of innovations such as bus lines on weekends and free parking at organized locations.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The occurrence of conflicts in rural areas might be predictable, but the selection of appropriate indicators asks for a butterfly approach. Our analytical tool was based on identification of key processes (demographical, socio-economic and spatial field) and

was later on tested with e-survey. In our survey, we mostly identified individualized approach towards conflict resolution. Knowing what kind of change a conflict can make could be a useful skill in spatial planning, but systematic approach would speed up long administrative procedures, enable active problem solving, and connect people with similar interests.

Conflicts in rural areas ask for many bridging activities, and create many opportunities that usually hide behind a lot of work in the form of meetings, confrontations, phone calls, e-mails, misunderstandings, questions, worries and troubles. What is unknown is if the stakeholders and actors, who are involved in these conflicts on their everyday basis, realize these opportunities, recognize their positive nature and try to take advantage of them (Guštin et al. 2020).

The main area in which municipalities anticipate help or changes is the legislation. The municipalities want clearer, uniform, unambiguous, flexible and simple legislation in the fields of agriculture, rural areas, ownership, land, environmental protection, preservation of the cultural landscape and economic public infrastructure. Municipalities, which play a key central role in the network, want to cooperate with the state in drafting such legislation, but also want to gain more responsibilities in the field of spatial planning and issuing building permits.

Municipalities want the most support in the field of economic public infrastructure in arranging property matters, acquiring land and optimizing the procedures for obtaining building permits. Other forms of assistance are needed in the field of agriculture, financial assistance, and inspection services are relevant for bridging conflicts in rural areas.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## HOW TO PREDICT AND BRIDGE CONFLICT IN RURAL AREAS?

**Sara Mikolič**  
**Nejc Bobovnik**  
**Lea Rebernik**  
**Barbara Lampič**  
**Irma Potočnik Slavič**

### **Abstract:**

In rural areas the overlapping of different functions creates spaces and places where activities and interests of various actors and stakeholders converge; herewith the potential for conflict arises. Based on extensive desk research (demographical, socio-economical and spatial analyses) and an e-questionnaire among Slovene municipalities we identified: (1) the areas with the highest potential for the conflict occurrence; (2) the most frequent types of conflict; (3) which actors/stakeholders are often involved in conflicts; and (4) practical solutions to the conflicts in surveyed municipalities. The prediction of conflicts in rural areas is of key importance for policy makers, but even more important is to develop an approach to prevent these conflicts. Paper presents several examples employed in Slovenian rural localities, which address the non-systematic practices used for bridging conflicts.

### **Keywords:**

Conflict, rural areas, Slovenia, actors, stakeholders.

**Sara Mikolič**, MSc  
PhD candidate  
Research assistant  
sara.mikolic@ff.uni-lj.si

**Nejc Bobovnik**, MSc  
PhD candidate  
Teaching assistant  
Nejc.bobovnik@ff.uni-lj.si

**Lea Rebernik**, MSc  
PhD candidate  
Research assistant  
Lea.rebernik@ff.uni-lj.si

**Barbara Lampič**, PhD  
PhD in Geography  
Senior researcher  
barbara.lampic@ff.uni-lj.si

**Irma Potočnik Slavič**, PhD  
PhD in Geography  
Professor  
irma.potocnik@ff.uni-lj.si

## THE NATURA 2000 ECOLOGICAL NETWORK IN RAVNI KOTARI REGION – CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES

**Zoran Šikić**  
**Ante Blaće**

**Abstract:**

The Natura 2000 ecological network covers close to 20% of the territory EU territory and represents the largest system of preserved and protected areas worldwide. Natura 2000 sites are composed of areas important for the conservation of endangered species and habitat types (POVS) and areas important for birds (POP). The Rural Spot project of the University of Zadar (IP-UNIZD-2021-01) deals with sustainable tourism in rural areas, and focuses on the physiognomic region of Ravni Kotari in the central part of Littoral Croatia. Ravni Kotari is determined as an area of eight local self-government units (one town and seven municipalities) that are located in the hinterland part of Zadar County. Namely, Natura 2000 covers 34.82% of Zadar County, and Ravni Kotari is registered as POVS and POP Natura 2000 areas under the codes HR2001361 and HR1000024. This status increases the attractiveness of this area, gives a chance for more pronounced use of EU funds, but also imposes the obligation to pre-check the planned activities in terms of their environmental sustainability concerning the conservation objectives of these areas. The review aims to determine the state of the Natura 2000 network in the study area, with the ultimate purpose after research, identifying its potential and challenges for the development of this rural area, and ultimately to define environmental sustainability indicators (eg land use, waste generation, water consumption).

**Keywords:**

Natura 2000 sites, Ravni Kotari, environmental sustainability

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Natura 2000 is the ecological network of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU) which includes areas of interest for the conservation of endangered species, habitat types, and related corridors between them. It covers close to 20% of the EU's territory and about 27,500 sites, and as such represents the largest system of preserved and protected regions in the world. The proclamation is based on EU directives, namely the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive, which are the basis of EU legislation in nature protection. Regions are selected by scientific criteria and include areas important for the conservation of endangered species and habitat types (POVS) and areas important for birds (POP).

The Natura 2000 ecological network of the Republic of Croatia covers 36.67% of the land territory and 16.26% of the territorial sea and inland waters, ie 29.34% of the total area (Ministarstvo gospodarstva i održivog razvoja 2019).

The Rural Spot scientific project of the University of Zadar (IP-UNIZD-2021-01) deals with sustainable tourism in rural areas and it focuses on the physiognomic region of Ravni Kotari in Zadar County in the central part of Littoral Croatia. Ravni Kotari in the broadest sense stretches from Town of Nin, Town of Novigrad, and the Karin Sea in the northwest to the Krka River in the southeast, Bukovica region in the northeast and the City of Zadar and Pašman Channels in the southwest (Blaće and Jurić, 2014, 2018). For the project activities, Ravni Kotari was determined as an area of eight local self-

government units (one town – Benkovac and seven municipalities – Galovac, Lišane Ostrovičke, Polača, Poličnik, Stankovci, Škabrnja, Zemunik Donji) located in the Zadar hinterland (Figure 1). Ravni Kotari defined in this way covers an area of 834 km<sup>2</sup>, and according to the first results of the 2021 census, it has 23,342 inhabitants (Croatian Bureau of Statistics – CBS, 2022). It is a predominantly rural area characterized by agricultural production, especially in fruit and vegetable growing (Rajković and Iveta 2014), and more recently in viticulture, winemaking and olive growing (Matassi et al. 2013). The basic physical features of the area (mainly flat terrain, distribution of flysch valleys with fertile soils and moderately warm humid climate – Cfa according to Köppen climate regionalization) (Blaće 2014) are suitable for agricultural development, but also rural tourism. Ravni Kotari, the region at the contact of different civilizations and cultures, is rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Jurić 2018), which, so far, has not been sufficiently valorized by tourism industry (Buljan et al. 2020).

Figure 1: **Research area**



Source: based on: Croatian Geodetic Administration, 2016

Natura 2000 covers 34.82% of Zadar County and covers exactly 100 areas (Zadarska županija 2016) Natura 2000 areas are managed by national nature protection institutions (national parks, nature parks) or regional or county institutions in charge of nature protection, such as Public Institution Natura Jadera (for the Zadar County).

In the Natura 2000 program, Ravni Kotari is registered as an area important for the conservation of endangered species and habitat types (POVS) and as an area important for birds under the codes HR2001361 and HR1000024 (Figure 2). The development of

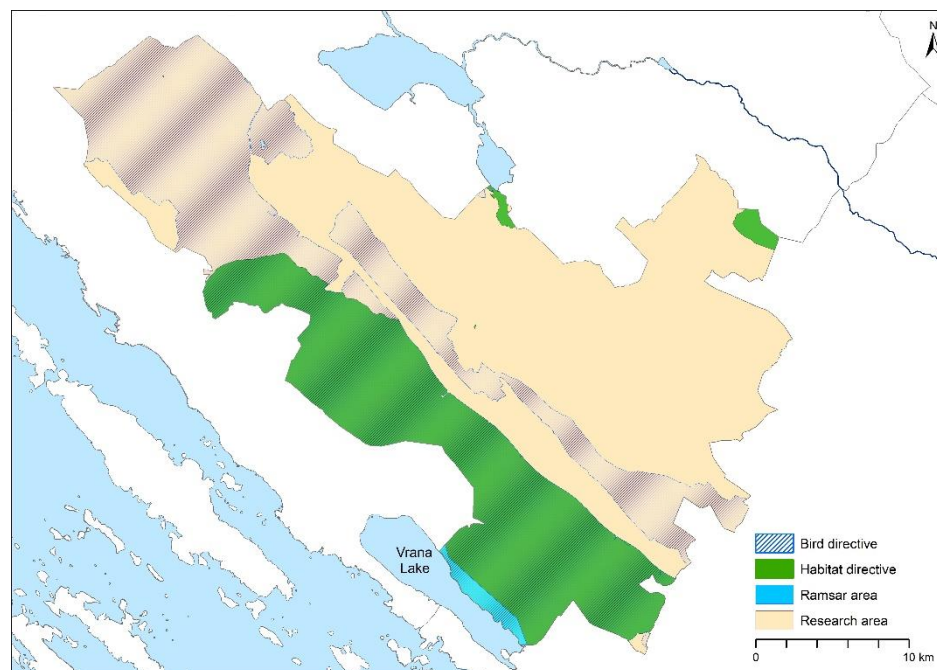
management plans for these areas has just begun, within which general and specific objectives and management indicators will also be defined.

Ravni Kotari is in direct contact with the zone of Vrana Lake, an important wetland area protected by the Ramsar Convention, in addition to being a nature park within national category of nature protection (Figure 2).

One of the starting points of the research is that Natura 2000 sites increase the attractiveness of this area and give a chance for more significant use of EU funds, but also imposes the obligation to pre-check planned activities in terms of their environmental sustainability concerning conservation objectives.

The current situation also imposes an aspect of the impact of the crisis due to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. Although, according to some research, rural tourist areas show greater sensitivity than urban ones in the time of crisis (Zeng et al. 2006), the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus brought a shift in tourist demand towards less tourist-intensive areas. They are not overcrowded which means tourists can achieve their privacy and thus security (OECD 2020).

Figure 2: Natura 2000 sites in the research area



Source: based on: Croatian Geodetic Administration, 2016, Državna geodetska uprava, 2015

The tourism industry has a prominent role in the overall Croatian economy generating around 20 % of the total GDP (Ministry of Tourism and Sport 2021). Some of the negative impacts of tourism in Littoral Croatia is environmental degradation due to the large number of guests that come mostly during three summer months on the coastline and islands. Ravni Kotari has a perspective of alleviating the pressure from the coastline by developing more diversified offers not restricted by the summer season. However,



careful planning is needed in order not to cause saturation of land and the same negative effects as on the coastline.

A preliminary overview of the literature (Blancas et al. 2011, Agyeiwaah et al. 2017) indicates several environmental factors that have a key role in assessing potentials for the development of sustainable tourism: tourism activity (number of tourists and overnight stays), land use (agriculture), water consumption, waste production and management etc.

Ravni Kotari has been recording tourist activity for the last ten years stimulated by the construction and expansion of accommodation capacities (holiday homes). The study area in pre-pandemic 2019 was visited by more than 12,800 tourists who realized around 88,300 overnight stays (CBS 2020), which is a steady increase compared to 2009 when 235 tourists came who realized 1,857 overnight stays (CBS 2010). We still miss some of the data for the two last seasons to assess tourism activity, but preliminary results indicate a drop of 60% in arrivals and stay in 2020 (CBS, 2021) and recovery in 2021. In relative numbers, Ravni Kotari makes less than 1% of arrivals and overnights of Zadar County. Therefore, the area has so far been an underused resource in terms of tourism within Littoral Croatia. Due to pedological and climatological conditions, Ravni Kotari has a good predisposition for more developed agriculture. However, only around 30% of the total arable land is being farmed, mostly as vineyards, olive groves, orchards, and vegetable gardens (Copernicus 2018). Since Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013, there has been a pronounced growth of organic farmers and organically farmed land (Blaće et al. 2020). In Ravni Kotari around 600 hectares are being organically cultivated, mostly olive groves and vineyards. Such type of agriculture should be further encouraged due to environmental benefits but also as a support for development of rural tourism. Regarding the waste production, in 2020 approximately 5% of the waste of Zadar County was generated in the research area (Zadarska županija 2020). Unfavorable fact is that only 5-6% of the waste is currently recycled and there are still illegal waste disposal sites. Research on water consumption so far indicates that water availability can meet the needs of residents and tourists in the nearby future (Hrvatske vode 2008). However, the issue present all over Croatia is that due to old plumbing up to 50% of water in the supply system is being lost (Margeta 2020).

This overview implies rather satisfying environmental conditions for the development of sustainable tourism and valorisation of the Natura 2000 sites, but further research is needed to assess their influence precisely.

## **2. AIM AND PURPOSE**

The aim of this review is to determine the state of the Natura 2000 network in the research area of Ravni Kotari, with the ultimate purpose after conducting research, identifying potentials and challenges for the development of this rural area, and to ultimately define environmental sustainability indicators (eg land use, waste, water consumption).

## **3. ELABORATION**

The reason for establishing the Natura 2000 ecological network is to preserve or re-establish a favourable state for over a thousand endangered and rare species and about 230 natural and semi-natural habitat types. Areas are selected by scientific criteria, and

the management of these areas considers the interests and benefits of the people who live in them. Although largely altered by human activity, European nature includes a very large diversity of habitats. Extensive natural forests, meadows and pastures, wetlands and unregulated rivers, marine, subterranean and other habitats inhabited by numerous species still represent the rich natural heritage of Europe. Many of these habitats are the result of traditional land use, which does not endanger but enriches biodiversity. Over the last decades, human activities and the use of natural resources have changed significantly around the world. The state of biodiversity has deteriorated dramatically in the last 50 years, more than in the entire history of mankind. Due to human activities, species become extinct 1,000 times faster than in natural circumstances (Pimm et al. 1995). These losses overshadowed the productivity of nature and thus endangered the long-term survival of mankind. More than 700 species, mostly birds and mammals, are on the Red List of Endangered Species in Europe. Not only rare or endemic species are endangered, but also many species that are still numerous, but their suitable habitats are rapidly disappearing, which can lead to their imminent extinction. Natura 2000 is a fundamental program by which the European Union is trying to stop these negative trends on its territory (<http://www.haop.hr/hr/tematska-podrucja/odrzivo-koristenje-prirodnih-dobara-i-ekoloska-mreza/ekoloska-mreza/natura-2000>).

In the Ravni Kotari region Ecological network's (HR2001361) goal is to preserve two habitat types: Mediterranean high wet grasslands (*Molinio-Holoschoenion*) and caves and pits closed to the public, or two speleological objects (Špilja kod Vrane i Baldina jama) (Table 1). The ecological network area is also important for seven target species (Table 2).

Table 1: Target habitat types

Habitat types present on the site and assessment for them										
ANNEX I HABITAT TYPES							SITE ASSESSMENT			
CODE	NAME	PF	NP	COVER (ha)	CAVES (number)	DATA QUALITY	A   B   C   D	A   B   C		
							Representativity	Relative surface	Conservation	Global
6420	<a href="#">Mediterranean tall humid grasslands of the <i>Molinio-Holoschoenion</i></a>	0	0	1		P	C	B	C	C
8310	<a href="#">Caves not open to the public</a>	0	0		2	P	B	C	C	C

PF: Value "1" indicates the priority form for habitat types that can have a non-priority as well as a priority form (6210, 7130, 9430)  
 NP: Value "1" indicates a habitat type that no longer exists in the site  
 Caves: for habitat types 8310, 8330 (caves) the number of caves is entered if estimated surface is not available  
 Data quality: G = 'Good' (e.g. based on surveys); M = 'Moderate' (e.g. based on partial data with some extrapolation); P = 'Poor' (e.g. rough estimation)  
 Representativity (Degree of representativity of the habitat type on the site): A= excellent, B=good, C=significant, D=non-significant  
 Relative surface (Area of the site covered by the natural habitat type in relation to the total area covered by that natural habitat type within the national territory): A = >15%, B = 2-15%, C = <2%  
 Conservation (Degree of conservation of the structure and functions of the natural habitat type): A = excellent conservation, B = good conservation, C = average or reduced conservation  
 Global assessment (Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the natural habitat concerned): A = excellent value, B = good value, C = significant value

Source: Biportal SDF

<http://natura2000.dzrp.hr/reportpublish/reportproxy.aspx?paramSITECODE=HR2001361>

The assumption is that there were probably once more pastures and meadows as livestock declined. Therefore, as a cause of endangerment, it is stated that drainage of canals was carried out north of Vrana Lake, so the former grasslands, among which there were most likely such habitats, were turned into arable land (Table 3). Encouraging extensive livestock farming is also mentioned as a protection measure for the conservation of these habitat types. However, on the other hand, the question of the economic sustainability of such livestock production arises, and the related to social sustainability as a pillar of sustainability too. It is, therefore, necessary to introduce incentives for such partly limited economic production in order to compensate for the reduced economic profit, keep the population in such areas, and to preserve endangered habitat types and species in them.

Table 2: Target species

Species referred to in Article 4 of Directive 2009/147/EC and listed in Annex II of Directive 92/43/EEC and site evaluation for them														
GROUP	CODE	SPECIES		POPULATION ON SITE						SITE ASSESSMENT				
		SCIENTIFIC NAME	NP	TYPE	SIZE		UNIT	CATEGORY	DATA QUALITY	AIBIC				
					MIN	MAX				POPULATION	CONSERVATION	ISOLATION	GLOBAL	
I	1092	<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	0	p					r	DD	C		A	B
I	6350	<i>Protoerebia afra dalmata</i>	0	p					c	DD	B		C	A
M	1310	<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>	0	c	50	300	i			M	C		C	C
M	1307	<i>Myotis blythii</i>	0	c	20	20	i			M	C		C	C
M	1316	<i>Myotis casacovi</i>	0	c	15	15	i			M	D			
M	1324	<i>Myotis myotis</i>	0						p	DD	D			
M	1305	<i>Rhinolophus euryale</i>	0						p	DD	D			
M	1304	<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	0						p	DD	D			
M	1303	<i>Rhinolophus hipposidemus</i>	0						p	DD	D			
R	1279	<i>Elaphe quatuorlineata</i>	0	p					r	DD	B		C	B
R	1293	<i>Elaphe situla</i>	0	p					r	DD	B		C	B
R	1217	<i>Testudo hermanni</i>	0	p					c	DD	C		B	B

Group: A = Amphibians, B = Birds, F = Fish, I = Invertebrates, M = Mammals, P = Plants, R = Reptiles  
 NP: Value "1" indicated that a species is no longer present in the site  
 Types: p = permanent, r = reproducing, c = concentration, vi = wintering  
 Unit: i = individuals, p = pairs or other units according to the Standard list of population units and codes in accordance with Article 12 and 17 reporting (see [reference portal](#))  
 Abundance categories (Cat): C = common, R = rare, V = very rare, P = present - information is provided if data are deficient (DD) or in addition to population size information  
 Data quality: G = 'Good' (e.g. based on surveys), M = 'Moderate' (e.g. based on partial data with some extrapolation), P = 'Poor' (e.g. rough estimation), 'DD' = Data deficient (category used when not even a rough estimation of the population size can be made - 'Abundance categories' is used instead of population size)  
 Population (Size and density of the population of the species present on the site in relation to the populations present within national territory): A = >15%, B = 2-15%, C = <2%, D = non-significant population  
 Conservation (Degree of conservation of the features of the habitat which are important for the species concerned and possibilities for restoration): A = excellent conservation, B = good conservation, C = average or reduced conservation  
 Isolation (Degree of isolation of the population present on the site in relation to natural range of the species): A = population (almost) isolated, B = population not-isolated, but on the margins of area of distribution, C = population not-isolated within extended distribution range  
 Global (Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the species concerned): A = excellent value, B = good value, C = significant value

Source: Biportal SDF

<http://natura2000.dzrp.hr/reportpublish/reportproxy.aspx?paramSITECODE=HR2001361>

The site represents one of main centres of distribution for species *Protoerebia afra dalmata*, is considered to be of importance for the conservation of *Austropotamobius pallipes* in Southern Croatia (Dalmatia). There is important site for herpetofauna species *Testudo hermanni*, *Elaphe quatuorlineata* and *Zamenis situla* for which the area is considered to support a significant presence. Also, it is important site for Caves not open to public – such as Špilja kod Vrane which represents type locality for critically endangered species *Monolistra pretneri*, known only from its type locality and *Niphargus illidzensis dalmatinus*. Baldina jama pit represents important site for bats, important *Miniopterus schreibersii* and *Myotis blythii* migration site, internationally important underground site for *Miniopterus schreibersii* (Table 2).

Threats, pressures and activities affecting Natura 2000 Ravni Kotari are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Pressures on the Ravni Kotari area

Threats, pressures and activities with Impacts on the site					
CODE	DESCRIPTION	TYPE	RANK	POLLUTION	OCCURENCE
A02.01	agricultural intensification	N	M		i
A04.03	abandonment of pastoral systems, lack of grazing	N	H		i
C01.04	Mines	N	H		i
D01	Roads, paths and railroads	N	H		i
E01	Urbanised areas, human habitation	N	M		i
F03.02	Taking and removal of animals (terrestrial)	N	M		i
G02.01	golf course	N	M		i
G05.11	death or injury by collision	N	M		i
H07	Other forms of pollution	N	M		
J02	human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	N	M		i
J03.02	anthropogenic reduction of habitat connectivity	N	M		i

Type: N = Negative, P = Positive  
 Rank: H = high, M = medium, L = low  
 Pollution: N = Nitrogen input, P = Phosphor/Phosphate input, A = Acid input/acidification, T = toxic inorganic chemicals, O = toxic organic chemicals, X = mixed pollutions  
 i = inside, o = outside, b = both

Source: Biportal SDF  
<http://natura2000.dzrp.hr/reportpublish/reportproxy.aspx?paramSITECODE=HR2001361>

Conservation measures for this Natura 2000 site include the prohibition of any regulation of flows in known localities, the prevention of water pollution and the prevention of the introduction of foreign species of crustaceans, and the hunting of crustaceans for consumer purposes. Also, activities are prescribed to prevent overgrowing and closing or overgrowing habitats, encouraging livestock farming because such terrains are difficult to maintain by mowing.

In the conservation area important for birds Ravni Kotari (HR1000024) the goal is to preserve 18 target bird species, including species, European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) (Figure 3), Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) and Olive-tree Warbler (*Hippolais olivertorum*), have the largest population in this area within the borders of the Republic of Croatia.

The European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) is a target bird species within this part of the Natura 2000 ecological network. It is very important for sustainable forms of tourism such as bird watching (Figure 4). However, it is also important for agriculture because it regulates the number of some pests. It also populates hollow habitats on some tree species such as poplars (*Populus spp.*), which are excellent type of windbreaks because they protect crops from the wind. Therefore, the management of this Natura 2000 area includes the restoration of tree species such as poplars.

Figure 3: **European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*)**



Source: <https://www.plantea.com.hr/zlatovrana/>

Figure 4: **Bird watching in the Vrana Lake Nature Park as a sustainable form of tourism**



Source: Z. Šikić

The development of a management plan as a strategic management document is prescribed for all Natura 2000 sites. It is developed and adopted by respecting the principle of participatory and transparent participation of all stakeholders in these processes. The management plan is adopted for a period of 10 years with the possibility of revision after 5 years according to the principle of flexible management of Natura 2000 sites. The management plan prescribes conservation measures and monitoring implementation by defining sustainability indicators.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The percentage of territories that EU member states need to include in Natura 2000 is not prescribed, but results from the end of the peer review process as a result of the spatial overlap of all areas allocated to each species and habitat type. In accordance with the Birds Directive, Member States designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. The Habitats Directive covers all other European species and habitat types for which Member States are required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), after being screened and approved by the European Commission. The Republic of Croatia, with its overall biological diversity, greatly contributes to the conservation of species and habitats of the European Union through the ecological network Natura 2000. This fact provides exceptional opportunities for sustainable development but also brings the obligation to preserve target species and habitat types. In managing these areas, the interest and benefit of the people living in and from the area have to be considered. There are no absolute prohibitions in Natura 2000 sites, but protection measures are prescribed in accordance with the objectives of conservation of species and habitat types. Natura 2000 is also an opportunity for rural areas for sustainable green development, and in order to use it, it is necessary to know the mechanisms and instruments of the same. Therefore, the economic development of the Ravni Kotari should be in correlation with the measures prescribed for Natura 2000 sites in order to achieve more sustainable rural tourism.

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**THE NATURA 2000 ECOLOGICAL NETWORK IN RAVNI KOTARI REGION –  
CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES**

**Zoran Šikić**  
**Ante Blaće**

**Abstract:**

The Natura 2000 ecological network covers close to 20% of the territory EU territory and represents the largest system of preserved and protected areas worldwide. Natura 2000 sites are composed of areas important for the conservation of endangered species and habitat types (POVS) and areas important for birds (POP). The Rural Spot project of the University of Zadar (IP-UNIZD-2021-01) deals with sustainable tourism in rural areas, and focuses on the physiognomic region of Ravni Kotari in the central part of Littoral Croatia. Ravni Kotari is determined as an area of eight local self-government units (one town and seven municipalities) that are located in the hinterland part of Zadar County. Namely, Natura 2000 covers 34.82% of Zadar County, and Ravni Kotari is registered as POVS and POP Natura 2000 areas under the codes HR2001361 and HR1000024. This status increases the attractiveness of this area, gives a chance for more pronounced use of EU funds, but also imposes the obligation to pre-check the planned activities in terms of their environmental sustainability concerning the conservation objectives of these areas. The review aims to determine the state of the Natura 2000 network in the study area, with the ultimate purpose after research, identifying its potential and challenges for the development of this rural area, and ultimately to define environmental sustainability indicators (eg land use, waste generation, water consumption).

**Keywords:**

Natura 2000 sites, Ravni Kotari, environmental sustainability

**Zoran Šikić**, PhD, Associate Professor  
University of Zadar, Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture  
e-mail: zsikic@unizd.hr  
Trg kneza Višeslava 9, 23 000 Zadar, Croatia

**Ante Blaće**, PhD, Associate Professor  
University of Zadar, Department of Geography  
e-mail: anblace@unizd.hr  
Ulica Franje Tuđmana 24 i, 23 000 Zadar, Croatia



## AGRITOURISM PRODUCTS DIFFERENTIATION - ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES BASED ON COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

**Jadranka Deže,  
Tihana Sudarić,  
Krunoslav Zmaić**

### **Abstract**

Agritourism, as a form of economic activity, has an important multifunctional meaning in the socio-economic position of micro and small agricultural entrepreneurs as well as in local, regional and national economic development. Internally, creative and innovative agritourism products based on comparative differences are recognized by the tourism demand as new adventures and experiences. At the same time, externally the pandemic and economic crises are reducing the mobility of the population, which makes agritourism a more attractive choice compared to some remote and more expensive destinations. The dynamics of life, complexity of work and a lack of time to rest are influencing the growth in demand for shorter, closer and more frequent trips and excursions. The aim of this paper is making guidelines, as entrepreneurial opportunities based on comparative advantages, for the creation of agritourism products which arise by differentiation. The guidelines for the differentiation of agritourism products arise under the influence of the growth in demand in the tourism market, which has changed under the influence of dynamic processes of socio-economic development. Demand has been transformed from a rustic scheme into: 1) Multifunctional 2) Multidiversified, 3) Mobile and 4) Modern → 4M scheme, and therefore adjustments to the agritourism offer are necessary. The process of differentiation creates products that are different from the competitions. This research contributes to the design of guidelines in the development of agritourism products which implies the application of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship based on the endogenous resources of the destination and its comparative advantages.

**Keywords:** agritourism, product differentiation, diversification, entrepreneurship, competitiveness

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The differentiation of agritourism products is a process in which agrarian entrepreneurs strive to achieve a comparative advantage or create a superior product compared to other alternatives in the tourism market. The purpose of the differentiation process is not only to create a difference in relation to other similar products, but also to be superior - above the existing competition. The task is to design differences in products so that they stand out in the tourism market where there are many competitors. The goal of offering such products is to show the potential service users that they can get something different that others cannot offer and to explain why the product is more valuable than the others.

Product differentiation is an integral part of the differentiation strategy that creates products different from competitors, market recognizable and as such are in the function of sustainability of both products and business. In addition to this primary task, product differentiation transforms product attributes into comparative advantages that attract the attention of customers and are a prerequisite for reusing the service, thus building the foundations for loyalty and price growth. That is why it is necessary to activate the differentiation procedures based on the endogenous resources of the destination and its comparative advantages with the application of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of this paper is to review the guidelines, as entrepreneurial opportunities based on comparative advantages, for the creation of agritourism products that are created by differentiation procedures. In the realization of this aim, relevant and recent scientific papers were used in which the results of research related to experiences in the development of agritourism were presented. The paper points out the guidelines in the development of differentiated forms of agritourism products and services. By reviewing scientific papers, selecting and analysing available scientific research, guidelines were developed in response to the scientific question - how to create innovative agritourism products. Scientifically based summarization of the content of selected literature led to conclusions that represent objective evidence applicable in practice.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Creating innovative products contributes to the sustainable development of agritourism, as well as local, regional and national economic development. The growth of agritourism efficiency is directly related to the creation of new jobs, especially for young entrepreneurs in rural areas.

In their research, the authors confirm that farm tourism contributes to a more efficient use of labour (Fleischer and Tchethik 2005). Valdiva and Barbieri (2014) note that agritourism is a form of adaptation strategy that makes it easier for farms to capitalize on natural, agricultural, cultural and social resources that invest in long-term economic sustainability. Agritourism is a market mechanism for encouraging and rewarding farmers who in this way protect the environment, preserve the diversity of plant cultures (Germplasma) and the genetic potential of indigenous breeds. Broccardo et. al. (2017) sought to explore the key success factors of the Italian agritourism business model - structure, social and economic characteristics, and integration with the sustainability approach. Agritourism, according to their knowledge, contributes to sustainable rural development with beneficial effects on the environment, society, agricultural heritage and economic development. Zasada (2011) points out that under the pressure of urban areas, rural areas are also changing, so agriculture is responding to these changes. Urban demand for rural goods and services is a driver of adaptation and the growing importance of multifunctional agriculture in peri-urban areas as a phenomenon that uses diversification to benefit the ecological, social and economic functions of agriculture.

Pitrova et. al. (2020) look for alternative and additional sources of farm income that are primarily engaged in livestock production and they find them in agritourism. By applying the diversification strategy, new uses of the economy's resources are found - facilities, equipment, labour and their conversion into processing or agritourism facilities. They conclude that diversification in agritourism brings economic benefits even in the conditions of isolation due to coronavirus, even more so than the *From farm to table* strategy. Schilling et. al. (2014) as a result of the analysis of agritourism impact on farm profitability, it was found that agritourism has a statistically significant and positive effect on profitability, especially on small family farms. As farms grow the effects of profits are diminishing.

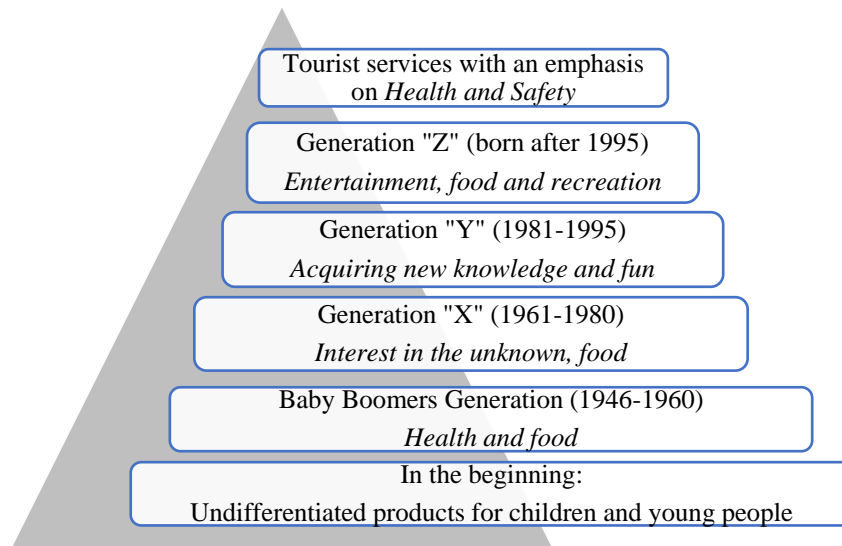
The geographical distribution of agritourism farms depends on many exogenous factors, most notably Fanelli and Romagnoli (2021) who have studied the factors influencing the

agglomeration of agritourism farms and the concentration of agritourism products according to the division into northern, central and southern Italy. They found that the living standard of the population, transport infrastructure and a high level of urbanization have a positive effect on the agglomeration. The analysis has showed that the geographical concentration depends on local determinants and the internal organization of agritourism farms and agritourism products that they offer. Furthermore, (Tew et al. 2014) argue that concentration varies depending on transport connections, natural attractions, historical and cultural resources, and recreational activities. Innovation and creativity in designing an agritourism product are found by Deže et. al. (2018) and note how agritourism can offer an innovative tourism product based on indigenous-traditional-gastronomic elements that will ensure its regional recognition in the global tourism market. The significance of the regional recognizability of autochthonous products through the gastronomic offer was researched through the offer and demand on the tourist market of Slavonia. The best results were found to be expressed by average values in the supply segment through the links between gastronomic offer and geographical area, although the greatest variability was found in responses related to product promotion through technology and product story. Tourist demand is the initial factor in the transformation of supply that needs to be adjusted in accordance with consumer preferences. The target market is a source of agritourism demand and as such offers relevant information on what, where, when and how is it most valuable to customers. Due to the exceptional importance of agritourism demand, the authors Ohe and Ciani (2012) analyse the demand for agritourism and identify two main drivers of demand growth: national (domestic) and international (European) demand. They point to the availability of agritourism products, transport infrastructure and the introduction of a common European currency as obstacles to demand growth. According to Hendija (2015) the preferences of tourism market consumers influence the transformation of tourism from 3S over 6E to the 4M form. Visitors, excursionists and other tourists already have larger requirements, needs and expectations from tourism services. In the 4M form, multi-diversification stands out, which implies an individual approach opposite to mass tourism and the experience of the autochthonous and regional identity of the destination. It is these specifics that can be offered to agritourism services. Such research and its results are important because of entrepreneurial initiatives to increase the value of agritourism products. This paper seeks to answer questions regarding the recognition of guidelines for adjusting the business of agritourism farms. Improving various activities has increased the value for tourists visiting agritourism farms. It is the strengthening of activities that is a prerequisite for the differentiation of agritourism products. Since this is an assumption, a number of new questions arise - whether such differentiations of activities can contribute to strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of agritourism products. The initiative for discussion and answers can be found in the generational transformations of tourist demand:

The comparative advantages of agritourism products arise from additional activities that create value for them. In addition to natural and social attractions, such accompanying activities have a synergistic effect and create a higher level of value for guests of agritourism farms, which they more clearly and intensively recognize. In this way, the geographical identity of rural areas, which represents the unity of cultural heritage, enogastronomic experience and landscape biodiversity, is lost, but by connecting in the

value chain, it contributes to strengthening the connection between agriculture and tourism, sustainability and competitiveness.

Figures 1. **Segmentation of market potentials based on generational attributes**

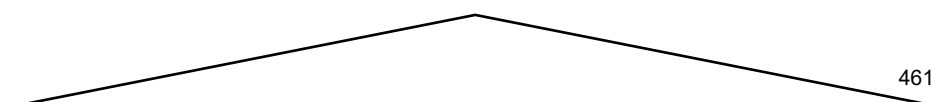


Source: author's work according to Morales-Zamorano et. al. (2020) and <https://www.racunalo.com/baby-boom-generacija-x-y-z>

Farms that diversify in the tourism industry need to recognize and use entrepreneurial opportunities to improve the value of agritourism products through additional activities. A tourist product generally means a form of service, and if it is performed on an agricultural holding that connects agricultural production with service activities in tourism in a rural area, it is an agritourism product. The success of an agritourism product depends on the level of its value to tourists in the offer of competing products. In fact, each location and each economy has its own unique, potential elements for creating new value on the basis of which they can generate equally unique comparative advantages on the road to competitiveness.

Competitive advantage (Porter 1985) is achieved by improving the value chain through a better organization of activities in order to achieve optimization - cost reduction and / or coordination of activities within the chain to rationalize time and resources. Morales-Zamorano et. al. (2020) conducted a research in order to link in the value chain of agritourism products that enable the attractiveness of the tourist offer. During the research, products that represented tourist attractions were identified, ie groups of basic and accompanying activities that create value in the chain of agritourism offer were described. It can be concluded that the success of agritourism depends first on the differentiation of agritourism products, and secondly, in access to new markets and the connection between the first and the second.

Table 1. **Destination value chain in agritourism**



VALUE ADDED

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public-private relationships</li> <li>▪ Institutional coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Raise public awareness</li> <li>▪ Friendly attitude towards the tourist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement and enhancement of resources</li> <li>▪ Environmental improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Telephone networks and internet connection</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Destination planning</li> <li>▪ Ground uses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement of skills and knowledge of workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of new markets and segments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Market research</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public transport</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure, electricity, drinking water, waste management</li> <li>▪ Signalling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creation of jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quality systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Computerized reservation systems</li> </ul>	
Destination planning and infrastructure	Human resource management	Resource and product development	Technology and information systems	
<b>SUPPORT ACTIVITIES - DIFFERENTIATION</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Routes and circuits tours and routes,</li> <li>▪ Marketing materials,</li> <li>▪ Tour packages,</li> <li>▪ Resource interpretation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consumer advertising,</li> <li>▪ Tourism fairs and workshops,</li> <li>▪ Familiarization trips,</li> <li>▪ Relationship with the communication media,</li> <li>▪ Relationship with intermediaries and tour operators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reception and transport service</li> <li>▪ Taxes devolution</li> <li>▪ Formalities of entry/exit</li> <li>▪ Baggage handling</li> <li>▪ Security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visitors center accommodation,</li> <li>▪ Gastronomy,</li> <li>▪ Tours and itineraries,</li> <li>▪ Recreational activities,</li> <li>▪ Rent a car,</li> <li>▪ Tourist information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management of information obtained,</li> <li>▪ Databases,</li> <li>▪ Sources customer tracking,</li> <li>▪ Industry feedback.</li> </ul>
Product creation	Promotion	Internal logistics	Destination services	Post-sale services
<b>PRIMARY ACTIVITIES</b>				

Source: author's work adapted of Morales-Zamorano et. al. (2020)

Particular emphasis is placed on the development of human resources abilities and skills involved in all links of the value chain. It's necessary to continuously improve the quality of services and monitor the tourist satisfaction by following their ideas and suggestions. It is important to know that cultural and natural heritage are just a generator of values in a complex system based on the input energy of human resources and teamwork, so that is why the development of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and abilities is necessary to achieve new values.

Broccardo et. al. (2017) call the agritourism business a phenomenon that bases its success on the offer of complementary agritourism products that are created by the action of human resources - families, especially women and employees on the agritourism farm. In this regard, Hung (2014) confirms that the number and quality of human resources is

a key factor in success in agritourism. In the continuation of his research Hung et. al. (2016) confirm that the quantity and quality of human resources are key success factors for medium and high-performance farms. The agritourism business model in general plays a key role in determining performance. Jensen (2014) explains how agritourism offers recreational and educational facilities on the farm and that diversification and expansion of activities can generate additional income. In their research, they discover potential barriers that affect the development and expansion of business. They recognize them in the education and management of employees who participate in development plans.

The intensity of entrepreneurial activity may be related to gender motivation according to McGehee (2007) who researched gender motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship and found that women are more focused on cost-cutting activities than on income-increasing activities preferred by their male partners. According to the results, women have a higher motivation for agritourism entrepreneurship, but not so significant as to influence its application. In an earlier period, McGehee (2004), in researching the dynamic nature of motivation for entrepreneurship in agritourism, distinguished between economic and sociocultural nature on farms for which agriculture was a secondary source of income. Socio-cultural motivation influenced the organization of picking one's own fruits, selling seedlings, horseback riding, children's educational programs, zoos and farm festivals. The importance of the entrepreneurial aspect in the development of agritourism is explained by Khazami and Lakner (2021) who emphasize the importance of the connection between social identity, social capital and functional competencies in the application of entrepreneurship in agritourism. It is social identity that represents the link between social capital and functional competencies that enable differentiations of agritourism products. Of course, the growth of added value of tourism products created by entrepreneurs requires some material investment, but first it requires a radical change in attitudes - from entrepreneurial identity based on the basic goal of starting and maintaining a business, through strengthening local communities and local entrepreneurs to the social identity of the entrepreneur that are dynamically looking for the place and role of their business for the advancement of the entire social community, a socio-entrepreneurial identity that is different from entrepreneurs who strive for profit. Steiner and Hoffmann (2012) present a taxonomy of diversification that arises from entrepreneurial creativity in agriculture, and argues that the direction of diversification depends on the active, creative and motivated entrepreneur, but also on location factors. In his research on taxonomy of diversification, Sudarić et. al. (2020) in the creative diversification of agriculture recognize different forms: horizontal, vertical, diagonal and passive diversification. Horizontal diversification of agricultural production implies the expansion of the production program and lines. Vertical diversification occurs through the processing and finalization of products. Diagonal is more complex by combining horizontal and vertical diversification and connecting production and service activities - agritourism. The last form of agricultural diversification is recognized as passive diversification, such as renting and leasing agricultural resources (land, facilities and machinery) to other legal entities. This form does not involve work activities with farm resources but on the contrary, resources are given to others for a certain fee. This form is important for the preservation of agricultural resources in rural areas but also for the existence of the rural population.

Agritourism is a type of economic activity that is encouraged by the Rural Development Program (<https://ruralnirazvoj.hr>), sub-measure 6.2 - support for investment in starting

non-agricultural activities in rural areas. In the following, sub-measure 6.4 finances the costs of differentiation of agritourism products in the context of the introduction of traditional and artistic crafts, production of souvenirs, services in rural areas, processing and marketing of agricultural products. At the same time, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has defined 17 goals for sustainable development (SDGs), one of which is Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. According to the guidelines of this goal, Strengthening National Capacities for Enhancing Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (MSME) the development of sustainability tourism are encouraged.

All these proposed guidelines in the development of differentiated forms of agritourism products and services are supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund which encourages the tourism industry, entrepreneurship and development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) socio-economic sustainability and resilience of tourism regions. The support system encourages transformations in the sector that occur with the application of innovation. One of the goals is to exploit the full potential of culture and tourism for economic recovery with social inclusion and environmental and economic sustainability.

The Cohesion Fund supports investments linking tourism, environmental protection and the construction of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), and projects (Interreg) that encourage European regional cooperation. The first goal of these European policies includes smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in tourism, which is planned to be realized by supporting innovation in the sustainable development of regional culture, and increasing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized economic entities. The application of new digital services, products and solutions (example: digitization of cultural and historical heritage), then the development of skills for smart specialization are the basis of regional development.

In addition to the advantages of differentiating agritourism products, it's important to point out the disadvantages associated with additional pressure on producers in deciding which attribute could prove to be unique. Furthermore, product differentiation activities can increase the costs of both the service itself and marketing without at the same time securing an increase in revenue because it is uncertain whether customers will equally value the services uniqueness and originality.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The paper provides an overview of guidelines, as entrepreneurial opportunities based on comparative advantages on the farm, for the creation of agritourism products that are created by differentiation procedures. It is necessary to continuously improve the quality of services and monitor the satisfaction of tourists according to generational attributes, following their ideas and suggestions. It is important to know that cultural and natural heritage are just a generator of values in a complex system based on the input energy of human resources and teamwork. Therefore, the development of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and abilities is necessary in order to achieve new values. The human potential is of particular importance which forms the basis of the value chain in all its parts. The paper emphasizes the role of human resources that represent the link between social capital and functional competencies that create differentiations of agritourism products.

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**DIFERENCIJACIJA AGROTURISTIČKIH PROIZVODA –  
PODUZETNIČKE PRILIKE NA OSNOVU KOMPARATIVNIH PREDNOSTI**

**Jadranka Deže,  
Tihana Sudarić,  
Krunoslav Zmaić**

**Abstract**

Agritourism, as a form of economic activity, has an important multifunctional meaning in the socio-economic position of micro and small agricultural entrepreneurs as well as in local, regional and national economic development. Internally, creative and innovative agritourism products based on comparative differences are recognized by the tourism demand as new adventures and experiences. At the same time, externally the pandemic and economic crises are reducing the mobility of the population, which makes agritourism a more attractive choice compared to some remote and more expensive destinations. The dynamics of life, complexity of work and a lack of time to rest are influencing the growth in demand for shorter, closer and more frequent trips and excursions. The aim of this paper is making guidelines, as entrepreneurial opportunities based on comparative advantages, for the creation of agritourism products which arise by differentiation. The guidelines for the differentiation of agritourism products arise under the influence of the growth in demand in the tourism market, which has changed under the influence of dynamic processes of socio-economic development. Demand has been transformed from a rustic scheme into: 1) Multifunctional 2) Multidiversified, 3) Mobile and 4) Modern → 4M scheme, and therefore adjustments to the agritourism offer are necessary. The process of differentiation creates products that are different from the competitions. This research contributes to the design of guidelines in the development of agritourism products which implies the application of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship based on the endogenous resources of the destination and its comparative advantages.

**Keywords:** agritourism, product differentiation, diversification, entrepreneurship, competitiveness

**Jadranka Deže, PhD**

Jadranka Deže, Full Professor, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Department of Bioeconomics and Rural Development, Croatia, E-mail: jadranka.deze@fazos.hr

**Tihana Sudarić, PhD**

Tihana Sudarić, Full Professor, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Department of Bioeconomics and Rural Development, Croatia, E-mail: tihana.sudaric@fazos.hr

**Krunoslav Zmaić, PhD**

Krunoslav Zmaić, Full Professor, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Department of Bioeconomics and Rural Development, Croatia, E-mail: krunoslav.zmaic@fazos.hr

## DEVELOPMENT POTENTIALS OF THE RURAL AREA IN WESTERN HERZEGOVINA COUNTY

**Jelena Putica Džajić**

**ABSTRACT:**

The rural area of the West Herzegovina County is characterized by a wealth of natural and cultural resources, but also numerous problems arising as a result of depopulation expressed since the second half of the 20th century. Considering the potential of the area and the growing demand for rural forms of tourism, it is necessary to revitalize the area through strategically developed tourism. This paper uses the Delphi method to analyze possible solutions for the revitalization of the rural area of the County and predicts the time required for the implementation. The survey was conducted from June to October 2019 in three rounds. In the first round of the research, experts determined the potentials of the area, while in the second and third rounds they defined possible scenarios for the development of rural areas. Experts pointed out gastro and wine tourism, sports, recreation and cultural tourism as leaders in the development of the rural areas. The results of the research also indicated the need to organize a larger number of educational seminars, more significant promotion of natural and cultural resources of rural areas as well as a bigger protection of the rural landscape.

**Keywords:** rural area, rural tourism, West Herzegovina County, Delphi method

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural areas around the world are characterized by negative demographic trends, but also by negative economic processes. In the mid-last-century the West Herzegovina County was traditionally agricultural county and agriculture has been the primary occupation for many years. Intertwined processes of industrialization, urbanization, depopulation, deagrarianization and deruralization negatively affected the rural area of the County. It is necessary to prevent continuous negative processes in rural areas by various measures and activities which would improve living conditions and prevent emigration, in particular young and mature population. It is also important to emphasize diversity of activities in rural areas that will no longer rely solely on agricultural production, but also on other opportunities offered by rural areas and one of them is certainly tourism. Tourism has a very important role in the revitalization of rural areas, whereas it generates additional income for the local population, allows jobs diversity, ensures an increase in domestic foreign investments and employment, which greatly improves the local economy (Smolčić et. all. 2018). Considering the natural and social potentials of the County, and greater demand of modern tourists for spending holidays in the nature, rural tourism imposes itself as a kind of an instrument of the rural development (Sorensen et al. 1996). Rural tourism as a selective form of tourism arose primarily as a need of preserving and valorizing natural and cultural heritage through a specific tourist offer (Demonja 2012). It is also important to mention that in the rural area, depending on its natural and social potential, one can develop different forms of the rural tourism (agritourism, sports and recreation, religious, hunting, gastronomic and others (Kušen 2006). The development of the rural tourism must be based on the concept of sustainable development of rural areas, in which significant economic indicators would be achieved, but also protect the environment (Cronin and Manić 2014).

## 2. FIELD OF RESEARCH

The research area is the rural area of the West Herzegovina County located in the southwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figure 1). The county was founded in 1996 and consists of the towns of Široki Brijeg and Ljubuški and the municipalities of Grude and Posušje. Its area is 1362.2 km<sup>2</sup>. According to OECD criteria, 90% of the County is a rural area, that is out of 102 settlements, and 92 belong to the rural type of settlement. (Putica Džajić 2020)<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 1. Geographical position of the West Herzegovina County



Source: (Putica Džajić 2020).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Delphi method was used in the paper and three rounds of research were performed. The Delphi belongs to a forecasting methods and is used in research, based on the opinions of a number experts, who do not communicate with each other, to form and reach a potential solution to a particular problem (Eret 2017). The research is characteristic by the fact that in the second round of the research all respondents are shown the opinions and average grades of all respondents from the first round. In this way, respondents can stay true to themselves and their attitude or to re-examine it and coordinate it with the attitude of the majority (Đogić Cerjak 2015). The main reason for

<sup>1</sup> The result was obtained by calculating a number / percentage of settlements with a population density higher than 150 inhabitants / km<sup>2</sup> out of 102 total settlements.

choosing Delphi research methods and the valuation of the rural area of the West Herzegovina County is the possibility of participation of heterogeneous experts professions who will use their competencies to provide with quality solutions to problems facing rural areas. Also, one of the essential factor of choosing the Delphi method is objectivity or impossibility to impose a subjective opinion.

A team of 12 experts with different occupations, from different countries participated in the research related to research topics. It wasn't easy to chose the experts. To identify real problems and define concrete proposals for the recovery of the rural area of the County, it was necessary for the people on the team to be familiar with the area. Therefore, a team of 12 experts was formed: four geographers, two economists, one archaeologist, two agronomists, two entrepreneurs in rural tourism and one winemaker. The research was conducted from June to October 2019. After agreement with the respondents or experts, an initial questionnaire with open-ended questions was created. The questions were related to basic concepts of rural tourism, tourist potentials of the area and the importance of state authorities in managing rural areas. Based on extensive answers, a survey questionnaire was created for the second round of research. The questions for the second round of research consisted of two parts: 1. Status and problems of rural area and 2. Guidelines for future development of the rural area. The questionnaire contained 14 closed-ended questions, the last two questions were of the prognostic type. Questions in the third round of the research were the same as in the previous one, except that the respondents could see the answers from the second round and thereby ultimately make their decisions about an individual issue. Questionnaires in all three rounds were sent by an e-mail to all respondents. The research was conducted from June to October 2019.

#### **4. RESEARCH RESULTS**

##### *Potentials and problems of the County's rural area*

According to respondents (Table. 1), the greatest wealth in the rural area of the West Herzegovina County refers to natural beauties (75% consensus). In addition to natural beauty as the greatest wealth, respondents highlighted the cultural and historical heritage which manifests itself in stone houses, dry stone walls, mills (consensus 75%). The degree of agreement with the claim that the preserved agrarian landscapes are great wealth of rural area is somewhat lower than other claims, however it certainly shows that respondents also recognized agrarian landscapes as one of the significant wealth of rural area (consensus 58%). Development of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County is traditionally tied for agricultural production in the lowlands and livestock in the hilly area. Given the long tradition of growing crops of early fruits and vegetables, vines and tobacco, it is necessary to revive and intensify agricultural production. Emphasis should be on organic agricultural production and in particular to strengthen it within family farms - agritourism properties that would also be included in the tourist offer. In addition to growing organic products, tourists should be offered a stay on rural estates, in traditional Herzegovinian houses and participation in different activities. The process of organic production itself should be controlled by relevant ministries, and the end result could be certified and labeled product. A positive example might be early potatoes from Ljubuski which, thanks to the work and association of farmers, received a certificate and

protection of geographical origin. Organically grown products would have a higher price, and thus would provide additional income and additional employment in agricultural sector. Holding additional education on products, so called process from the field to the table, and the participation of guests in agricultural activities (tobacco picking, grape harvesting, wine making process, the process of making various fruit liqueurs and desserts, feeding cattle) at estates can be an interesting tourist product of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County.

**Table 1. Experts' attitudes on the potentials of the rural area of the West Herzegovina County.**

Claim	Number of respondents (%)		
	I totally agree	I partially agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Natural beauties	9 (75 %)	2 (16,7 %)	1 (8,3 %)
Agrarian landscapes (tobacco, vineyard)	5 (41,7%)	7 (58,3%)	0 (0,0 %)
Cultural history and heritage (stone houses, mills, dry stone walls)	9 (75%)	3 (25 %)	0 (0,0 %)

Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

According to the respondents, the current situation in rural area and related activities are not satisfactory (Table 2.). Most respondents state that promotion of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County is not on the satisfactory level (consensus 84%). In addition, most respondents consider the rural area is not sufficiently tourist valued or protected by environmental protection measures (consensus 58%). In addition, respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the failure to hold educational seminars at county level (consensus 66%).

**Table 2. Experts' opinions on the current state of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County**

		1	2	3	4	5 <sup>2</sup>
Insufficient promotion of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County	N	2	10	0	0	0
	%	(16,7%)	(83,3%)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)	0,0%)
Insufficient protection of the rural area	N	7	5	0	0	0
	%	(58,3 %)	(41,7 %)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)
Insufficient tourist evaluation of rural area and landscape	N	7	5	0	0	0
	%	(58,3%)	(41,7%)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)	0,0%)
Need more educational seminars (emphasis on the importance of the rural area protection)	N	8	4	0	0	0
	%	(66,7 %)	(33,3 %)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)	(0,0%)

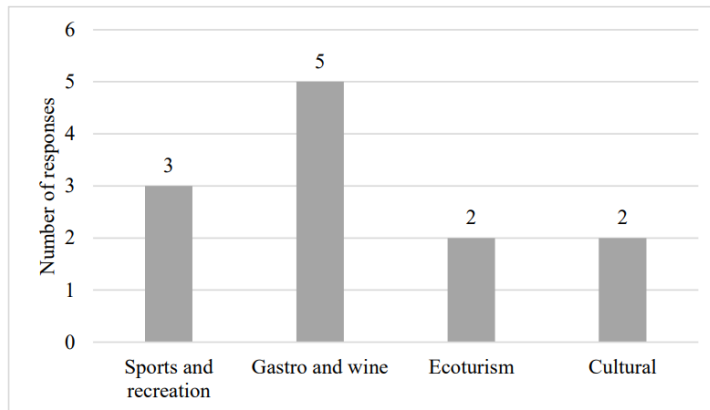
Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

*Guidelines for future development of rural areas*

As the biggest obstacle for development of rural area, the respondents stated economic and traffic structure (consensus 66%), poor development policies at all government levels (consensus 58%), insufficient financial investments in rural development (consensus 66%) and market trends (consensus 66%). Of these mentioned obstacles, one in particular can single out poor development policies at all government levels as well as a lack of financial investment in rural areas. The only thing respondents do not recognize as obstacles are natural resources (consensus 75%), which they have already pointed out as the greatest potential of the area. Considering current trends and potentials of rural areas, rural tourism is emerging as one of the possible key solutions for revitalization of the County's rural area. According to experts (Figure 2.) gastro and wine tourism could be affirmed as the main form of tourism. Certainly one of the main reasons for the selection of gastro and wine tourism is in addition to the specific gastronomic offer, the reason it doesn't depend on the season and thus can certainly be a form of tourism which will extend the tourist season (Drpić and Vukman 2014). Besides gastro and wine tourism, three respondent opted sports-recreational, two respondents opted for ecotourism or cultural tourism.

<sup>2</sup> Likert scale 1- I totally agree, 2- I partially agree, 3- I neither agree nor disagree, 4- I partially agree 5- I totally disagree

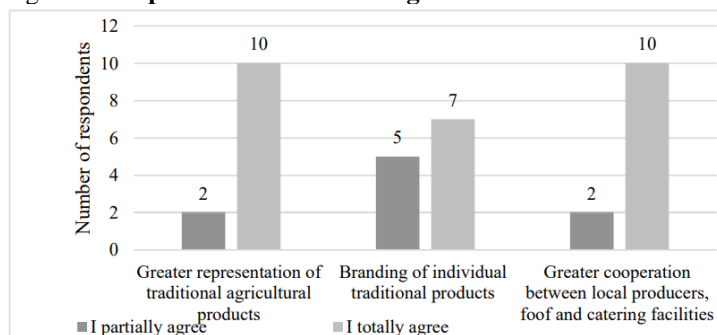
**Figure 2. Expert opinions on the form of tourism that could be a leader in the development of rural areas of the West Herzegovina County**



Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

According to respondents, 10 out of 12 fully agree that for the full realization of gastro and wine tourism in the County is necessary to have more active cooperation between local food producers and catering facilities (Figure. 3) A good cooperation would certainly contribute to greater representation of traditional products in the gastronomic and wine offer of the County. In addition to that, 7 out of 12 respondents, fully agree with branding of certain traditional products. The gastronomic and wine tourism of the County is based on the traditional Herzegovinian food such as: pura and lučnica, ustipci, collard greens, peka dishes, cottage cheese, bellows cheese, figs, spongecake; indigenous wines blatina and žilavka and various types of liqueurs (honey, walnut, sour cherry) (Šiljković et al. 2017). Southern part of the county, city of Ljubuški, is also involved in the project called Herzegovina Wine Route, which in addition to a tour of tourist attractions also offers a tour of wine cellars, vineyards and wine tasting.

**Figure 3. Respondents' attitudes on gastro and wine tourism**



Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

According to the majority of respondents (Table 3.) the proximity of attractions in the area (Kravice waterfalls, Medjugorje, Mostar) is a fact that supports development of rural areas in the West Herzegovina County (consensus 75%). In addition to that, the environment preservation (consensus 92%) is an advantage so as low degree of urbanization (consensus not reached) and nearness to the Adriatic coast (50% consensus).

**Table 3. Attitudes of respondents on the benefits of the rural area development in the West Herzegovina County**

Claim	Number of respondents (%)		
	I totally agree	I partially agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Nearness to attractions in the area (Kravice Medjugorje, Mostar)	9 (75 %)	3 (25 %)	0 (0,0%)
Position nearby border-Adriatic sea	6 (50,0%)	6 (50,%)	0 (0,0%)
Low degree of urbanization	5 (41,7%)	5 (41,7%)	2 (16,7%)
Protected environment	11 ( 91,7%)	1 (8,3%)	0 (0,0%)

Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

The biggest limiting factor of rural tourism according to respondents' opinion in the County is insufficient governments support (consensus 92%). In addition to insufficient government support, it is necessary to mention the complex institutional structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where is necessary to coordinate legislation for future development. Local authorities and local communities, as well as private economic entities and tourism organizations, must be more active in enabling the development of tourism in its jurisdiction (Madžar and Madžar 2016).

The following important limiting factors (Table 4.) are negative demographic picture of rural areas and a lack of tourist infrastructure (83% consensus). Poor transport infrastructure (consensus 75%) is also in the opinion of most respondents an important limiting factor, while respondents' opinions on seasonality are divided (50% consensus). The problem of seasonality as all of the above limitations could certainly be solved by development of rural tourism, as one of the selective forms of tourism. Except for the existing resource base, it is necessary to upgrade and supplement the tourism offers with infrastructure facilities such as the construction of sports centers, tennis courts, football fields, golf courses, outdoor swimming pools, wellness and spa centers. Of course it should be emphasized that the rural area of the County requires strategically developed tourism, primarily with protecting the environment.



**Table 4. Respondents' attitudes on limiting factors for development of rural tourism in the West Herzegovina County.**

Number of respondents (%)

Claim	I totally agree	I partially agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Negative demographic picture of rural area	10 (83,3%)	2 (16,7 %)	0 (0,0%)
Bad traffic infrastructure	9 (75,0%)	3 (25,0%)	0 (0,0%)
An issue of seasonality	4 (33,3%)	2 (16,7%)	6 (50,0%)
Insufficient government support	11 ( 97,1%)	1 (8,3%)	0 (0,0%)

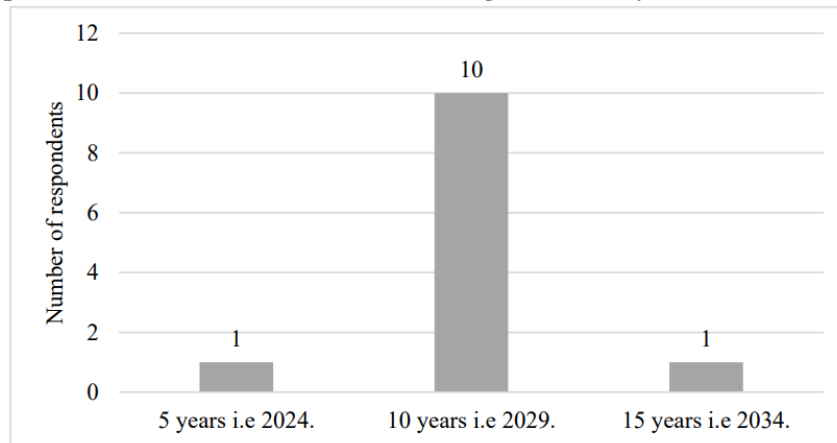
Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

To the prognostic question "In how many years could rural tourism be an initiator of rural development in the West Herzegovina County?" all respondents have the same answer: in 10 years or 2029 (100% consensus).

The majority of respondents believe that in 10 years (consensus 83%) the development of rural tourism could prevent / alleviate pronounced depopulation processes in rural areas. One respondent believes that could be earlier, in 5 years, while one thinks it will take more than that.

According to the respondents (Figure 4.), the expected time during which rural tourism will alleviate the pronounced depopulation processes in rural areas of the West Herzegovina County is 10 years, at the earliest in 8.5 years and at the latest in 11.5 years (M = 10.0; SD = 2.132). 95% CI: 8.65-11.35).

Figure 4. **Respondents' attitudes to the question "In how many years would development of rural tourism could prevent / alleviate pronounced depopulation processes in rural areas of the West Herzegovina County?"**



Source: prepared by the author based on the results of an empirical research

## 5. CONCLUSION

The rural areas of the West Herzegovina County have been facing numerous economic and demographic issues since the mid 20th century. However, the rural areas of the County also represent unexplored, specific, attractive areas for the development of tourism. In favor of tourism development of the rural areas, certainly contributes a favorable geographical position, proximity to important tourist destinations (Mostar, Medjugorje, Adriatic Sea, Blidinje Nature Park), and numerous natural and social resources.

Rural tourism has become increasingly important in recent years and includes various activities in rural area. The research results indicate a number of possibilities for the tourist evaluation of rural areas in the West Herzegovina County, primarily through various forms of rural tourism. Experts emphasize gastronomic, sports-recreational, cultural and ecotourism. Due to its uniqueness, the tourist evaluation of rural areas should be approached in a sustainable way, in order to alleviate the negative consequences of tourism valuation. Systematically organized rural tourism can be developed only with the active participation of the local community and greater cooperation of the private public partnership.

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**DEVELOPMENT POTENTIALS OF THE RURAL AREA IN WESTERN  
HERZEGOVINA COUNTY**

**Jelena Putica Džajić**

**ABSTRACT:**

The rural area of the West Herzegovina County is characterized by a wealth of natural and cultural resources, but also numerous problems arising as a result of depopulation expressed since the second half of the 20th century. Considering the potential of the area and the growing demand for rural forms of tourism, it is necessary to revitalize the area through strategically developed tourism. This paper uses the Delphi method to analyze possible solutions for the revitalization of the rural area of the County and predicts the time required for the implementation. The survey was conducted from June to October 2019 in three rounds. In the first round of the research, experts determined the potentials of the area, while in the second and third rounds they defined possible scenarios for the development of rural areas. Experts pointed out gastro and wine tourism, sports, recreation and cultural tourism as leaders in the development of the rural areas. The results of the research also indicated the need to organize a larger number of educational seminars, more significant promotion of natural and cultural resources of rural areas as well as a bigger protection of the rural landscape.

**Keywords:** rural area, rural tourism, West Herzegovina County, Delphi method

**Jelena Putica Džajić**

University of Mostar

Faculty of Science and Education

Matice hrvatske bb, 88000 Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovin

Phone: +387 36 445 482

E-mail: [jelena.putica@fpmoz.sum.ba](mailto:jelena.putica@fpmoz.sum.ba)

## THE CONCEPT OF GREEN TOURISM AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RURAL AREAS

**Ornella Mikuš**  
**Magdalena Gregorić**  
**Mateja Jež Rogelj**  
**Tihana Kovačiček**

**Abstract:**

Tourism is a fast-growing sector that puts pressure on the environment, a significant source of waste and greenhouse gas emissions, and a major energy consumer. On the other hand, it supports and strengthens the cultural assets, history and traditions of the local community, contributing to the economic growth and competitiveness of the region and ultimately a better standard of living for its inhabitants. Public policy measures in global systems (EU, UN) are increasingly relying on the concept of circular economy, bioeconomy, green infrastructure and environmental pressure reduction. Existing literature often describes sustainable rural tourism in the context of tree pillars, environmental, economic and social, but less attention is given to green practices themselves and their impact on sustainable rural development. Therefore, the subject of this paper is green tourism, a concept which serves to enhance environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of the rural area, in line with the new EU and UN policy initiatives aimed at reducing environmental pressure. It suggests the concept of green tourism development, describes its connection with similar concepts and identifies measures and policy activities that seek to strengthen its role in rural development. The results show various positive impacts of green tourism practices on the rural area and policies' lack of direction in improving the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and rural development.

**Keywords:**

green tourism, rural areas, sustainable development, policy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although 35 years have passed since the official definition of sustainable development and sustainability in *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), better known as the Brundtland Report (BR), there still seems to be a lack of understanding of the application of this concept in practice. Despite its ambiguity, the WCED definition of sustainable development has become a highly popular instrument to address different aspects of the environmental challenges that our planet is facing. According to BR, sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Since then, almost every public or business policy document seeks to incorporate sustainability as a long-term goal and define measures and instruments to achieve it. This has led to a widening of discourse on the concept of sustainable development, resulting in a wide variety of definitions and interpretations (Mebratu 1998, 494). The idea of sustainability or sustainable development was first thought as a strategy to prevent ecological disaster resulting from the extreme exploitation of natural resources and environment deterioration caused by the dominant model of economic growth and development. Environmental care was the predominant term in the sustainable development debate used to describe progress toward sustainability. The idea has been subsequently extended to other two factors: economic and social sustainability. In short, sustainable development is a process or path to sustainability, which can be environmental, economic or social.

Tourism is an important economic activity throughout the world. According to the UNWTO (The World Tourism Organization of United Nations), international tourist arrivals worldwide

have grown from 530 million in 1995 to 1.5 billion in 2019. The Middle East has emerged as the fastest-growing region for international tourism arrivals in 2019, growing at a pace almost twice as high as the global average (+8%). Asia and the Pacific slowed down but still demonstrated above-average growth, with international arrivals up by 5%. Europe, where growth was also slower than in previous years (+4%), continues to lead in terms of international arrivals numbers, welcoming 743 million international tourists last year (51% of the global market). The Americas (+2%) showed a mixed picture, seeing as many island destinations in the Caribbean consolidated their recovery after the 2017 hurricanes, while South America saw a decline in arrivals, partly due to ongoing social and political turmoil. Limited data available for Africa (+4%) points to continued strong results in North Africa (+9%) while arrivals in Sub-Saharan Africa grew more slowly in 2019 (+1.5%) (UNWTO, 2022).

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in rural areas. It is an economic activity with social, economic, and environmental impacts that are highly dependent on the local characteristics of a region, and it has the potential to stimulate rural economies with positive effects on farm income. One of the priorities of rural tourism development is thus its sustainability (Ivona, 2021, 2), but sustainable, responsible rural tourism is difficult to achieve without applying “green” thinking. Attractive parts of a particular space have certain unique natural and cultural features which enable its use for tourism purposes and thus become tourist attractions. Since they are the basic motive for the arrival of tourists to a certain destination, they are considered the basic element of tourism development and as such need to be protected in order to keep tourism in these areas sustainable (Ritoša, 2019).

This paper provides a review of relevant studies dealing with sustainable rural tourism, especially its environmental context and its development in the framework of green policy and practices. The aim of this paper is to define the concept of green tourism, describe its connection with similar concepts and identify measures and policy activities that seek to strengthen its role in rural development.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This is a narrative review based on a qualitative secondary data analysis, summarizing references selected from scientific bibliographic databases, such as ISI Web of Science Core Collection, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and Hrčak based on the following sequence of keywords: sustainable rural tourism, sustainability in rural tourism, green tourism, ecotourism, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), cohesion policy, tourism policy. There were about 2,000 works in total. For this purpose, a total of 20 research and review studies were chosen according to abstract and key words related to sustainability goals and implementation issues in rural tourism.

Information on the international and national policy framework associated with sustainable or green rural tourism was accessed via EU, UNWTO and Croatian governmental bodies websites. Other references that served to complete the picture of green tourism are not specified here due to the lack of space but are available upon request.

### 3. SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, rural tourism became a new alternative to the fast-growing sun, sea and sand mass tourism practice that dominated the post-Second World War period. It was mainly developed by rural people who were typically new to tourism entrepreneurship, at low cost and on a small scale. In many areas (but not in all) it was seen as a rural diversification and development tool for the countryside losing jobs and income through the modernisation of agriculture, a process that had produced surplus food, thus forcing down farm gate prices (Lane and Kastenholz 2015, 1134). Today, rural communities in the developing world also see rural tourism as an opportunity to diversify the economy of rural areas and revitalize territories that are otherwise no longer competitive in the face of market dynamics and the evolution of agricultural policies (Ivona 2021). Even though it may seem that rural tourism is not as economically attractive as most of other sectors, it presents many benefits. It complements agriculture, diversifies farmers' income and contributes to the protection of demographic structure in rural areas. It supports the specific natural and cultural heritage and accelerates the integration of the local population into tourism decision-making process which in turn improves their sense of belonging. (Šimkova and Ivona 2021). Examples from Romania show that tourism development is associated with better employment opportunities and faster development of public infrastructure, thus improving the overall quality of life (Ibanescu et al. 2012). Alongside its positive effects on the destination, it has been proven that rural tourism induces sustainable economic growth in neighboring rural localities via a well-known contagion effect, therefore contributing to sustainable regional development (Ibanescu et al. 2018, 2).

Sustainable tourism has become a desirable goal in tourism development, introducing the concept of sustainable development in order to reduce the negative impacts experienced during the tourism development process (An and Alarcón, 2020). Sustainable rural tourism is an economic activity which meet the needs of tourists and their hosts enhancing ecological, socio-cultural and economic development of the rural area in which it occurs (Carić, 2018, Kantar and Svržnjak, 2017). The goal is to achieve sustainable outcomes through networks that balance social, economic and environmental aspirations for communities and best equalize benefits and costs for key stakeholders, while retaining the quality of resources (Saxena et al., 2007, 358).

The number of studies dealing with sustainable rural tourism has been increasing steadily with the passage of time. It became a very important topic in Europe and Asia (China, South Korea) but the concept is interpreted differently. Most of the studies take into consideration three (economic, social and environmental sustainability) or five (adding cultural and political) dimensions of sustainable rural tourism.

Case studies descriptions confirm the positive role of rural tourism in a certain region. Authors describing the case of Cyprus claim that the vitality of tourism has to be emphasized as a primary economical sector especially for islands as they often suffer the disadvantages of a specialized small economy, limited range of human and physical resources, limited ability to react to international market changes, and exogenous decision-making. Furthermore, in order to prevent the deterioration of natural and traditional environment, educational programs should promote local awareness on cultural and natural heritage (Türker and Dinçyürek, 2007). To elevate the sustainability dimension, some case studies include additional elements such as environmental sustainability and community orientation, focusing on endogenous development (Mwesiumo et al., 2022). Moreover, findings from the case of Poland suggest that community-based action brings about more than just social impact; rather it plays a

critical role in a successful long-term tourism development (Strzelecka and Wicks 2010). Anderson et al., 2015, point out a particular concern in the case of Ireland: lack of networking and integration of this development into the wider economy and community. Authors analyze rural lake tourism in Finland raising a question of difficulties when it comes to implementing the theory of sustainable tourism or ecotourism in practice. The discussion on sustainability and ecotourism is too abstract and wide for the communities that may lack the resources to implement tourism strategies into industry, let alone a sustainable tourism policy or strategy. Grgić et al., 2016. conclude that the underdevelopment of rural tourism in Croatia is a consequence of continuously neglected rural areas and family farms and orientation towards mass tourism on the Adriatic coast. A few years later Grgić et al., 2021. show research results in the case of a nature park in Croatia, concluding that it is necessary for protected areas to implement custom promotion and marketing that will not provoke mass tourist movements towards those areas. Social learning, communication and lifelong learning education on the importance of protected areas have a key role in their sustainable use and biodiversity conservation (Grgić et al. 2021, 879).

#### **4. GREEN RURAL TOURISM**

Green tourism is presented as a recent concept in tourism development, which should emphasize the preservation of natural resources and their sustainable use. In the context of tourism, environmental awareness is rising rapidly with the emerging concepts such as ecotourism, sustainable, nature-based and green tourism (Tuohino and Hynönen 2001). As a new concept of tourism development, green tourism would enable tourism development in accordance with the needs and capabilities of the area by emphasizing the preservation of natural and cultural resources.

Ecological dimension of sustainability in rural tourism is based on putting the emphasis on the importance of the environment, promoting ecological values in business and green behaviour among tourists (Kantar and Svržnjak 2017). Green tourism seeks to answer how to minimize the impact of climate change but also how to reduce the effects of environmental problems such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Green tourism consequently intends to reduce the unfavorable impacts on the local environment and foresee its applicability to the global scale (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al. 2020).

Green tourism in rural area affects local environmental concerns, local economic viability and local socio-cultural factors. Local environmental concerns are usually connected to the preservation of local natural resources, waste management and biodiversity. The most challenging rural area issue is usually its endogenous economic growth and development which would provide long-term sustainability. Lower educational attainment, geographic remoteness, lack of employment opportunities, lower average income and poor infrastructure are the most usual characteristic of rural areas in the EU, especially its central and eastern part. Those factors have a negative impact on rural economic performance as rural area becomes more vulnerable to modern market demands and is rarely integrated into economic processes. Furthermore, socio-cultural aspects with a significant effect on the ability of a business to succeed should be elevated in rural areas. The latter implies social capital, community awareness, compliance with customs and traditions as well as the culture of living in spiritual and material sense (Kantar and Svržnjak 2017).



Green tourism is a special economic activity which could serve as an alternative source of income providing employment and additional income opportunities for local communities while increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists. Being environmentally responsible, informative and educational, responsive to the growing public demand of greener economy, improving community networking, solidarity and enhancing a sense of community identity, green tourism could be a road to take for rural area. It integrates agriculture and other local economic activities, providing them with added value while lowering environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing. In Table 1 we present the impact of green tourism on four aspects of rural development based on reviewed literature and our expert opinion.

Table 1: Green tourism impact in rural area

Context	Green practices impact
<p><b>Environmental:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preservation of natural resources</li> <li>• reducing pollution</li> <li>• fighting climate change issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local food consumption helps to reduce carbon emission</li> <li>• support organic agriculture</li> <li>• support the development of circular economy using renewable resources</li> <li>• better waste disposal, energy efficiency and water management help fighting climate change</li> <li>• contribute to the conservation of biodiversity</li> <li>• support the development of new, clean technology and infrastructure (solar collectors, wind turbines)</li> <li>• support an alternative form of transportation (cycling)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• endogenous development based on local resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• raise employment rate</li> <li>• provide income diversification</li> <li>• link additional economic activities with tourism</li> <li>• development of rural entrepreneurship and self-employment</li> <li>• attract investments including EU funds</li> <li>• innovation increases competitiveness of the area</li> <li>• raise living standard and quality of life</li> <li>• achieve financial savings by optimizing the process of waste</li> </ul>

	disposal, energy efficiency, drinking water consumption and wastewater management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strengthen the synergic development of small-scale economies</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>respect for the needs and interests of local communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increase knowledge and deliver lifelong learning process</li> <li>emphasize participation and cooperation of local stakeholders</li> <li>strengthen the non-governmental sector and public-private partnerships</li> <li>improve social cohesion and community solidarity</li> <li>make tourists conscious of their carbon footprint</li> <li>strengthen identification with the place of residence</li> <li>intercultural understanding, tolerance and reduction of discrimination on any grounds</li> <li>reduce poverty by enhancing economy</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>respect the social, cultural authenticity, traditional heritage and values of the local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enhance both tourist's and resident's knowledge of cultural conservation</li> <li>preserve local history, heritage sites, local cultural activities, local dialect, traditional food, crafts, customs, values and beliefs.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' elaboration

Terms related to green tourism can be used without an adequate definition and thus cause confusion, even in research. Some examples of such terms are nature tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly tourism, which do not necessarily have the same meaning (Tuohino and Hynönen 2001). Green tourism does not mean the development of a new form of tourism, but the development of tourism that takes place in accordance with the needs of the environment, respecting its natural features, limitations and improving the area's socio-cultural and economic outcomes. On the other side, the concept of sustainable development is applicable to all aspects of tourism development. Therefore, sustainable tourism is not a specific form of tourism, but a set of principles, policies and practices according to which tourism should be developed. It considers current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, taking care of the needs of visitors, sectors, environment and destinations. Eco-tourism is just one form of tourism in which tourists enjoy the authentic

natural environment, without polluting it and endangering natural resources. The main tourist attractions are flora, fauna and cultural and historical heritage (Ritoša 2019).

Likewise, eco-tourism and sustainable tourism are not synonymous. It is important to emphasize that eco-tourism is not automatically sustainable. However, if it is to be sustainable and to contribute to sustainable development, it must be economically viable, environmentally appropriate, and socio-culturally acceptable (Turkalj et al. 2013).

## 5. POLICY APPROACH

Globally, for more than two decades, various initiatives and international organizations have been encouraging the application of sustainability in tourism. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has designated 2020 as the 'Year of Tourism and Rural Development'. In this respect UNWTO launched the publication "*Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development*" which aims to support governments at different levels, as well as the private sector and the international community developing tourism in rural territories in a way that contributes to inclusive, sustainable and resilient development. The document outlines the rationale and recommendations rural areas can employ to help drive social, economic and environmental recovery (UNWTO, 2020). It emphasizes that policy strategy implementation should be based on a multi-action and multi-stakeholder participatory approach. The role of UNWTO is to serve as a support to the rural tourism sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies.

There is still a gap between policy development and implementation. Government officials are more concerned about increasing tourism revenues, infrastructure construction and investment, tourism promotion and marketing, tourism diversification, tourism development, and tax laws and regulations. These concerns are economically driven and growth-oriented. There is an inconsistency between the priorities of officials and the goals of sustainable tourism policies in national tourism strategies. (Guo et al., 2019). For example, the Republic of Croatia adopted its Sustainable Development Strategy in 2009 (OG 30/2009) and while the Strategy did not expressly identify sustainable tourism as one of the concepts whose implementation was to be pursued in practice, it is mentioned in the Republic of Croatia Tourism Development Strategy until 2020, according to which tourism should rely on the implementation of environmentally sound, 'green' concepts. Although claiming that tourism needs to be developed throughout the country's territory, the Strategy is not particularly concerned with the potential of continental (inland and highland) Croatia and sustainable rural development. (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019, 259). Furthermore, *Action Plan for Green Tourism Development, 2016* (MT, 2016), or even the rural policy-oriented document *Rural Development Programme of the Republic of Croatia for 2014–2020* (MA, 2021) do not address sustainable rural tourism as a separate topic.

The most recent European Commission green initiative, EU Green Deal, aims to stop the climate change by moving to a clean, circular economy, revert biodiversity loss and achieve economic growth not tied to resource use. Although not being singled out as separate industry, tourism is expected to adapt to green practices demands, which could be a great challenge for mass tourism, especially in protected areas. Further development of rural tourism is partially envisaged through the EU *Farm to Fork Strategy* (EC, 2020) which signalizes that rural tourism and short food supply chains can enable availability of locally produced fresh food to end consumers, leaving a minimum carbon footprint. In June 2021, the European Commission

introduced *A Vision for rural areas towards 2040* (EC, 2021) identifying the environmental and socio-economic challenges and concerns faced by those areas. The document highlights some of the most promising opportunities available to these regions with respect to their diversity. The Vision proposes an EU Rural Pact and Rural Action Plan that identifies four areas of action to enable rural areas to become stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous. In the context of the fourth area, which stands for prosperous rural area, it can be noticed that the focus is put on diversifying economic activities and improving the value added of farming where green tourism practices can be seen as one way to contribute to this idea.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to define the concept of green tourism, describe its connection with similar concepts and identify measures and policy activities that seek to strengthen its role in rural development. It provides an overview of relevant studies dealing with sustainable rural tourism, especially its environmental context and its development in the framework of green economy, policy and practices. The findings indicate that most of the papers were written from a holistic sustainability perspective without being biased towards any one of the environmental, economic, and social aspects. The studies pay less attention to the green aspect and green practices in rural tourism, despite the European policy initiatives through *The EU Green Deal*, aimed to make Europe a net-zero emitter of greenhouse gases by 2050 and achieve the development of economies without a resource usage increase.

Hence, this narrative review contributes to the discourse presenting the concept of green tourism and its possible impact on four aspects of rural development: resolving environmental and climate issues, economic benefits of local community, social needs and interests and preservation of local cultural authenticity. Results show that although numerous benefits arise from the application of green tourism practices, it is crucial to raise knowledge on its possibilities, enhance local participation and achieve a more target-oriented decision-making process.

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## THE CONCEPT OF GREEN TOURISM AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RURAL AREAS

**Ornella Mikuš**  
**Magdalena Gregorić**  
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### **Abstract:**

Tourism is a fast-growing sector that puts pressure on the environment, a significant source of waste and greenhouse gas emissions, and a major energy consumer. On the other hand, it supports and strengthens the cultural assets, history and traditions of the local community, contributing to the economic growth and competitiveness of the region and ultimately a better standard of living for its inhabitants. Public policy measures in global systems (EU, UN) are increasingly relying on the concept of circular economy, bioeconomy, green infrastructure and environmental pressure reduction. Existing literature often describes sustainable rural tourism in the context of three pillars, environmental, economic and social, but less attention is given to green practices themselves and their impact on sustainable rural development. Therefore, the subject of this paper is green tourism, a concept which serves to enhance environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of the rural area, in line with the new EU and UN policy initiatives aimed at reducing environmental pressure. It suggests the concept of green tourism development, describes its connection with similar concepts and identifies measures and policy activities that seek to strengthen its role in rural development. The results show various positive impacts of green tourism practices on the rural area and policies' lack of direction in improving the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and rural development.

### **Keywords:**

green tourism, rural areas, sustainable development, policy

### **Ornella Mikuš, PhD**

Associate professor  
University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development  
[omikus@agr.hr](mailto:omikus@agr.hr)

### **Magdalena Gregorić**

Student of undergraduate study *Agricultural Economics*  
University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
[magdalenagregoric7@gmail.com](mailto:magdalenagregoric7@gmail.com)

### **Mateja Jež Rogelj, PhD**

Assistant professor  
University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development  
[mrogelj@agr.hr](mailto:mrogelj@agr.hr)

### **Tihana Kovačiček, PhD**

University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development  
[tkovacicek@agr.hr](mailto:tkovacicek@agr.hr)

## WATER AS A RESOURCE BASIS FOR THE METAMORPHOSIS OF RURAL TOURISM

**Romana Lekić**  
**Tena Franjić**  
**Ružica Rašperić**

### **Abstract**

The global conception of sustainable development and the lack of awareness of sustainable development are important areas for reflection and action in many areas of life, and the change to the paradigmatic worldview is especially significant in the relationship between man and his environment. This paper will show the possibility of communicating in tourism from a wider perspective where the meaning of tourism cannot be sought in utilitarian facts and functions of travel, but more in terms of research and experience. Each year, on 22 March, World Water Day is celebrated, which was launched at the initiative of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This important date attempts to draw the world's attention to the importance of water and the management and maintenance of water resources. According to Eurostat, Croatia is the top country in the European Union in terms of drinking water supplies, ahead of Finland and Sweden. This data is particularly important for rural areas, which, through springs, rivers and lakes, is now a unique resource for creating new tourism experiences through the connection of special sustainable and transformative forms of tourism related to water and next to water. This paper presents suggestions and ways how the process of transformation can be carried out through the metamorphosis of rural tourism, and where the tourist attraction base through the element of water receives a special place. In this manner, water becomes a real resource for the creation of tourist experiences in rural areas. An added value is the recognition that tourism is a phenomenon and is associated with many activities and disciplines, and that the development of tourism is not a matter of inertia and fashion ability, but a thoughtful process that must be adaptable to all market conditions, especially the post-Covid period that awaits us.

**Keywords:** experience, water element, sustainable development, rural tourism, transformation

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The element of water is extremely important in our lives. Water covers 71% of Earth's surface and is necessary for life as we know it. Croatia is among the thirty richest countries in the world in terms of water (eurostat-european-statistics\_hr). Environmental protection and drinking water supply are becoming a major problem and challenge for the survival and development of civilization as drinking water becomes a major resource in the 21st century due to the rise in the number of people and the changed standard.

Each year, on 22 March, World Water Day is celebrated (Svjetski dan voda.hr), which was launched at the initiative of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This important date attempts to draw the world's attention to the importance of water and the management and maintenance of water resources. According to Eurostat (Eurostat-european-statistics,hr).

Croatia is the top country in the European Union in terms of drinking water supplies, ahead of Finland and Sweden, and it seems that we have a great deal to be pleased about. It should be pointed out that our country has not yet protected the right of citizens to drinking water (Sabor.hr), such as Slovenia. The debate on this issue has been launched in Croatia, however, it remains to be seen how the Constitution will regulate the right to drinking water.

The cycle of water circulation in nature has existed for billions of years and all life on Earth depends on it. We also call it the hydrological cycle. All the water on our planet is in constant motion and always in a different state: liquid, gaseous or solid. (enciklopedija.hr).

When talking about water circulation as a hydrological process, logic dictates, and it is natural that certain amounts of water are always retained in certain suitable areas. These are: oceans, rivers, natural and artificial accumulations, glaciers, underground aquifers etc. Of the total water on Earth, about 97.5% is saline and is found in the seas and oceans, while the remaining 2.5% is fresh water. Interestingly, out of the total amount of fresh water, 75% consists of ice and snow, 24.5% consists of groundwater, and 0.5% is by other waters (Wikipedia.hr). These data for fresh water are a strong additional argument of the great potential for development of special forms of tourism with fresh water, i.e. streams, rivers and lakes in our country. In addition to these important data and images in this introductory part, we would like to highlight certain scientific controversies that further reinforce the motivation and new trends of travel related to the proximity of water.

The case of the memory of water is a scientific controversy that sparked passion in the 1980s and 1990s. This idea intrigued not only the homeopathic community, but also serious scientists and researchers such as Luc Antoine Montagnier, winner of the Nobel Prize (Montagnier et al. 2015). An example is also the scientifically recognized so-called Memory Effect of Water, when, in 1995, Japanese scientist Masaru Emoto conducted extensive research into how water reacts to various influences, such as music, thought and words (book *Poruke skrivene u vodi*). He obtained some surprising results. Natural water that came from mountain streams or springs, as well as water after prayer, classical music and positive thoughts, formed perfect crystals of incredible beauty. Crystals of polluted and stagnant water were irregular and deformed. The research of Dr. Masaru Emoto confirm that water is "alive" and has a memory.

## 2. WATER IN MYTHS

In many sacred scriptures, it is pointed out that the Nomads viewed the banks of rivers and seas as places of joy, rapture and prayer. Rivers and streams and seas as water are present in many mythologies and here lies the mysterious and fairytale world of mythical beings. This is the case in our ancient Slavic mythology and folk traditions, where we have recorded many stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Particularly inspiring are the stories of fairies and water fairies that have been researched by the historian, writer and poet Ivan Kukuljević Saksinski in the literary journal "Danica Ilirska" (stilistika.org). Croatian ethnologists (Bošković-Stulli 1997, Tkalčić 2015 and Vargović 2017) consider this paper by Kukuljević as the first Croatian comprehensive folklore study on fairies..In our rural areas, along streams, rivers and lakes, there is a story (Tkalčić 2015) of Rusalkas that has its roots also from pagan times and are permanently inscribed in our collective imagination. Rusalkas are a symbol of fertility and are similar to Celtic and Greek nymphs; they are spiritual forces that were supposed to provide life-giving moisture to fields and forests every spring when they came ashore to dance in the moonlight. Through a specially created experiential offer, contact with water can be a return to that miraculous and wonderful feeling of contact with nature, a return to a fairy tale that unfortunately disappeared from our lives and it is necessary to read the message that I.B. Mažuranić (2015) told us in her fairy tales, especially in the fairy



tale “Ribar Palunko i njegova žena” (The fisherman Palunko and his wife). Through “immersion in water”, what actually occurs, in accordance with the economy experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999), is a kind of phenomenon of "immersion" in the tourist existence where the tourist is temporarily transformed into a new person, with a different identity (tourists) and the tourist destination becomes a stage. In this process, the tourist becomes an “actor” and takes on the role of a swimmer, fisherman, rower, diver, sailor... and the water is a director and screenwriter.

### **3. TRANSFORMATIVE TOURISM (TRANSTOURISM) AND PARADIGM CHANGE**

The post-corona crisis, existential fears and insecurity are a reality in Croatia affected by recent earthquakes and pandemics. In such an unenviable situation, the question arises as to how to present oneself as a safe and desirable tourist destination and how to generate income in the period ahead, because we now live at a time when humanity is oriented towards fear and imbalance.

UNWTO (2016) points out that more and more people are talking about the tourist experience and not about the product and that the journey becomes an opportunity for personal development and transformation, as a form of communication where creativity and networking are directed towards a different, more humane paradigm. Referring to various sources such as Reisinger, Ross, Lean, Kottler and Pollock, the authors Dukić, Ateljević and Tomljenović (2018, 49-69) describe what transformative journeys are. The authors emphasize that transtourism is a unique scientific project funded by the Croatian Science Foundation and implemented by the Institute for Tourism for four years, from 2015 to 2019.

According to Lekić (2021), in the development of these sustainable forms of tourism and the related offer, it is important to consider the spatial and geographical aspect that should be treated as a functional area, which enables the achievement of a quality and complete experience for residents living in these areas, but also for tourists. Such a space gains a sociological connotation as a kind of milieu and becomes a platform for the development of community. In their explanation, the mentioned authors, as well as the UNWTO, connect the experience of travel with the process of healing through working on oneself, where a tourist destination becomes a place of personal development.

Korstanje (2007) describes the journey as a process of renewal that is essential for understanding how healing tourist sites operate. When returning from a trip, the traveller will return to the same status they had before the trip, however, changed for the experience they had, whether positive or negative. Authors Eliade (1968), Turner (1967) and Van Gennep (1960) also talk about the archetypal and mythical basis of each trip, so we can conclude that travel is a kind of renewal process where tourist places become places of personal development. They also highlight the moment of self-discovery of personality that emerges as a need and endeavour of a large number of people embarking on a journey, not only to see and experience the new and unknown, but also to understand their purpose in life.

#### 4. NEW TRENDS AND TOURISTS MOTIVATED BY NATURE AND "GREEN" ECOLOGICAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL FORMS OF TOURISM

Tourists now have different beliefs and expectations (Dukić, Ateljević, Tomljenović 2018) and want to spend their holidays differently and see some other destinations and want trips motivated by free stays in nature. As shown in the project of the Institute for Tourism (Trans-tourism: An integrated approach for the study of transformative role of tourism in the 21st century) the development of such forms of tourism rests on the basic premise that tourism, as a major economic and social power, can make a significant contribution to the vision of a sustainable world, a vision that includes personal well-being, social fairness and environmental care, which is embedded in the vision of Europe 2020 to create a more just and inclusive society and a better quality of life for all citizens.

The following table summarizes the new values that are important for the elaboration of content and activities that can be offered in the form of transformative water tourism in rural areas. Alen Botton also pointed them out in his book *The Art of Travel* (2005) and our Croatian author Davor Rostuhar in his book *Degustacija Slobode* (2012).

Table 1. New values related to the development of destinations in nature and water

NEW VALUES	TARGET	WHAT CAN BE OFFERED Destination	NEW TOURISM PRODUCT
<b>Transformation and growth</b>	The quest to change not only the place but also your own consciousness, the quest for a more meaningful life.	Destination as a space of maturation and growth	A tourism experience is sought with challenge, learning, (co)action that contributes to personal Growth
<b>Harmony</b>	Striving to achieve harmony with the world and people, a work-life balance, career and family...	Destination as a space of peace, realization of harmony with nature, culture, people	Tourism products, services and experiences of 'returning to balance' are sought, from physical to spiritual
<b>Spirituality and Self-Awareness</b>	The search for meaning, the search for answers. Come up with it!	Destination as a space of self-awareness, a way to discover meaning, a way to meet oneself, self-realization	Travel is sought that restores a sense of the sacred, enables spiritual growth, Pilgrimages
<b>Inspiration, creativity, aesthetics</b>	"HOMO AESTHETICUS" searching for indigenusness, uniqueness, symbolic destinations, the need for creativity	Destination as a space of inspiration and creation	Xenophilia – the love of the unknown and the inspiring. In demand are new inspirational products, creative workshops, artistic expression

<b>Health</b>	"HOMO MEDICUS" In demand is a clean and intense life, the need for activity, movement	Destination as a healthy space	Healthy tourist destinations are sought – offering a holistic approach to health
<b>Identity</b>	"Hyper-Individualist World" Searching for autochthony, different identity levels of the destination Demand personalization	Destination as a rich space of intertwining identities	Pro-consumer-traveller is looking for the possibility to combine identity levels and facilities as freely as possible while travelling
<b>Communication</b>	Travel is social therapy, seeking sameness, seeking diversity	Destination as a space for meeting, socializing, learning about customs and people	Events, festivals are in demand
<b>Responsibility</b>	Travel and holidays do not exclude political and social responsibility and activism in the destination	Destination as a space of positive action	In demand are trips that enable serving others (voluntourism...)

Source: Compiled according to Botton, A. "The Art of Travel" (2005) and Rostuhar, D. "Degustacija Slobode" (2012).

## 5. TRANSFORMATIONAL FORMS OF RURAL WATER TOURISM

This transformational journey begins with a call to take this topic seriously and to put into practice sustainable development, which, within the phenomenon of tourism, means greater interest in tourist destinations outside cities, small villages, hamlets, and little-known and less-visited places: those most secluded places that need to be discovered or rediscovered precisely because they are enchanting and untouched, and are far from tourist destinations where crowds are common. Choosing a holiday in a rural area seems like a good solution for escaping the everyday, monotonous routine of city life and increasing stress in the workplace (Knowd 2001). The possibilities of rural tourism development in Croatia and especially in the continental part are extremely great provided that investments are made in the development of products, which corresponds to the modern demand for the experience of staying in a rural area and better and more organized promotion.

### 5.1. Naturism

In the first place, we would cite naturism, where naturists stand out, as followers of the idea of the balance between humans and nature. They like to stay outdoors, enjoy sports and healthy food and appreciate campsites and, for them, naturism is a way of life – and this is closely linked to camping and the proximity of rivers and lakes.<sup>1</sup> In question are mostly managers with higher education qualifications, coming from the Anglo-Saxon speaking area, with above-average or average incomes, and we have data that the consumption of tourists in naturist camps is usually higher than that of apartment guests. Numerous scientific studies (Sladoljev et al. 2015) contributed to the increase of this way of spending vacation and leisure

<sup>1</sup> The INF (International Naturist Federation) is an organization consisting of members of the federation, correspondents and part-time members in over forty countries: <https://inf-fni.org/about-inf-fni/>

time, which shows that nudists age more slowly and that it is the free lifestyle, healthy air and spending time in nature that enables them to stay young for longer regardless of age. They are usually vegans or vegetarians, animal lovers and use organic products, and thus live daily in this manner, and all of this contributes to the popularization and spreading of this way of life. There are significant opportunities for the development of naturist camps in rural areas along rivers and lakes, and here are some data to support this. Experts believe (Sladoljev et al. 2015) that the future of Croatian naturism lies in small high-quality resorts through year-round tourism, and thus in “luxury nudism”, privately owned that could create a new offer and start a renaissance and create a new market niche in the post-corona period. According to the British Association of Naturists, the same authors say that, in the UK alone, there are about 1.2 million people who are considered naturists. Along with Germany, France is the top naturist destination in the world; 15% of French people are ready to try naturism. Naturism is also associated with camping and the increasingly popular glamping.

## **5.2. Robinson Crusoe style tourism**

Another major trend that is expected in the post-corona period in view of the changes in attitudes and state of consciousness of a large number of tourists who want a different vacation that will help them recover and heal and which will contribute to ecological sustainability is Robinson tourism. This type of vacation involves accommodation that is usually without water and electricity. It is a special market niche for guests looking for a holiday in nature outside densely populated places, without cars, without the classic tourist crowds, without noise, alone with the colours and sounds of nature. This form of tourism has so far developed on our islands and along the coast, and a good example are our lighthouses, but there are great opportunities for development in rural areas, in isolation and near streams, rivers and lakes.<sup>2</sup> Robinson tourism and naturism are directly linked to sustainable development, contributing to the preservation of the environment by making smart use of resources and providing care for the environment, the economy and society so that natural resources are used as efficiently as possible.

## **5.3. Creative tourism**

Creativity has been used in the transformation of traditional tourism, shifting the focus from material heritage to greater involvement in intangible heritage. Creative tourism is developed as a continuation or reaction to mass tourism. One of Atlas' research (Richards and Raymond 2000) showed that many places follow similar strategies to become unique, and in the end all these places look the same. Tourists increasingly want to experience local culture, live like a local, and learn about the true identity of the place they are visiting. In the process, the skilled consumer is often more informed than the service provider, so it is not surprising that tourists are increasingly involved in the co-creation of experiences. In this sense, a significant number of tourists reject finished products, and appreciate and seek customized experiences (Pine et al. Gilmore 1999). Creative tourism is precisely a form of tourism based on experience, and the focus of tourism activity is on experience creation instead of service provider.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.adriagate.com/Hrvatska-hr/Svjjetionici-Hrvatska>, an offer that includes 10 lighthouses along the entire Adriatic coast.

It is necessary to emphasize in particular what can be found in creative tourism and to highlight the difference between the elite and elite travel and exclusive<sup>3</sup> travel, which helps create experiences in a rural environment by water, where there may not be electricity, but only solar energy, and reaching the accommodation facility or a smaller camping or glamping resort will take place on horseback, bike or boat. Exclusivity in creating experiences through creative tourism may include an exclusive offer where the treehouse is by the river or lake, or a gazebo where a wealthy manager may spend a weekend with his or her children without cell phones or harmful radiation. The fact that there is no cell phone signal in particular will be valued and it will be viewed as an added value. Such exclusive accommodation facilities made of ecological materials and designed in accordance with tradition are especially interesting for modern glamping where the design of the accommodation itself gives a special atmosphere and opportunity to stay in nature in the traditional way.

#### **5.4. Fishing tourism**

The tourist offer of Croatia in the post-corona period, especially on the continent and rural areas along water can be accelerated and made especially attractive through another form of tourism, i.e. fresh water fishing tourism. Educating and involving the local population of the destination in fishing tourism could achieve positive results, as fishing would no longer be considered as an occasional source of food, but as a sustainable source of tourism product and supply, if well managed. Since sport fishing is one of the most popular forms of recreation, fishing tourism on fresh waters has exceptional potential in Croatia. In most cases, it is a passive activity that does not require great physical effort and investment in equipment. According to the European Anglers Association, there were about 21 million sport anglers in the countries of Central and Western Europe in 2003. According to the same source, the socio-demographic profile of sport anglers on trips is mostly men, over 40 years of age, but they are increasingly joined by women.

Anglers who travel beyond the place of permanent residence mostly have higher purchasing power and financially invest a significant amount in equipment and travel, as such, they are a highly respected type of tourist. The most common motif of sport anglers is the desire to stay in nature. Fishing tourism is in line with the objectives of sustainable development of the European Union fisheries sector and the promotion and development of such activities is financed through various components of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF [Europski fondovi.eu](https://europa.eu/euromaritime/)). Good examples have already been launched and this is an opportunity to highlight one of the most potent for the period ahead. Balkan Fly Tour is an organization launched in 2020 ([Flydrimmers.com](https://www.flydrimmers.com/)) and the goal of the organization is to promote fly fishing and fishing tourism primarily in Croatia, but also in neighbouring countries.

## **6. EXAMPLE OF RURAL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT BY WATER KRIŽNICA RIVER ISLAND**

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<sup>3</sup> *Elite* derives from the French verb *élire*, which means 'to choose'. Elites are, in this sense, selected, minority groups, which constitute the most prominent and respected in society, people with the highest reputation, recognition, influence or wealth within their reach are counted among the elites. <https://hr.encyclopedia-titanica.com/significadode-elite>

Križnica is a river island and one of the most developed meanders of the Drava River, which with its flower shape is an easily recognizable symbol of this part of its course. It is a space bounded by the Croatian-Hungarian border and the Drava River. Here, the Drava also forms meanders in a small area, in large curves that are almost absent from Austria to the mouth into the Danube.

The Križnica has the shape of a flower with 5 petals, and within the island there is another island - Širinski otok.. Since 2008, Križnica is located within the “Mura-Drava Regional Park” (preventive protection). Due to the special value for biodiversity conservation, this area is also included in the ecological network of the Republic of Croatia (NATURA 2000<sup>4</sup>). It is very important to point out that Križnica is a part of the UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura Drava Danube. This is certainly a special invitation for tourists who have a highly developed environmental awareness and who want to experience the "phenomenon of water and meandering" through personal experience. Križnica thus becomes a Drava oasis and a kind of temple of ecological tourism with significant resources. One unit where, especially through educational ecological tourism and especially interpretations and tours, all the examples and phenomena that the river can create can be experienced and thus become a “home” for different species of fish and birds.

There is a great role for local people who strive to maintain creativity in forming identity and authenticity, and are particularly active in protecting natural values and preserving biodiversity.! Križnica is connected to the shore by cable ferry and a suspension bridge, and every day the cable ferry operator and his colleagues transport cars, locals and schoolchildren who go to school in Pitomača. The suspension pedestrian bridge has an interesting story and crossing it is a kind of adventure. Numerous activities are offered for sports and recreational enthusiasts. Particularly interesting and favourable opportunities are available for different clubs where one can bring to training camp entire football, handball or other teams. There available is rafting and volleyball.

Also worthy of mention are the existing manifestations such as *Veliki skok* (The Big Jump) by the bridge in Križnice should also be highlighted. The manifestation is part of the action *Big Jump*, in which tens of thousands of people across Europe jump into rivers and lakes to raise public awareness of the need to protect European waters.

Visitor Centre is a project worth 15.5 million kuna, whose lead partner is the Municipality of Pitomača and will be open in June 2022. This centre is primarily developing as a meeting place where the destination Križnica thus becomes an area for travellers to socialize and an area of communication – travellers and hosts, travellers and their co-travellers, whether they are family, colleagues, friends or new acquaintances met on the road. Workshops and school in nature programs will be organized, which is a strong momentum for educational tourism among other special forms of tourism. Contents such as painting, photography, lectures and workshops on birdwatching, protected flora, the phenomenon of water, etc. will be offered. The entire area of the Centre will be accessible to people with disabilities and reduced mobility, and will have educated tourist guides and animators at their disposal. All these creative contents are a good basis for team-building programmes and incentive programmes for all those corporations and companies that respect ecologically sustainable development and, at the same time, want to become innovative and original and, of course, trendy through

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<sup>4</sup> Professional basis for the designation of the Mura-Drava in the Republic of Croatia as a regional park (State Institute for Nature Protection, Zagreb 2009)

their brand communication. The Visitor Centre in Križnica plans (Pitomača, hr) numerous facilities, including a solar-powered train, a small lake, a white-tailed eagle's nest, an amphitheatre, hiking and biking trails, a research station and recreational and tourist facilities.

The Drava River, with its restless temperament and whims, is one of the greatest natural-geographical values of Europe and Croatia (Čavrak 2003). This is a mid-stream area where it is restless, fast, meandering, and cuts into its riverbed. Of particular interest is the meandering, and the related terms in a semiotic and symbolic sense have a fascinating meaning (Jezikoslovac.hr), so the Drava thus gains a deeper mythical meaning. It is interesting to point out only some meandering concepts that speak more than words: oscillation, movement, flow, variation, circling, permeation, wandering, intertwining, interplay, sliding, coexistence, intertwining, rippling, runoff, flowing, equilibration, branching, wobbling, chaining, swirling, crossing, constriction, movement, flickering, curving, intertwining, juxtaposing, pulsing...(kontekst.io).

## 7. CONCLUSION

A network of stakeholders within water-related rural tourism stakeholders should be networked to establish channels of communication and cooperation between stakeholders and the local community that share common interests. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to create various forms of support such as joint publications, conferences, meetings, etc. It is necessary to systematically develop awareness and knowledge of the interests and roles of partners within the interpretative destination organism. The network will function if the possibilities and defined roles of each individual partner or stakeholder in this process are clear from the very beginning.

The orchestration of relations between all involved partners and stakeholders in the development of new activities and contents inspired by the attraction base of water is based on building quality relationships within the destination, trust and credibility.

It is encouraging to emphasize that interaction and evolution move non-linearly, so that small changes can lead to a cascade effect. Within the framework of the sustainability guarantee, according to Lekić (2013,2017,2021), it is essential to prefer initiatives of a smaller scale, rather than mega projects, and it was therefore necessary to create and implement lessons for local residents and stakeholders in tourism on the topic of local diversity. The added value of the creative development of rural tourism by the water in this manner is that it is also a platform for establishing partnerships through new and different creative forms of accommodation and networking of regions within Croatia, for abandoning the old way of behaving and adopting a new one. The local community will no longer be a supporting stakeholder, but the creator of the lifestyle and tourism that it desires.

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## **WATER AS A RESOURCE BASIS FOR THE METAMORPHOSIS OF RURAL TOURISM**

### **Abstract**

The global conception of sustainable development and the lack of awareness of sustainable development are important areas for reflection and action in many areas of life, and the change to the paradigmatic worldview is especially significant in the relationship between man and his environment. This paper will show the possibility of communicating in tourism from a wider perspective where the meaning of tourism cannot be sought in utilitarian facts and functions of travel, but more in terms of research and experience. Each year, on 22 March, World Water Day is celebrated, which was launched at the initiative of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This important date attempts to draw the world's attention to the importance of water and the management and maintenance of water resources. According to Eurostat, Croatia is the top country in the European Union in terms of drinking water supplies, ahead of Finland and Sweden. This data is particularly important for rural areas, which, through springs, rivers and lakes, is now a unique resource for creating new tourism experiences through the connection of special sustainable and transformative forms of tourism related to water and next to water. This paper presents suggestions and ways how the process of transformation can be carried out through the metamorphosis of rural tourism, and where the tourist attraction base through the element of water receives a special place. In this manner, water becomes a real resource for the creation of tourist experiences in rural areas. An added value is the recognition that tourism is a phenomenon and is associated with many activities and disciplines, and that the development of tourism is not a matter of inertia and fashion ability, but a thoughtful process that must be adaptable to all market conditions, especially the post-Covid period that awaits us.

**Keywords:** experience, water element, sustainable development, rural tourism, transformation

### **Romana Lekić, PhD**

College Professor,  
Edward Bernays University College,  
E-mail: romana.lekic@bernays.hr

### **Tena Franjić**

Cluster groups&events coordinator  
Hotel Group Hilton Worldwide Zagreb  
E-mail: tefranjic@gmail.com

### **Ružica Rašperić, MSc**

Lecturer  
Edward Bernays University College  
E-mail: rrasperic@gmail.com

# RURAL TOURISM IN THE SKADAR LAKE ZONE IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CHANGE

Tina Novaković  
Đordina Janković

## Abstract

At a time of global change - coronavirus pandemic, environmental pollution, rural tourism development today more than ever represents a chance for economic development and an opportunity to preserve essential elements important for sustainable tourism development in rural Montenegro.

Skadar Lake National Park is an area with exceptional potential for the development of rural tourism. Tourist entities as well as the local population, operating under the auspices of rural tourism, would recognize the need to preserve natural and cultural resources, which would contribute to reducing migration from rural areas of Montenegro, and returning part of the population to the countryside and at the same time it would represent an ideal response of the tourism industry to the challenges brought by the changes that are happening on a global level.

The aim of this paper is to consider the potentials and limitations for the development of rural tourism in the Skadar Lake National Park region, and to point out, based on the analysis of the attitudes of the local population, their readiness to return to the villages of this region through tourism, and thus contribute to the preservation of nature, cultural resources, traditions and start the trend of returning to rural life.

The paper includes secondary and primary research, where secondary research will be based on data from available bibliographic units, statistical data of MONSTAT - Statistical Office of Montenegro, while primary research will be based on descriptive statistical method of processing data collected through survey questionnaire, and relate to the collection of opinions and attitudes of the population living in rural areas around Skadar Lake and the population who emigrated from this area, and related to the contribution of rural tourism to preserving the elements that make up the rural environment and the possibility of their valorization.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, sustainable development, global change

## 1. TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Increasingly intensive development of tourism increases the impact on natural resources and social systems, and requires careful and continuous planning of tourist valorization of space, as well as the system of monitoring the condition of the environment and pollution. Sustainable and responsible management of tourism development is necessary if we want the tourism industry to survive and natural resources to be preserved.

### 1.1. Term, definition and characteristics of sustainable tourism

Tourism has a significant positive and negative impact on the natural, cultural and socio-economic environment. Its more intensive development has recognized the importance of applying the concept of sustainability and environmental protection. In response to the negative consequences of mass tourism, but also globalization, there is sustainable tourism, which can be simply described as a form of tourism that does not require major changes in space, especially in natural and cultural environments, and meets the needs of local people in terms of employment and providing income.

There are many definitions of sustainable tourism, however, most of them emphasize the balance and positive approach to activities, ie the use of resources without much negative impact on the environment. For example, a tour of Durmitor National Park and a boat or kayak ride on Black Lake or a bike around the lake, does not affect the environment, and brings income to both locals and the National Park, and at the same time tourists enjoy authentic and a unique experience. In this way, tourism encourages the development of local features, but also financial profit.

It is important to emphasize that the sustainable development of tourism is a continuous process, which requires constant consideration, research and development of new ways to preserve nature and make the offer diverse, creative and authentic.

One of the most popular definitions of sustainable tourism was given by the World Tourism Organization, which defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that fully takes into account its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, environment and receptive destinations" (UNWTO, <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>).

In essence, tourism can never be fully sustainable, given the fact that every industry has certain impacts. However, it can function in a way that makes it more sustainable to ensure the survival of the community and nature. Then, sustainable tourism would mean refocusing and adapting, or finding a balance between limits and use, so that continuous change, monitoring and planning will ensure tourism management. At the same time, planning must be long-term, at ten, twenty or more years (Sustaining tourism, <https://sustainabletourism.net/>).

Despite the forecast that tourism will be endangered by the coronavirus pandemic, relevant tourism institutions, such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and others, predict a dynamic growth rate in tourism, with the number of participants in international tourism in 2030 exceeding 1,800 million foreign tourists (Barjaktarović and Pindžo 2016). This and many other indicators of tourism development and strengthening further confirm the thesis that sustainable development is necessary.

## **1.2. Tourism and sustainable development goals**

Although not everything depends on tourism, tourism depends on everything (Sustaining tourism, <https://sustainabletourism.net/>). In order for tourism to ensure its existence, it must respect the principles of sustainable development, respectively, it must preserve the environment, but also the cultural and social basis of society. Otherwise, tourism would harm the resources that make up the essence of the tourism product.

Therefore, sustainable tourism should make optimal use of natural resources as a key element of its development. Sustainable tourism should respect the socio-cultural identity of the destination and protect the living and built cultural heritage and traditional values, but also contribute to understanding and tolerance between cultures. In addition, the important role of tourism is to provide stable jobs and long-term economic activities, to reduce poverty, to contribute to all stakeholders by bringing them social and economic benefits (UNWTO, <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>).

When dealing with problems that cause damage to natural and cultural resources, it is necessary to identify the causes and approach them through various policies and various initiatives. Thus, tourism has a significant role in achieving all 17 goals of sustainable development on which the universal Agenda 21 is based, as a development plan for the

next hundred years, which was adopted in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro by world leaders under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) put into effect in 2015, and represent a unique call to action to eradicate poverty, protect nature and ensure peace and prosperity for all, and tourism directly or indirectly contributes to their realization. In particular, tourism is included in the measures under Objectives 8, 12 and 14 (Tourism for SDGs, <https://tourism4sd.gs.org/tourism-for-sd-gs/tourism-and-sd-gs/>).

Picture no. 1. Sustainable development goals by 2030



Source: Tourism Development Strategy until 2025 with an action plan, Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro

The goal of the country should be to create such policies and business practices, and encourage consumer behavior, which can contribute to achieving the UN's sustainable development goals. All national and international strategic documents are based on UN strategic development goals (Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro, 2021). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is in charge of promoting responsible and sustainable tourism, which has determined tourism in the goals until 2030, as an effective remedy for their realization (Dražić 2020).

The World Tourism and Trade Council adopted Agenda 21 for the tourism industry in 1996, in an effort to help understand the challenges and tasks of today's tourism development, in order to meet the needs of protecting important cultural and natural assets that are key travel and tourism resources. Twelve goals of sustainable tourism have been defined, which relate to the economic well-being of the local community, through increasing the number of jobs, and thus social equality (Dražić 2020). Agenda 21 as an action plan for sustainable development is implemented globally, nationally and locally and it is the basis for the development of action plans of governments of all countries in the world.

Setting sustainable development goals is not enough, therefore, for a better future of humanity, joint action and partnerships at the global level are necessary.

### 1.3. Foundations of the policy of sustainable development of Montenegro

The foundations of Montenegro's sustainable development policy were laid with the adoption of the Constitution and the Declaration on the Ecological State in 1991. In July 2016, Montenegro adopted the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030 (NSSD), guided by the obligations arising from its membership in the United Nations and the need to strengthen the institutional system of an independent and economically stable state, which implements all the requirements of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development until 2030 (Public Policy, <https://javnepolitike.me/politika/odrzivi-razvoj/>).

The strategy defines a detailed plan for enabling progress in priority issues: Improving the state of human resources and strengthening social inclusion; Support for values, norms and patterns of behavior important for the sustainability of society; Preservation of natural capital; Introduction of green economy; Improving the management system for sustainable development and Financing sustainable development (Đurović et al. 2016). Within these priority areas, clearly defined goals have been set to determine further activities.

Montenegro's tourism development policy is reflected in the following goals of sustainable development of the UN Agenda until 2030 (Public Policy, <https://javnepolitike.me/politika/turizam/>):

- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth  
8.9. By the end of 2030, design and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities  
11.4. Strengthen efforts to protect and secure the world's cultural and natural heritage.
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production  
2.b Develop and implement tools to monitor the impact of sustainable development on sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- SDG 14: Life below water  
14.7. By the end of 2030, increase the economic benefits for small island developing states and the least developed countries based on the sustainable use of marine resources, also through sustainable management of fisheries, water management and tourism.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development, which implements all the requirements of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development until 2030, highlights the obligations in the field of tourism development policy where Montenegro, in terms of implementing NSSD and the accompanying action plan, committed until 2030 to (Public Policy, <https://javnepolitike.me/politika/turizam/>):

- Improves the local entrepreneurial infrastructure and business environment for the development of entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises (SDG

8.9.1), which mentions incentives for investors investing in tourism in the central and northern region of Montenegro through the model of tourism development zones, ie green investment in tourism.

- Improve the importance of culture as a fundamental value of spiritual, social and economic development that significantly improves the quality of life of citizens, but also to work to promote cultural tourism and achieve sustainable tourism with emphasis on cultural and eco tourism, as necessary through the development of cultural tourism and other forms of sustainable tourism, agriculture, crafts and creative industries (SDG 11 (11.4) and SDG 8 (8.9)) to establish sustainable use of cultural heritage.

#### **1.4. Global change as a challenge for sustainable tourism development**

Changes in tourism began to take place in the middle of the twentieth century, during the time when it was the privilege of the elite came to an end and when it became more accessible to the lower classes, as a mass phenomenon. The massiveness of tourism has contributed to the improvement of transport infrastructure, paid vacations or so-called social tourism and the globalization of the tourist market (Stojanović 2014).

Authors Gradinac and Jegdić (2016) note that globalization and tourism are closely related. The processes of globalization have a strong impact on the development of today's tourism, so the increasing need for information, air transport and all other modes of transport, the emergence of many new destinations on the market, increasing cultural and educational level of the population, new preferences and habits of tourists, resulted in business adjustments (taken from Milošević et al. 2017).

With advances and innovations in technology, increasing access to countries, more often movements of people, new, faster methods and techniques of communication and information, and many other changes taking place globally, new challenges are emerging, such as poverty, inequality, health inequality, climate change, peace and justice, destruction of natural and cultural resources, and many others. This is where sustainable development comes into play.

Tornka states that tourism as a global activity is considered one of the strongest drivers of development in the world, which requires special focus when choosing the appropriate approach when analyzing this activity (taken from Milošević et al. 2017). According to Milošević et al. (2017) the benefits of tourism development are numerous, and first visible through the employment of local population and the income it brings, and as a global activity, tourism is an important tool for economic development of industrial and underdeveloped countries. Thus, it recognizes the significant importance of its development in underdeveloped and sparsely populated places such as rural ones, and its role in reducing poverty and inequality.

The coronavirus pandemic, as a global challenge, highlighted the need for sustainable development, with results showing that countries that have made greater progress towards achieving sustainable development goals have been better able to cope with the crisis. The previously mentioned Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play a significant role here. For example, the success achieved in providing clean water (SDG 6), fewer people living in poor blocks (SDG 11), and reducing non-communicable diseases (SDG 3) make it easier to mitigate the risk of infection. In addition, better access to the Internet and smartphones (SDG 9) is helpful in communicating with the public (Health inequalities portal, <https://health-inequalities.eu/en/eu-beyond/global-action/>).

There are many other challenges posed by the coronavirus, it has restricted movement, many jobs have been abolished, and people have moved more within the borders of their state.

The recent past, present, and even certain forecasts for the future, show that the tourism industry will have to find ways to adapt to global phenomena outside the tourism sector, ie, global trends regarding demographic change, economic change and its impact, current political instability which affects tourist trends and destination choices.

Peace is necessary for tourism to take place. However, its development did not stop even during the war. Crises and wars not only affect tourism, but also affect trade, economy and other areas, encourage migration, etc.

The continuous emphasis on ethnic, national and religious differences is becoming more pronounced. This reality on a global level provokes various tensions. As a result, frequent political unrest and terrorist attacks are observed. Numerous political events that resulted in civil unrest, also influenced the tourist movements in them (Milošević et al. 2017). These events have resulted in an economic crisis and rising prices, and many tourists from emitting markets who wanted to travel will save money and spend with caution. Another important problem, caused by riots, is migration, as a problem that cannot be solved quickly, easily and simply. All this creates a feeling of insecurity among tourists and in this way, this issue becomes a great challenge for tourism.

It is known that climate and weather are an integral part of the tourist experience and that they affect the demand and satisfaction of tourists. Climate change can significantly affect tourism, and the most sensitive industry for climate change is the ski industry, as part of winter tourism (Racz 2020). Global change is affecting the entire world economy. In the field of tourism, there is a distinct sensitivity and the need to adapt. Especially because the contribution of the tourism industry to climate change is most noticeable in the sphere of transport, fossil fuels, accommodation, etc., which contributes to the global emission of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) gases (Milošević et al. 2017).

All the mentioned challenges, and many others, set a clear task, to learn more about the various changes that are happening globally, but also to find effective solutions that will lead to adjustments in the tourism business.

## **2. RURAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Sustainable development is such development that will use resources in a way that will preserve them for new generations. One of the alternative forms of tourism that can make a significant contribution to sustainable development is rural tourism

### **2.1. Rural tourism in the function of sustainable development**

Mass tourism has caused a number of negative effects for both socio-cultural and natural environment, and in response to this phenomenon, a large number of tourist destinations are turning to sustainable development through the development of alternative forms of tourism, especially in destinations with sensitive ecosystems and rural areas. The basis for the development of tourism in rural areas is the preserved natural and socio-cultural environment. Therefore, in a world that is constantly changing and advancing, the



management of rural tourism development must be an extremely carefully managed process, in order to preserve rurality itself.

According to Sharpley and Roberts (2004), rural tourism is directly related to the specific characteristics of rural areas and that the main motivation for visiting a village is to experience rurality. Pasinović M. (2006) emphasizes that in the offer of rural tourism accommodation must be in authentic style, not the one encountered in the hotel industry, which speaks of the need to preserve the traditional way of building in rural areas, so that accommodation facilities preserve their authenticity way were attractive to tourists coming from urban areas.

According to the authors Sagustfn at. al. (2011) the development of tourism in rural areas that will be sustainable in the long run should be planned in such a way as to ensure the preservation of local features of the developing area, which will ensure optimal use of natural resources and respect socio-cultural authenticity local communities, provides and stimulates the preservation of their culture, architectural and traditional values, providing all participants with socio-economic benefits (taken from Smolčić Jurdan at. al. 2018).

Tourism as a development strategy in rural communities contributes to a number of benefits such as: local employment, more favorable demographic trends, diversification or expansion of existing entities such as rural households, and also contributes to stabilizing their income, attracting finance and improving the environment and infrastructure, which means maintaining and improving the appearance of buildings and rural areas in general. (Petrić 2006).

Krajnović at. al. (2011) also state that the concept of sustainability in rural tourism implies the development and stimulation of support, understanding and sensitization of "decision makers", especially from local, regional and state level, but also other institutions responsible for long-term development of rural areas as well as a clear understanding of the fact that complete dependence on tourism is harmful and does not bring the desired results, so it is best to work towards diversifying the local rural economy and balancing between the development of rural tourism and other activities in rural areas.

## **2.2. Potentials and limitations for the development of rural tourism on Skadar Lake**

Skadar Lake has exceptional potential for tourism development, primarily due to the specific natural environment, cultural and historical heritage, traditional way of life and business of the local population, gastronomy, traditional way of building, events and local customs. Considering the natural potentials of Skadar Lake, the very fact that this area has the status of a National Park, speaks of its natural values. The Skadar Lake region covers three municipalities - Podgorica, Bar and Cetinje and has an extremely favorable geographical and traffic position, located near the most important roads and railways, airports in Podgorica and the Port of Bar.

There are several islands on the lake, the largest of which is Vranjina, where an attractive fishing village is located. This island, as well as the island of Lesendro, is connected to

the mainland by the construction of the Adriatic Highway and the Belgrade-Bar railway. In addition to these two, the larger islands are Moračnik, Beška, Starčevo, Grmožur, Kom, Velja and Mala Čakovica, and on some of them there are important cultural and historical monuments. In addition to the above, there are other important and extremely attractive tourist locations such as Žabljak Cmojevića, Rijeka Cmojevića, Virpazar and a large number of fishing villages with traditional style of construction, traditional way of life and business of the local population. It is also held in this area through events that represent significant tourist potential (Radović 2010).

Skadar Lake is also known for a large number of bird species (264) that live or come here (Radojičić 2002). The Skadar Lake region is rich in wineries, has a specific gastronomic offer, and the population of the settlements located in the vicinity of Skadar Lake has a specific way of life and business of the local population. Among the traditional jobs in the villages of this area, the most important are fishing, fruit and vegetable growing, grape growing, wine production, brandy production, beekeeping and honey production, production of domestic juices, mowing, haymaking, livestock, etc.

Taking into account the migratory trends that characterize the continuous decline of the population in this area, it is clear that there is a danger of extinction of these traditional values and local characteristics, and efforts must be made to stop the emigration and preserve local culture, and the development of rural tourism can play a significant role in terms of its preservation.

There are 17 villages in the Skadar Lake National Park (Đurašević 2014) in which the number of inhabitants continuously decreased from 1953 to 2011, so in 1953 the total number of inhabitants in the villages belonging to the Skadar Lake National Park was 4,578, while in 2011, the number of inhabitants in these villages dropped to 814 (MONSTAT 2005 and 2011). The main causes of the emigration of the population are the insufficient development of the village as well as the low standard of living, that is, the inability of the population to earn enough high income on their property that can provide them with decent living conditions.

The development of tourism can contribute to higher employment of the local population and bring additional income on various bases, from income from renting accommodation, food and beverage services, to selling local products, souvenirs and income from other services consumed by tourists. In addition, other effects of tourism on the local economy should be considered, such as the promotion of agricultural production and the possibility of marketing agricultural products on the farm itself.

Until now, economic development in the Skadar Lake region has taken place spontaneously, without a carefully guided and controlled approach from the level of competent institutions in various segments of economic and social life. Therefore, there are a number of examples of negligent use of natural resources, negligent disposal of waste materials and construction of facilities that deviate from the ambient whole of the village. For this reason, it is necessary to take steps to stop such trends, through penal policy and educational programs in order to change the awareness of the local population about the value and importance of natural and cultural resources, traditions and the need to preserve all elements of rural environment. In addition to educational programs and

a consistent penal policy, planned and carefully managed sustainable tourism development is one of the most important ways to valorize resources in rural areas.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE LOCAL POPULATION AND THE POPULATION THAT EMIGRATED ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE SKADAR LAKE ZONE**

For the purpose of analyzing the attitudes of the population related to the development of rural tourism in the Skadar Lake region, a survey was conducted on a sample of 88 respondents who are residents of villages belonging to Skadar Lake NP and respondents who are now residents of urban and suburban settlements, and earlier they moved out of the mentioned villages. The total number of inhabitants in the villages around Skadar Lake according to the last census from 2011 is 814.

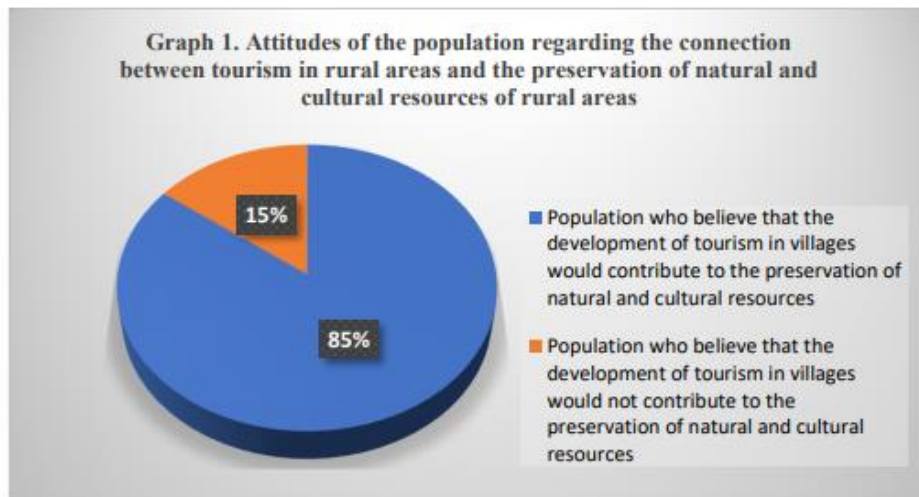
#### **3.1. Results of the research**

Using interrogation as a method of data collection, through a scientific survey sent by e-mail, the research aimed to point out the need to develop sustainable tourism in the rural area of Skadar Lake and the importance of rural tourism in revitalizing the village.

The research surveyed 54 males and 34 females, as a planned sample, of different educational structures, namely 31 persons with completed secondary school, 8 persons with completed higher education and 49 persons with completed university. The research involved the population living in the villages around Skadar Lake (17 people), the population who emigrated from these villages and now live in suburban settlements (19 people) and the evicted population from these villages who now live in the city (52 people). Out of 88 respondents, as many as 85 have some property in the villages, 3 respondents own property that they do not cultivate, 8 respondents own property that they cultivate, 11 respondents own a house and as many as 63 respondents own a house with property in the village.

The attitudes of the population regarding the connection between rural tourism and the preservation of natural and cultural resources, the preservation of traditional lifestyles and local customs in the rural areas around Skadar Lake are extremely important, as shown in Graph 1 and Graph 2.

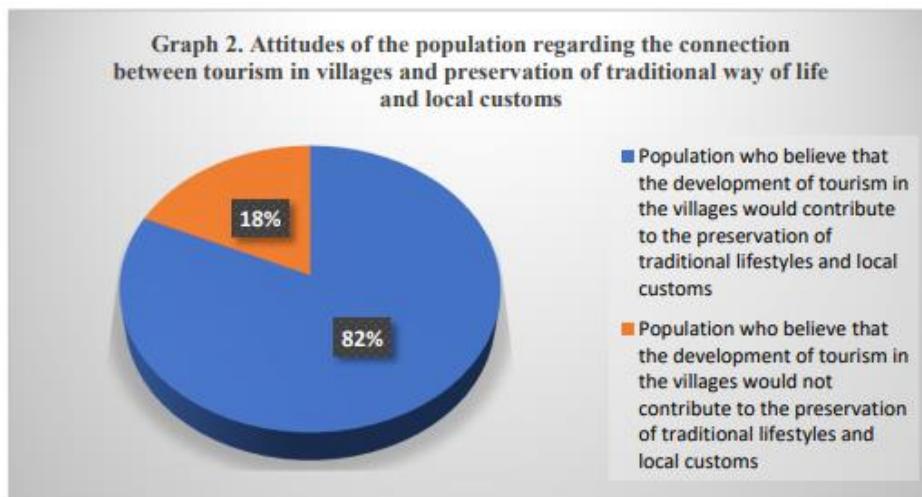
**Graph 1. Attitudes of the population regarding the connection between tourism in rural areas and the preservation of natural and cultural resources of rural areas**



Source: Author's processing

From Graph 1 it can be concluded that many more respondents (75) who believe that the development of rural tourism would contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural resources of rural areas than the number of respondents (13) who do not think that the development of rural tourism would contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural resources.

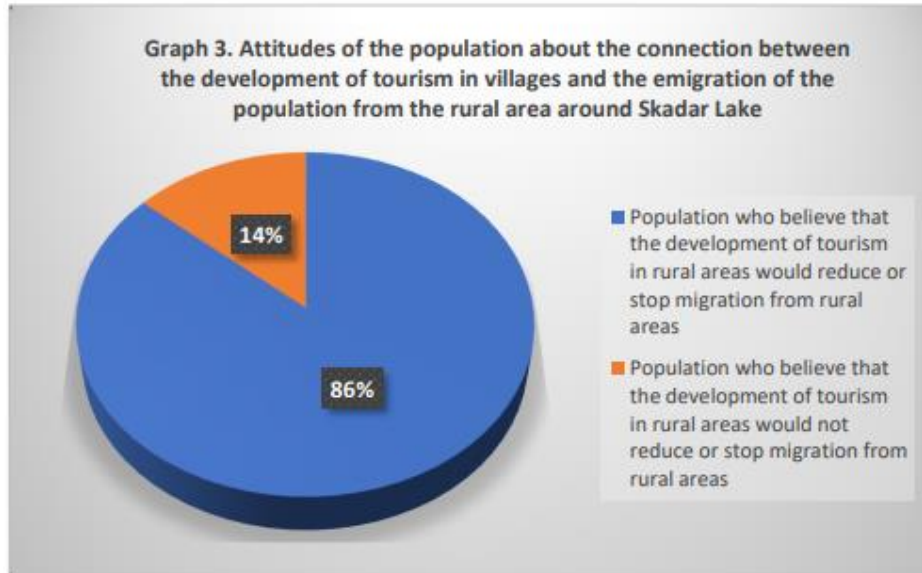
**Graph 2. Attitudes of the population regarding the connection between tourism in villages and preservation of traditional way of life and local customs**



Source: Author's processing

It can be concluded from Graph 2 that, similarly to Graph 1, many more respondents (72) believe that the development of rural tourism would preserve traditions and local customs than the number of respondents (16) who do not think that rural tourism development would preserve the mentioned cultural values.

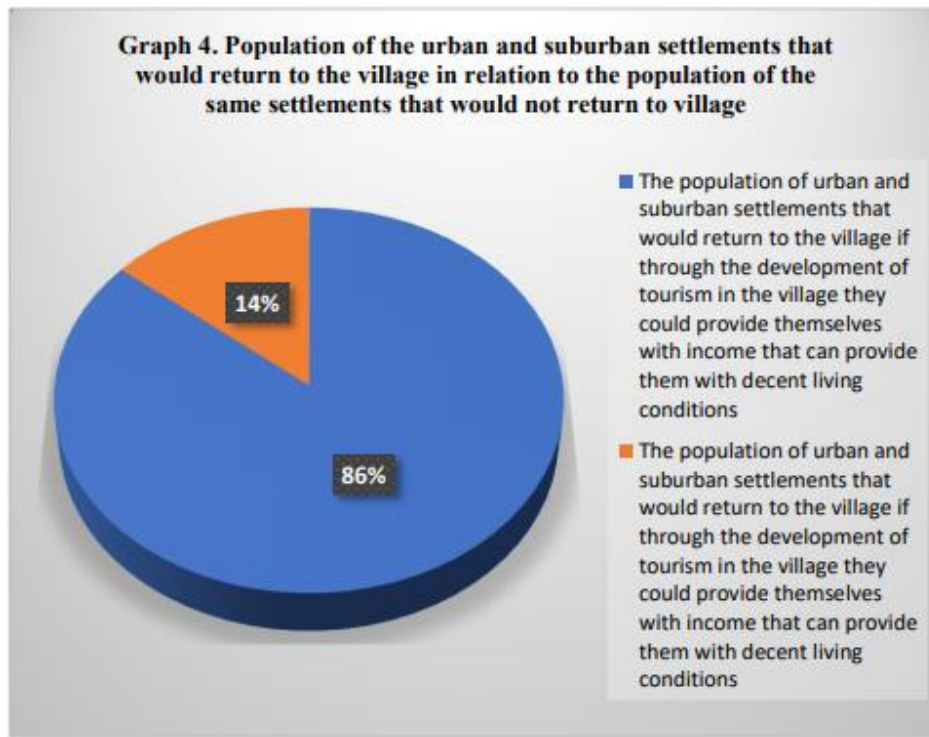
Most of the respondents believe that the development of tourism would contribute to the maturing of awareness among the local population about the importance of preserving natural cultural resources, traditions and authentic customs. Also, most of them believe that the development of tourism would revive local businesses, domestic production, local crafts, etc.



Source: Author's processing

Graph 3 shows the ratio of attitudes of the population who believe that the development of tourism in rural areas would stop or reduce migratory movements from rural areas and the number of residents who do not think the same, and the number is 76, which is significantly more than the number of respondents (12) to stop the development of rural tourism or reduce migratory movements from rural areas.

**Graph 4. Population of the urban and suburban settlements that would return to the village in relation to the population of the same settlements that would not return to village**



Source: Author's processing

From Graph 4 it can be concluded that a much higher number of inhabitants (61) of urban and suburban settlements who would return to the villages if they could provide themselves with decent living conditions through the development of tourism, than those residents who would not return (10). Respondents identify the lack of conditions for decent living and earnings in rural areas as the main reason for emigrating from rural areas. Most of them, in addition to the key reason for increasing income, see the possibility of a healthier and better lifestyle, the possibility of practicing various recreational activities, the possibility of producing domestic agricultural products, as well as the possibility of developing their own business.

In a sample of 88 respondents, 37 of them stated that they are engaged in rural tourism, and 51 answered that it is not an activity they are engaged in. Thirty-six respondents who are engaged in rural tourism, stated that they have their own accommodation capacities that they rent out, and that is the largest percentage of houses and apartments, with a capacity of up to 10 people.

Most of the respondents who offer tourist services stated that in the time before the coronavirus pandemic, they offered accommodation, food and drinks, ie domestic products.

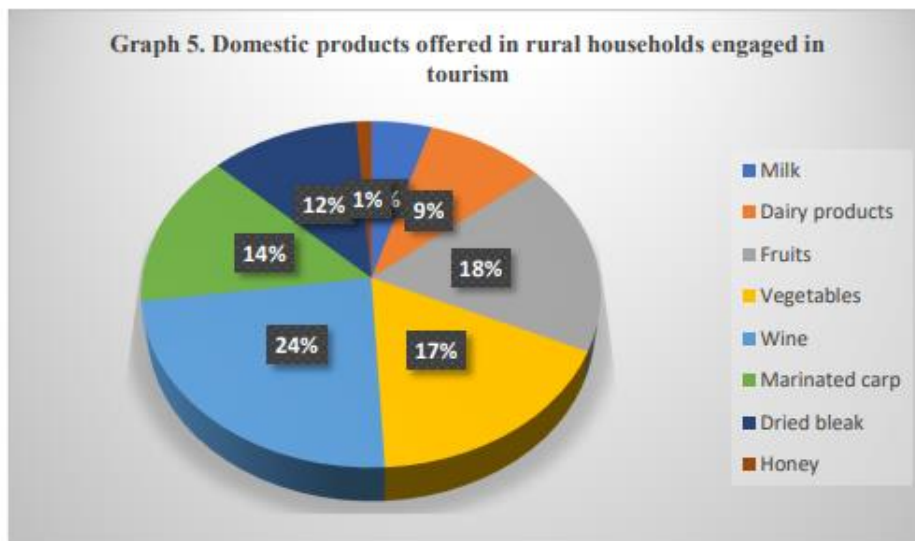
When asked "Did you introduce any changes in the offer during the coronavirus pandemic?", Out of 34 respondents, 11 of them stated that they did not introduce changes

in their offer, while the rest stated that the novelty in their offer was: boat ride on lake, walking tours, planting and working in the field, renting kayaks, bicycles, personal training services, yoga. This data emphasize activities in nature, which are a perfect response to the changes taking place in the global market, and concern the current pandemic, but are also a significant driver of reducing the harmful effects of mass detentions in urban areas and mass tourism.

To the question "Do you have a proposal for activities to better cope with the changes brought about by the corona virus and current developments in the international market?" states and financially boosting businesses. In addition, they emphasize the need to introduce more individual activities in nature, as well as the introduction of innovative business ideas such as api chambers, which is conducive to sustainable development.

The results of the survey also show that domestic products such as milk and dairy products, fruits, vegetables, wine, fish, honey, juices, brandies, and other products are highly valued by tourists, so they are happy to include them in their offer. This is also shown by the results in the following chart.

Graph 5. Domestic products offered in rural households engaged in tourism



Source: Author's processing

The promotion of such and the contents mentioned in the previous analyzes defines a new segment of the tourist offer of Montenegro, and thus meets the requirements of sustainable development.

#### 4. CONCLUSION



In accordance with the policy of sustainable development that has been continuously promoted at the global level over the years, respecting the fact that the country, ie the natural environment and its preservation is primarily important for human survival, but also extremely important for tourism development which would disappear with its degradation, it is necessary to adapt to the new trends brought by the modern age. In that sense, and through the research that was conducted in the rural area of Skadar Lake, the crucial role of rural areas as a catalyst for sustainable development is recognized.

The analysis of the conducted research showed a significant percentage of respondents who showed interest in dealing with rural tourism, and that they have the desire and spatial capacity to start a new business. In this way, their creativity is encouraged when creating an offer, but there is also optimism, which is poorly recognized in previous initiatives, and which starts small businesses on which a significant part of the economic development of Montenegro is based.

The results also show that in this way more sustainable directions in the field of tourism are promoted, as an ideal response to mass tourism, and a strong willingness to engage in outdoor activities based on sustainable means such as bushcraft, kayaking, bird watching, cycling, walking, and in this way a diversified, unique offer of Montenegro is created as a destination that offers unique experiences.

Rural development, that is, revitalizing and improving the work of households, will weaken the impacts of changes in the global market, such as infectious diseases, economic crisis, climate change in overcrowded environments, and many others, by emphasizing accommodation in small groups, diverse offer of activities on agricultural land, increased production of milk and dairy products, fruits, vegetables, honey, wine, use of poorly used resources. World practice is also proof that this model is extremely successful and environmentally friendly, and Montenegrin practice, ie research results, show that the right time to act is right now.

The development of rural tourism will result in stopping migration movements from rural areas as well as returning part of the already emigrated population to villages, which is confirmed through research by carefully selected respondents, who express a desire to return. The revitalization of rural areas will result in positive economic, social and developmental effects on society as a whole and the state.

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**RURAL TOURISM IN THE SKADAR LAKE ZONE IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CHANGE**

**Tina Novaković**  
**Đordina Janković**

**Abstract**

At a time of global change - coronavirus pandemic, environmental pollution , rural tourism development today more than ever represents a chance for economic development and an opportunity to preserve essential elements important for sustainable tourism development in rural Montenegro.

Skadar Lake National Park is an area with exceptional potential for the development of rural tourism. Tourist entities as well as the local population, operating under the auspices of rural tourism, would recognize the need to preserve natura! and cultural resources , which would contribute to reducing migration from rural areas of Montenegro, and returning part of the population to the countryside and at the same time it would represent an ideal response of the tourism industry to the challenges brought by the changes that are happening on a global level.

The aim of this paper is to consider the potentials and limitations for the development of rural tourism in the Skadar Lake National Park region, and to poi nt out, based on the analysis of the attitudes of the local population, their readiness to return to the villages of this region through tourism, and thus contribute to the preservation of nature, cultural resources , traditions and start the trend of returning to rural life.

The paper includes secondary and primary research , where secondary research will be based on data from available bibliographic units, statistical data of MONSTAT - Statistical Office of Montenegro, while primary research will be based on descriptive statistical method of processing data collected through survey questionnaire , and relate to the collection of opinions and attitudes of the popu lation living i n rural areas around Skadar Lake and the population who emigrated from this area, and related to the contribution of rural tourism to preserving the elements that make up the rural environment and the possibility of their valorization.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, sustainable development, global change

**Tina Novaković**, mr. se  
Mediterranean University Podgorica, Montenegro Tourism School  
tina.novakovic@unimediteran.net

**Đordina Janković**, spec. sci  
Mediterranean University Podgorica, Montenegro Tourism School  
djordjina.jankovic@unimediteran.net

## **SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS STORYTELLING**

**Mladen Marinac**  
**Martin Golob**

### **Abstract**

Besides one of the oldest forms of teaching, having numerous beneficial effects upon the learning process, storytelling is also an indispensable marketing tool in today's tourism. Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to unveil stories while fueling the audience's imagination. Basically, it is a mode of human communication and, thus, pervasive in everyone's life. Moreover, more and more studies stress the bond between storytelling and resilience, which seems crucial in the era of the coronavirus pandemic. As a marketing tool, storytelling can be used to create consumption value for consumers, both in branding various tourist destinations, where it is most commonly used, but also in creating a sensory experience for products that usually lack branding, such as agricultural products. Given the multifaceted nature of storytelling, the aim of our study was to explore views upon storytelling both as an educational and marketing tool. Therefore, the study investigated Sustainable Agritourism students' and teachers' experiences and their attitudes towards storytelling. To do so, an online questionnaire was administered in the winter semester of the academic year 2021/2022 at one Croatian institution of higher education. The findings suggest students and teachers are familiar with storytelling theoretically, however, they do not seem to use it to a great extent in a tertiary education setting or for marketing purposes. Both students and teachers are aware of its potential use in teaching and marketing. The majority of the participants believe storytelling improves the quality of education and they deem it is an important marketing tool. Therefore, further research should focus on implementing storytelling in different classes and measuring its effects upon the teaching environment.

**Keywords:** agritourism students, agritourism teachers, marketing method, storytelling, teaching

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid changes in the tourism and hospitality industry represent a challenge for all educators working in the sector. Students need to get the knowledge and competencies relevant on the market which also involves transferable skills. Namely, workers in this sector often need to display a range of emotions, which are frequently omitted from the curriculum in favor of more tangible goals. What is more, offering high-quality services and dealing with a range of factors is becoming more and more relevant. Thus, workforce in tourism needs to receive diverse training, using different pedagogical strategies. To address the issue of diverse training needed, there is an increase in the number of higher education degrees in the industry (Bury 2019). In line with this, the professional study program of Sustainable Agritourism was launched in the academic year 2018/2019, which was part of the program goal "Improving Quality in Higher Education through the Croatian Qualifications Framework" (Dudaš et al. 2016).

Despite the growth of the numbers and diversity of study programs there is still a perceived lack of adequately skilled labor. Improving students' personal development, communication skills and attitudes is the goal of the industry and introducing storytelling in the classroom is one of the ways to keep education in the tourism industry up to date (Bury 2019). Namely, no matter who the audience is, narratives are always an effective tool to engage people in the content (Verdet et al. 2020).

This paper aims to investigate both teachers' and students' familiarity with storytelling in order to lay the groundwork for its further implementation in the educational process. Firstly, it explores storytelling as a teaching method that could improve teaching quality and add another layer in activities used in the classroom (Davidson 2004). Secondly, it examines marketing as a method in marketing courses that could improve students' future efforts once they start their business or get employed is another. In the next chapters, literature overview is presented followed by the methodology and the results of the study.

## **2. STORYTELLING**

### **2. 1. Storytelling as an educational tool**

“Storytelling is the oldest form of teaching “. Although it has long been recognized as a pedagogical strategy, it has been used more frequently to teach children than in tertiary education. Nevertheless, learning through storytelling for both children and adults is in accordance with the “socio-cultural view of education, constructivist theory, and the anthropological tradition.” What is more, neuroscientists agree that our brain learns best through storytelling (Nguyen et al. 2015).

Storytelling is used and researched in teaching different academic fields from tourism, nursing, language teaching, interpretation, science etc. Research on storytelling as a pedagogical tool focuses on different aspects of storytelling in the classroom, some of the issues investigated are: use (Dujmović 2006; Napier 2014), comparison to other means of communication (Glonek and King 2014), attitudes (Bury 2019; Davidson 2004; Lordly 2007; Yocom et al. 2020).

In terms of storytelling use in teaching English, different methods and suggestions may be adapted to different grades and proficiency levels depending on the literature chosen (Dujmović 2006). Similarly, in teaching interpretation students, Napier (2014) discovered that experienced students find it useful because they can share the experiences from their professional settings. Also, Napier (2014) believes even less experienced students might find it beneficial because students could tell stories from their personal lives instead. As to the comparison of storytelling to other means of communication, Glonek and King (2014) likened narratives to expository presentations (e.g, PowerPoint) in terms of retention and corroborated that there are advantages to narrative form when it comes to instructional communication. Studies have also explored students' attitudes toward storytelling and discovered that it increases the level of their participation, links practice to theory, and helps them retain information (Davidson 2004). Similarly, Lordly (2007) informed on the positive outcomes of using storytelling in the learning environment and emphasized that storytelling addresses the emotional side of professional issues. Bury (2019) corroborated the abovementioned findings in the realm of teaching in tourism and hospitality and identified positive effects of storytelling on classroom activities, that is: more opportunities for communication, enhancing student's understanding of classmates, materials, the industry in general, their English language abilities and confidence when using English. In line with previous research, Yocom et al

(2020) confirmed positive experiences of nursing students towards storytelling where some shared, they would like to use digital stories in the classroom even more frequently. In relation to teachers' attitudes, Peleg et al (2017) report on high school chemistry teachers' reluctance to use storytelling in their classes given that they are science teachers who communicate facts, and they believe stories are something more suitable for language, music, and art classes. On the other hand, storytelling has been widely used in nurse education (Wood 2014), therefore, Attenborough, and Abbott (2020, 9) discovered the reasons why lecturers do it: "credibility with students, enjoyment, describing one's own good practice and re-connecting with nursing practice. "

## **2. 2. Storytelling as a marketing tool**

Storytelling is nowadays commonly accepted as a viable marketing tool and a technique to further promote company brands, products and services, tourism destinations and many more. Whitley (2018) states three reasons why storytelling should be a priority for marketers: enabling marketers to develop a deeper connection with the audience, representing a powerful learning method, and engaging consumers in a fragmented media world. The consumer is the primary focus of marketers today, and in the last decade, consumers no longer value only product or service quality, but they want an experience of emotions and enrichment of their senses to go with it. Hence, storytelling is used by marketers more and more to gain such emotional response from potential consumers (Pan and Chen 2019). One such use could be applied to agricultural products, agritourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, and other agriculture enterprises as well. It is for this reason important to explore agritourism students' attitudes toward storytelling as a marketing tool, to better understand their views and needs and to possibly incorporate storytelling activities in class, all for their future use in marketing their agricultural products or services. Today's consumer habits regarding consumption have changed in numerous ways, especially toward food safety. Consumers want to eat healthy food, and they often choose to do so by obtaining such food from local or organic sources. Related to this, small family farms and agritourism can use storytelling to connect more easily with their potential consumers and to brand their products. The effectiveness of the story offers more information regarding consumers' perceived physical quality. It can be said that it adds value to the product or service offered (Yueh and Zheng 2019). In a professional sense, a story today can be told digitally using social media, blogs, vlogs, public relations, online marketing, e-mail, and search (Pulizzi 2012) which, actually enables small family farms and agritourism business to participate on the market more easily and equally, the power of the content and of the story is what really counts. Agriculture enterprises can use storytelling, today via internet to control the costs, to build their own brands or even become icons in a sense, as proposed by Holt (2003) although on a much smaller scale, locally or even regionally. Earlier research (Butcher 2018) showed that consumers often associate themselves with the brands they consume, so marketers today have to carefully create or adopt stories that represent the brand values accurately in order to properly identify with their target market segment. Potential use of micro-branding for agriculture enterprises, especially digitally, are enormous. "Telling a good story is like a communication tool, in which not by forcing people to believe in, but encourage them to conceive the things you have told objectively by their personal feeling"(Vu and Medina 2014).

### 3. RESEARCH

The aim of the study was to explore views upon storytelling both as an educational and marketing tool. Therefore, the study investigated Sustainable Agritourism students' and teachers' experiences and their attitudes towards storytelling. To do so, an online questionnaire was administered in the winter semester of the academic year 2021/2022 at one Croatian institution of higher education. The research questions which guided the study are as follows:

RQ1: What are agritourism teachers' (perceived) attitudes towards storytelling as an educational tool?

RQ2: What are agritourism students' (perceived) attitudes towards storytelling as an educational tool?

RQ3: What are agritourism students' (perceived) attitudes towards storytelling as a marketing tool?

#### 3.1. Methods

The sample in this study is a convenience sample comprising students who attend and teachers who teach at the professional study program of Sustainable Agritourism at the Polytechnic of Rijeka. The study was conducted in the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021. A total of 21 teachers (80.8% of all teachers at the program) completed the questionnaire (male=42.9%, female=57.7%). In relation to their scientific area, a third (33.3%) belongs to social sciences and the same percentage (33.3%) represents biotechnical sciences. Other scientific areas encompass humanities (9.5%), natural sciences (9.5%), technical sciences (9.5%), and biomedicine and health (4.8%). In terms of their age, 42.9% of teachers represent the age group from 37 to 47, and the same percentage (42.9%) belongs to the 48-60 age group. Less than 10% of teachers (9.5%) are more than 61-year-old and less than 5% of them (4.8%) are in the 26-36 age group.

Table 1. Teachers' age groups

Age Group	N	%
18-25	0	0%
26-36	1	5%
37-47	9	43%
48-60	9	43%
61+	2	10%
Total	21	100%

Source: study results

Table 2. Teachers' gender

Gender Group	N	%
Male	9	43%
Female	12	57%

Toatl	21	100%
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Source: study results

**Table 3. Teachers` academic field**

Science Field	N	%
Natural Sciences	2	10%
Biotechnical Sciences	7	33%
Social Sciences	7	33%
Technical Sciences	2	10%
Humanity Sciences	2	10%
Bimedical sciences & Health	1	5%
Total	21	100%

Source: study results

As to the students, 26 students of the professional study program completed the questionnaire (female=73.1%, male=26.9%). More than 80% of the students belong to the 18-25 age group, which is followed by those in the age group (37-47), and finally 7.7% of them who are in the 26-36 age group.

**Table 4. Students` age**

Agre Group	N	%
18-25	21	81%
26-36	2	8%
37-47	3	12%
48-60	0	0%
61+	0	0%
Total	26	100%

Source: study results

**Table 5. Students` gender**

Gender Group	N	%
Male	7	27%
Female	19	73%
Total	26	100%

Source: study results

Two sets of data were collected using the adapted version of the Tourism English Storytelling Questionnaire by Bury (2019) to suit the Croatian context and the purpose of the study. Two questionnaires were administered online, one to students and one to teachers both of which were designed and answered in Croatian.

The student questionnaire consisted of three sections: biodata, attitudes towards storytelling as a teaching method, and attitudes towards storytelling as a marketing tool.



More precisely, the students rated their attitudes towards storytelling on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*I completely disagree*) to 5 (*I completely agree*). Two questions explored their attitudes towards introducing storytelling as a classroom activity and as a form of assessment, that is, students chose from a range of emotions (*interested, excited, happy, worried, nervous, surprised, indifferent*) and could add any additional emotion to the list. Lastly, one open-ended question elicited students' comments on storytelling as a teaching or marketing tool.

The teacher questionnaire comprised two sections: biodata (age, gender, and scientific area) and storytelling in teaching. Teachers' attitudes toward storytelling as a marketing tool were not investigated as teachers are less likely to use storytelling in practical marketing efforts in the market. Teacher rated statements on storytelling in teaching on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*I completely disagree*) to 5 (*I completely agree*). Also, the same two questions explored their attitudes if storytelling would be introduced, that is, would be used in assessment and teachers could have checked different emotions (*interested, excited, happy, worried, nervous, surprised, indifferent*) or could have added another emotion. Finally, one open-ended question investigated additional comments on storytelling in teaching.

Descriptive statistics of variables were utilized to describe data from the questionnaires. The statistical significance of differences in preferences between students and teachers where a p-value smaller than 0.05 indicates the statistical significance of the results.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Teacher's perceived attitudes toward storytelling

When asked if they were familiar with the method of storytelling, teachers responded positively. The majority of them had already heard about the method (Mean=3.52, Median=4, Mode=5). The teachers were, to a lesser extent, familiar with the same method used for marketing and promotional purposes (Mean=3.05, Median=3, Mode=5). The most frequent response when asked if they had already used storytelling as a method in the teaching process was that they had used it often (Mean=3.19, Median=3, Mode=4). The claim *I would like to use storytelling in the teaching process* got the second highest grade (Mean=3.95, Median=4, Mode=5), right after their willingness to learn more about storytelling as a method regardless of its use (Mean=4.19, Median=4, Mode=5). The claim *Using storytelling in teaching would facilitate mastering of the learning outcomes* received a general positive view as most participants believed it would help them to a greater extent (Mean=3.95, Median=4, Mode=5). Finally, *Using storytelling as a teaching method related would improve the quality of teaching* was rated highly with the most frequent answer being that it would improve it to a greater extent (Mean=3.90, Median=4, Mode=5).

Table 6. Teachers' storytelling attitudes – general

Statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
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I am familiar with storytelling as a teaching method.	3.52	4	5	1.50
I am familiar with storytelling as a marketing tool.	3.05	3	5	1.75
I use storytelling in teaching.	3.19	3	4	1.29
I would like to use storytelling in the teaching process.	3.95	4	5	1.12
I want to learn more about storytelling despite its use.	4.19	4	5	1.08
Using storytelling in teaching would facilitate mastering of the learning outcomes.	3.95	4	5	1.12
Using storytelling as a teaching method would improve the quality of teaching.	3.90	4	5	1.14

Source: authors

As to storytelling as a teaching method in relation to other methods teachers deemed storytelling would be more fun (Mean= 4.0, Median=4, Mode=5) and more demanding (Mean=3.5, Median=4, Mode=4). Surprisingly, they also thought that it would not be more stressful (Mean=2.4, Median=2, Mode=1) or more relevant for that matter (Mean=2.8, Median=3, Mode=3). Lastly, the findings indicated that they were mostly undecided if this method would be more useful than others (Mean=3.3, Median=3, Mode=3).

**Table 7. Attitudes toward storytelling as a teaching method in relation to other methods**

Statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
I think storytelling would be more FUN than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	4.00	4	5	1.10
I think storytelling would be more USEFUL than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.33	3	3	1.02
I think storytelling would be more DEMANDING than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.52	4	4	1.21
I think storytelling would be more STRESSFUL than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	2.43	2	1	1.16
I think storytelling would be more RELEVANT than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	2.81	3	3	0.98

Source: authors

Furthermore, teachers were asked to grade their attitude toward storytelling used as a assessment tool in the teaching process (e.g. more fun, useful, stressful, demanding and relevant) in contrast to other assessment methods. Here, the answers were not so positively aligned as with using storytelling as a teaching method. The average grade for storytelling being more fun as an assessment method is 3.62 (Median=4, Mode=3), while they felt that using it as a assessment method would be even less useful (Mean=3.24, Median=3, Mode=3). Teachers certainly thought that using storytelling as a assessment method would be more demanding than using other assessment methods (Mean=3.67, Median=4, Mode=4). Storytelling being more stressful (Mean=2.67, Median=3, Mode=3) or more relevant (Mean=2.95, Median=3, Mode=3).

**Table 8. Attitudes toward storytelling as an assesment method**

Statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
I think that storytelling could be more FUN than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.62	4	3	1.24
I think that storytelling could be more USEFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.24	3	3	1.04
I think that storytelling could be more DEMANDING than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.67	4	4	1.24
I think that storytelling could be more STRESSFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	2.67	3	3	1.28
I think that storytelling could be more RELEVANT than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	2.95	3	3	1.07

Source: authors

When asked how they would feel when introducing storytelling into the classroom, 81% of the teachers answered they would feel *interested*, and 24% of them said they would be *happy* to do that. Almost a fifth of the teachers (19%) expressed they would be *excited*. Similarly, implementing storytelling as an assessment method into the classroom gave somewhat similar answers (the majority seemed *interested* (57%) and happy 29%), however there is a drop in the percentage. On the other hand, 14% of participants admitted they would be *worried* and more of them said they would feel *nervous* and *surprised*.

**Table 9. Teachers' feelings about storytelling as an activity and an assesment tool**

	Teaching activity		Assesment Tool	
	N	%	N	%
Feelings				
Interested	17	81%	12	57%
Excited	4	19%	1	5%
Happy	5	24%	6	29%
Worried	1	5%	3	14%
Nervous	1	5%	2	10%
Surprised	1	5%	2	10%
Indifferent	2	10%	2	10%
Other	0	0%	0	0%

Source: authors

At the end of the questionnaire two teachers shared their opinions on storytelling. One (T, 12) was very positive and showed familiarity with the topic. On the other hand, the other participant (T, 18) thought that storytelling was more appropriate for certain age groups and scientific areas:

*It is a very desired and useful method, as intertextuality (introducing various historical-geographical-cultural content) or as a “facilitating” method of learning foreign languages (focus shifting). (T, 12)*

*Although storytelling seems useful as a teaching method, especially when teaching younger age groups, I believe it is more appropriate in social sciences and humanities than in technical and biotechnical sciences.(T, 18)*

#### 4. 2. Student’s responses and attitudes

The students reported that they were familiar with storytelling (Mean=4.12, Median=5, Mode=5), but are to a lesser extent familiar with it when it was used as a teaching method (Mean=3.65, Median=4, Mode=5) which is in line with their attitudes that it was not used in the educational process (Mean=2.88, Median=3, Mode=3). The participants showed a certain degree of familiarity with its use in marketing and promotional purposes (Mean=3.42, Median=4, Mode=5) but still they wanted to be educated about storytelling as a teaching method (Mean=3.77, Median=4, Mode=4) and they certainly wished to learn more about it (Mean=4.0, Median=4, Mode=4). Their attitudes toward the potential influence of storytelling on the quality of teaching is rather positive (Mean=3.73, Median=4, Mode=4).

Table 10. Students’ attitudes toward storytelling – general

Statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
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I have heard of storytelling.	4.12	5	5	1.45
I am familiar with storytelling as a teaching method.	3.65	4	5	1.41
I am familiar with storytelling as a marketing tool.	3.42	4	5	1.50
I would like storytelling to be used as a teaching method.	3.77	4	4	0.82
I would like to learn more about storytelling despite its use.	4.00	4	4	0.80
Storytelling is used in teaching.	2.88	3	3	0.95
Using storytelling in teaching would facilitate mastering the learning outcomes.	3.58	3	3	0.86
Using storytelling as a teaching method would improve the quality of teaching.	3.73	4	4	0.92

Source: authors

In terms of students perceived attitudes towards storytelling in relation to other methods, students thought it to be more fun (Mean=3.6, Median=4, Mode=4) and more useful (Mean=3.62, Median=4, Mode=3). On the other hand, they also thought that storytelling might be relevant, but also demanding and stressful.

Table 11. Students' views on storytelling as a teaching method

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
I think storytelling would be more FUN than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.65	4	4	0.89
I think storytelling would be more USEFUL than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.62	4	3	0.85
I think storytelling would be more DEMANDING than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.46	3	3	0.81
I think storytelling would be more STRESSFUL than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.31	3	3	0.88
I think storytelling would be more RELEVANT than other teaching methods (e.g. teaching, pair work, projects, etc.	3.42	3	3	0.70

Source: authors

The students' attitudes toward storytelling as an assessment method are in line with their view of storytelling as a teaching method. They perceive it to be more fun (Mean=3.77, Median=4, Mode=4) and useful (Mean=3.54, Median=4, Mode=4) but also demanding (Mean=3.23, Median=3, Mode=3), stressful (Mean=3.12, Median=3, Mode=3) and relevant (Mean=3.38, Median=3, Mode=3).

Table 12. **Students' views on storytelling as an assessment tool**

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
I think that storytelling could be more FUN than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.77	4	4	0.82
I think that storytelling could be more USEFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.54	4	4	0,86
I think that storytelling could be more DEMANDING than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.23	3	3	0.71
I think that storytelling could be more STRESSFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.12	3	3	0.82
I think that storytelling could be more RELEVANT than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	3.38	3	3	0.57

Source: authors

In relation to students' feeling towards introducing storytelling as a classroom activity, the majority of students reported feeling *interested* (65%) and *excited* (15%), but their answers indicated a range of feelings as well. Some stated they would feel *worried* (12%), *nervous* (15%), *surprised* (27%) or *indifferent* (12%). However, they shared ambivalent feelings about storytelling as an assessment tool. The most pronounced feeling was nervousness (38%), but also *interest* (31%), *worry* (31%) and *surprise* (27%).

Table 13. **Students' feelings about storytelling as an activity and an assessment tool**

Feelings	Teaching activity		Assesment Tool	
	N	%	N	%
Interested	17	65%	8	31%

Excited	4	15%	3	12%
Happy	2	8%	1	4%
Worried	3	12%	8	31%
Nervous	4	15%	10	38%
Surprised	7	27%	7	27%
Indifferent	3	12%	0	0%
Other	0	0%	0	0%

Source: authors

#### 4. 2. 1. Students' views of storytelling as a marketing tool

It is evident that students did not use storytelling as a marketing tool (Mean=1.96, Median=1, Mode=1). However, they seemed interested to use storytelling in marketing in the future (Mean=3.65, Median=4, Mode=3). Furthermore, their ratings of the two statements *Storytelling is a valuable method which is necessary to examine for the sake of promotion* (Mean=3.62, Median=4, Mode=4) and *I believe storytelling will help me in promotion in order to be different from other competitors in the market* (Mean=3.81, Median=4, Mode=4) were the highest showing that students perceive storytelling as a crucial method for differentiation on the market and perceive its contemporary value to be of high importance.

Table 14. Students' attitudes towards storytelling as a marketing tool

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
I used storytelling as a marketing tool in promotion.	1.96	1	1	1.28
I want to use storytelling as a marketing tool in promotion.	3.65	4	3	1.20
Storytelling is a valuable method which is necessary to examine for the sake of promotion.	3.62	4	4	1.02
I believe storytelling will help me in promotion in order to be different from other competitors in the market.	3.81	4	4	0.94

Source: authors

One student commented that he/she believes storytelling should be combined with other teaching methods in terms of education. On the other hand, he/she believes a great marketing tool:

*I believe that storytelling could be used in teaching to some extent. Everybody studies differently and finds different methods useful, so it can be used as a teaching method only partly. On the other hand, it is a well-known method and a great sales tool. (S,1)*

#### 4. 3. The difference between students' and teachers' attitudes

When comparing answers given by both groups of the participants (namely, teachers and students), there is no statistically significant difference between the means of both groups, showing that there are no differences between groups regarding feelings they would face if storytelling would be implemented into classroom ( $t(14)=-0,41$ ,  $p=0.683$ ). Similarly, statistical significance is not evidenced between both groups related to feelings faced in case of using storytelling as an assessment method ( $t(13)=0.15$ ,  $p=0.875$ ), but also in reference to their general attitudes towards storytelling in general and as a marketing tool. However, there is a statistically significant difference between groups of teachers and students regarding storytelling being more stressful ( $t(37)=-2.85698$ ,  $p=0.006979$ ) and storytelling being more relevant ( $t(35)=-2.41028$ ,  $p=0.021331$ ) than other teaching methods.

**Table 15. The results of the t-tests in relation to students' and teachers' general attitudes towards storytelling**

Statements	d f	T	p value
I am familiar with storytelling as a teaching method.	4 2	0.3027 8	- 0.7635 56
I am familiar with storytelling as a marketing tool.	4 0	0.7798 2	- 0.4400 87
I would like storytelling to be used as a teaching method.	3 6	0.6283 01	0.5337 73
I would like to learn more about storytelling despite its use.	3 6	0.6736 7	0.5048 24
Using storytelling in teaching would facilitate mastering the learning outcomes.	3 8	0.5676 93	0.5735 82
Using storytelling as a teaching method would improve the quality of teaching.	3 8	0.5676 93	0.5735 82

Source: authors

**Table 16. The results of the t-tests in relation to students' and teachers' attitudes towards storytelling in relation to other teaching methods**

Statements	df	T	p value
I think that storytelling could be more FUN than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	38	1,168 648	0,249 825
I think that storytelling could be more USEFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	39	- 1,015 55	0,316 103
I think that storytelling could be more DEMANDING than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	34	0,202 098	0,841 045



I think that storytelling could be more STRESSFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	37	- 2,856 98	0,006 979
I think that storytelling could be more RELEVANT than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	35	- 2,410 28	0,021 331

Source: authors

**Table 17. The results of the t-tests in relation to students' and teachers' attitudes towards storytelling in relation to other forms of assessment**

Statements	df	t	p value
I think that storytelling could be more FUN than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	33	- 0,4 76 69	0,6 36 72 3
I think that storytelling could be more USEFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	39	- 1,0 59 77	0,2 95 76 7
I think that storytelling could be more DEMANDING than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	30	1,4 33 81	0,1 61 96 8
I think that storytelling could be more STRESSFUL than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	33	- 1,3 95 45	0,1 72 2
I think that storytelling could be more RELEVANT than other forms of assessment (e.g. writing essays, testing facts orally, etc.).	29	- 1,6 67 47	0,1 06 18 6

Source: authors

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers who teach at Sustainable Agritourism show familiarity with storytelling and even greater eagerness to learn about its use in a classroom setting. Teachers' comments indicate that some are familiar to a large extent, whereas some hold prejudice towards its use in a tertiary-level education and within certain scientific fields. This is in line with research conducted by Peleg et al. (2017) who claim that science teachers believe storytelling is not appropriate for teaching science given that science teachers should be sources of scientific facts and narratives might put their validity at risk.

The findings are in accordance with the study conducted by Bury (2019) who concluded that students were initially not as comfortable with the use of storytelling as an

assessment tool as with its use as a classroom activity. This might corroborate that students are not familiar with storytelling to the extent they would welcome it comfortably as an assessment tool. Therefore, a wider, more structured implementation of storytelling in classroom is needed in order to familiarize tertiary students with this kind activity first, which could be followed by the gradual introduction of storytelling as an assessment tool. In terms of students' attitudes toward storytelling as a marketing tool, it is evident that students did not use storytelling in promoting products and services, but they feel positive about its usefulness, and they seem keen to learn about it in the future. Students perceive storytelling as a valuable method and a differentiation strategy, which is something that should be taken into consideration in marketing class curriculum in the future.

As to the differences between the two groups, students deem storytelling more stressful and more relevant than teachers. It might be assumed that students find it more stressful due to the lack of familiarity with the concept. On the other hand, students find it more relevant than teachers, which might be explained in terms of dissatisfaction with current teaching methods and a need for a change. Overall, given that the other statements are not statistically significant, it seems that both groups are not familiar with storytelling to a great extent that is they have no experience in its implementation and they do not show any pronounced attitudes towards its use.

This study has several limitations in terms of the number of participants (both teachers and students). Thus, in order to get a better insight into how storytelling is perceived by Croatian teachers and students of other study programs should be included as well. Also, further research should encompass other stakeholders (e.g. management), but also a more detailed investigation into teachers' (e.g. scientific field, experience, etc.) and students' differences (gender, student status, scientific field, etc.).

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## **SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS STORYTELLING**

### **Abstract**

Besides one of the oldest forms of teaching, having numerous beneficial effects upon the learning process, storytelling is also an indispensable marketing tool in today's tourism. Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to unveil stories while fueling the audience's imagination. Basically, it is a mode of human communication and, thus, pervasive in everyone's life. Moreover, more and more studies stress the bond between storytelling and resilience, which seems crucial in the era of the coronavirus pandemic. As a marketing tool, storytelling can be used to create consumption value for consumers, both in branding various tourist destinations, where it is most commonly used, but also in creating a sensory experience for products that usually lack branding, such as agricultural products. Given the multifaceted nature of storytelling, the aim of our study was to explore views upon storytelling both as an educational and marketing tool. Therefore, the study investigated Sustainable Agritourism students' and teachers' experiences and their attitudes towards storytelling. To do so, an online questionnaire was administered in the winter semester of the academic year 2021/2022 at one Croatian institution of higher education. The findings suggest students and teachers are familiar with storytelling theoretically, however, they do not seem to use it to a great extent in a tertiary education setting or for marketing purposes. Both students and teachers are aware of its potential use in teaching and marketing. The majority of the participants believe storytelling improves the quality of education and they deem it is an important marketing tool. Therefore, further research should focus on implementing storytelling in different classes and measuring its effects upon the teaching environment.

**Keywords:** agritourism students, agritourism teachers, marketing method, storytelling, teaching

**Mladen Marinac, M. A.**  
Polytechnic of Rijeka  
E-mail: marinac@veleri.hr

**Martin Golob**  
University Specialist in EU Business  
Polytechnic of Rijeka  
E-mail: martin.golob@veleri.hr

## CROATIAN TUSCANY – OVERTIME VISION OF J. J. STROSSMAYER, FOUNDER OF THE CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

**Ferdo Bašić**

### **Abstract**

Somewhat later, in relation to the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the influence of the Physiocratic School of Economy, the South Slavic area received historical changes announced by civil governor of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia ban Jelačić in the letter on the abolition of serfdom: the founding of the Croatian-Slavonian Agricultural Society. On the wave of these changes, the founder of Croatian Academy of Science and Arts (in the following text: CASA) bishop of Đakovo-Srijem Josip Juraj Strossmayer's syntagm "Croatian Tuscany", according to the Italian region, where the past and present, spiritual and secular/aesthetic - tradition / agriculture / forestry / landscape, / gastro-skills / archaeological and artistic heritage are connected into a unique harmonious economic and social whole. If we add Strossmayer's attitude towards agriculture, farming, and forestry (see below the title!) that phrase is ahead and a timeless vision of sustainable development, with a strong echo to this day. It is the first vision of sustainable development in the Slavic south, uttered long before the Anthropocene and the unimaginable, spectacular changes in it! In the first decades, (judging by current events that are obviously a historical turning point) of a more turbulent century than the previous one (the world from the beginning is something different from the world at the end of this paper), the CASA confirmed consistency with its Founder's vision. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the President of CASA, Academician Zvonimir Kusić, established the Committee for the Protection of Goods of National Interest headed by Academician Velimir Neidhardt (actually president) the first part of two-volume book entitled Croatian Natural Resources. The paper describes the historical development of agriculture in Croatia from the beginning of sedentary life in the Neolithic (Vinkovci, Vučedol) and antiquity to the present day, and Map of Rural Patrimony in which is the Rural patrimony divided into three parts: Rural Pannonia, Rural Highlands, and areas, laid the foundation for the creation of the Atlas of Croatian Rural Heritage. Even without current events on the world stage, the paper emphasizes that the sustainable intensification of Croatian agriculture is a contribution to the vision of the Founder and an indisputable path of development in the direction of Croatian Tuscany. The concept is in full agreement with the commitment and measures of the EU aimed at rural development, in which everything rural, including tourism, has its strong place. It is also a way to ensure much-needed self-sufficiency in food production as recommended by the Rome Declaration of the World Food Summit (Rome 1996<sup>th</sup>), which otherwise binds Croatia as a signatory to the declaration.

**Keywords:** Croatian Tuscany, Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Map of Croatian Rural Heritage, Rome Declaration of World Food summit, School of Physiocracy, Sustainable Development

### **1. INTRODUCTION - THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS**

*The Physiocratic School of Economy* founded by Francois Quesnay (phonetic: Fransoa Kenej) on the thesis that "all good things on Earth come from the soil", as a product of photosynthesis, generated by agriculture. *Physiocratic theorists claim that a farmer is the only individual whose work produces more than the salary he receives.* All remained in the shadow of world industrialization and "proletarian internationalism", but promoted "in a new guise", as a sustainable development based on trans-generational solidarity in the post-industrial period can be accepted. Precondition: *the term sustainability is obligate to decontaminate from meaningless additions that take away its real meaning.*

The indisputable scientific truth that the substances from which the human body is built is originating from the soil, the greatest poet among soil scientists Francis Hole (1989) from Maryland wrote: *We are what we eat, the material part of man is an animated mass*

*of moist soil.* The same also speak words of farewell from the deceased (Pardon 2014). Food from our soil sends special messages that have shaped us as well. It is hard to believe that food is without any affecting the genes, mutations, and consciousness of *Homo sapiens*, who ushered the world into a new geological epoch - the Anthropocene. Scientific methods today cannot determine the nature and connection of the spiritual and the material, but *the methods of future will be able to tell when, what, and with what consequences from the spiritual - emotional, woven into the genes of Homo sapiens and if anything, which part of it originates from the soil* (volcanic ash delivered over/to the soil-food, ended in somatic tissue), or other sources.

*The Physiocratic School of Economy*, founded by François Quesnay (phonetic: Fransoa Kenej) on the thesis that *all good things on Earth come from* physiocratic wealth is generated by agriculture. Physiocratic theorists claim that a farmer is the only individual whose work produces more than the salary he receives. The theory remained in the shadow of global industrialization and "proletarian internationalism". Promoted "in a new guise" as a sustainable development based on trans-generational solidarity in the post-industrial period, has the potential to be accepted.

The emotional foundations for the "natural" in the genes of *Homo sapiens* have been embedded since its inception - about 150,000 years ago, they were awakened by moving in the grass as a subconscious fear of reptiles. In contrast, emotions for the "rural" are built in only from a sedentary life, ie 10 thousand years, they are weak, threatened in subconscious intimacy, which awakens, for example, the smell of freshly baked bread, wherever you are - at the tram station or countryside in rural idyll.

The contribution to "reflection on the topic" is the thought that the "supporter of values of land-space" from the CASA, Academician Nikola Bašić (2017)<sup>1</sup> expresses in words that each of us Congress participants can apply to own country: *Croats are certainly not the only people who keep a beautiful story about how, in the division of land among the nations, by the confluence of strange circumstances, they liked exactly that "land particel" which Creator/God had left for himself.* We Croats could say that we were kind of lucky, because (from the beginning according to Jurić 2011) we were struck the "land particel" in Roman Empire, with agriculture taken from the nearby "fertile crescent" as the starting point of the first agriculture - domestic plants and domesticated animals.

It is no of less importance for history that we shared a part of history with the K&K Monarchy, which, inspired by *The Physiocratic School of Economy*, recognized its progress and development based on agriculture and forestry. Advocating these values, shaped the "rural" at that time, introduced land - books (cadastre), passed a law on forests, so "K&K meticulously" regulated agriculture, forestry, and everything "rural". It is a source of historical changes, which in Croatia began in 1848<sup>th</sup> with a letter of ban J. Jelačić on the abolition of serfdom, continued with the founding of *The Croatian-Slavonian Agricultural Society* -1841<sup>st</sup>. (bishop Haulik, Ban Jelačić and other sacral and secular dignitaries, intellectuals of the time), which promotes the values of agriculture and rural life in southern Europe. As early as 1845<sup>th</sup> they founded the *Ksaver agricultural sta-*

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<sup>1</sup> more known as creator of the famous marine organ on Adriatic coast in Zadar.

tion in Zagreb and trained farmers and rural youth in gardening, fruit growing, beekeeping and silkworm breeding; In 1853<sup>rd</sup> the Society started the idea, which was realized by the K&K court, opening in 1860<sup>th</sup> *The Royal College of Agriculture and Forestry in Križevci*, as a focal point of Croatian intellectual life, promoting the modern achievements of agriculture of its time. Finally, in 1916<sup>th</sup>, *The branch of the Croatian-Slavonian Agricultural Society Osijek* founded *Agri-chemical department*, today, *Institute Osijek*. In the second common state – former Yugoslavia, although better organized than first one, all rural was systematically marginalized, being a farmer was understood as a failure of life, and a rich farmer (kulak) in the darker, fortunately shorter epoch of that state, was marked as an *enemy of revolution*. The situation will significantly improve only when on the wings of education and science, with experts educated in the network of our colleges, faculties and institutes, agriculture and the countryside withdraw the progress of society. The aggression on Croatia end of last century, the destructional war interrupted that progress, post-war decision-makers turned to imports, with consequences of Covid 19 and events in Ukraine *show that disruption of the chain of food production and distribution point to own food production as the only right path, we pointed it out, but without results*. Accordingly, and bearing in mind that this issue is of a broader nature, *we believe that this Congress could be an incentive for participants to return to economic policies of our countries that set self-sufficiency in food production as the primary goal, in accordance with the Roman Declaration of World Food Summit (Rome 1996)*.

Consistently on the line of its Founder, in the first steps of the young state in 1994<sup>th</sup>, the CASA organizes a program scientific conference entitled *Agriculture and Food Production in the New European Environment* and undoubtedly clearly warns relevant decision makers and the public (quote):

*Efforts should be made to improve the status of agriculture in Croatia, which includes the need not to decide on agriculture and all issues related to this area of the economy without a profession. Only then will it be possible to implement a systematic agrarian policy and know the responsibility for its implementation (end of citation) - (Academician Maceljčki 1994).* - the appeal remained without echo!

Unfortunately, although supported by convincing arguments from competent, dedicated representatives of the same ideas and their associations, *the warning of possible consequences, pronounced in 2017<sup>th</sup> on 650 pages of an impressive book entitled Fight for a Living Village, passed equally* (Salaj and Kovač 2017).

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS OF WORK

The map of Croatian rural heritage was made based on the research results of the team of champions of that time, gathered at *the four-year project of the Council for Agricultural Research (VIP) Regionalization of Croatian Agriculture*, which used proven methods of field and laboratory work. For soil data other than own sources (Bašić 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Bašić, Herceg 2010), data prepared by Bogunović; climate prepared Mesić; human resources Božić; soil erosion Kisić. Soil fertility and plant cultivation systems were processed by Jurić and Žugec, soil and water reclamation as well as needs of irrigation Romić (Bašić et al. 2001, Bašić 2014). Mirošević invested his rich

knowledge and experience in the *Exhibition of Records on Vineyards and Wine in Croatia* (2002), *Ampelographic Atlas* (2003) and *Atlas of Croatian Viticulture and Enology* (2009). He dedicated "pearls of his homeland" to wine, as the "current soul" of rural tourism: *Vinorodnim domovinom* (2003), *Vinogradarski poliptih* (M. Hlača as "photon thief") and monographs on "vine pearls": *Ilok traminer – the Prince of Principovac*, *Kutjevačka Graševina – Bounty of the Vallis Aurea*, *Vrbnička žlahtina - The nobility of Island of Krk and Dingač – the Story of a Great Croatian Wine*.

In addition to the above titles, our own works from the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 (Croatian Agriculture at the Crossroads) to the present day (Bašić et al. 1996, 1999) and papers by various authors in the proceedings of scientific meetings of CASA.

Since the independence of Croatia, the CASA has contributed to the development of agriculture and rural values in modern Croatia, first - a round table on the ruins of Petrinja, then in preparation for Croatia's accession to the EU with a series of excellently organized conferences held in: *Zagreb* (Maceljčki 1994, Stipetić 1994, Maleš, Maceljčki 2000, Matić et al. 2015, Bašić, Tomić 2014, Bašić 2016), *Osijek* (Tomić et al. 2013, 2015) *Vinkovci* (Tomić et al. 2018), *Split* (Anić et al. 2013). A significant contribution to the offer of rural tourism on the coast and islands can be read from the monograph by S. Srećec (2020) *Taxonomy, ecology, and use of carob (Ceratonia siliqua) and laurel (Laurus nobilis)* published by the CASA. This is followed by the conference *Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Tourism in the Context of Climate Change, in Poreč*, where the concept of *Sustainable Intensification of Agriculture was presented and explained* (Tomić et al. 2020). *It is no coincidence that it was presented in Istria, which "rejects the old spirit" and the splendours and playfulness of Tuscany can be recognized*. The last conference, entitled on this topic: *The Future of Rural Space in Slavonia and Baranja in Požega* (Jakšić, Jakobović 2021).

The selection of data for this work from that abundance was made by the author, a proven friend of the rural, who read "from the trees of the motherland of education" in Ilok and Zagreb, and (orally, textbooks) spread to "colleges of life sciences" in: Zagreb, Križevci, Split, Mostar, Sarajevo, advocate of the "value of photosynthesis", soil, sensitive to a aroma of just plowing soils from Ilok to Konavle!

### 3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Everything rural is inseparable from agriculture and the soil - it is the source of the process of photosynthesis and from which food, drink, fiber, fuel, medicals, is grown, and the wastes remains of these processes are returned to the soil in a never ended circle. If we sum up 150,000 years since the appearance of *Homo sapiens* in one hour, the acceptance of agriculture and its spread across of Gea takes 4.5 minutes, for a long time agriculture is a source of survival, only 1.5 minutes lasts as an industry, of which a second or two becomes a consumer fossil energy and the "accused" of climate change, and the term from the title of the Congress - "rural tourism" lasts less than two seconds!

#### 3.1. The beginnings of settlement and development until the 20<sup>th</sup> century



The first traces of Homo sapiens in Croatia were found in the Šandalja cave (Italian: San Danielle) near Valtura in western Istria and on Hušnjakova brdo near Krapina. They date back to the Paleolithic (> 35,000 BC), when Istria was a hill in the northern Adriatic steppe (full of wildlife), and the sea was south of Zadar (Jurić 2011). The sedentary way of life in the Neolithic begins to write "never ended story - a book about agriculture", which time and generations are filled with new pages and contents.

*The key changes and directs history is the discovery of bread. From then until today, for 6,000 years, family hearth fire has spread the unique smell of bread that brings the family together and keeps it at the center of life (Jacob H.E.1957).*

Traces of the largest and oldest prehistoric settlement on Croatian land were discovered in Vinkovci, on the left bank of the Bosut River, on an artificial hill called Tržnica, dating to 8,300 years or 6,300 years BC. This Neolithic settlement is a contemporary of Jericho - the first city in the world and was built by farmers who came along the Danube River valley, from the Middle Eastern source of agriculture between Syria, Palestine, the Euphrates and the Tigris (Defilipis 2002, Durman 2006). The center and the richest site of fascinating Vučedol culture is Vučedol near Vukovar, on the loess terrace along the Danube River. The first European calendar, the *Vučedol dove and boot*, the serial production of metal axes (2,600 BC) and accessories for casting metals are material evidence of the Vučedol culture.

*It sounds unreal that foundries already had a calendar on the table almost 5,000 years ago. Vučedol is undeniably a leap of civilization, which puts Europe on a par with the first cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China.*

Our ancestors (autochthonous or immigrants) are at war with the pre-Illyrian and Roman inhabitants. Conflicts are the mildest in Istria, because "ours" as nomadic cattle breeders, descending from Čičarija mountain with their herds to the coastal Istria, gradually merged with the domicile population. In central Dalmatia, with the built cities, the conflicts are long-lasting, with the destruction (Salona) and the flight of the local inhabitants to the islands. Our ancestors here accept olive, fig, carob, grapevine and wine culture, and goat and donkey for domestic animals. A special practice that changes the natural landscape of the Mediterranean in Dalmatia and the islands is fencing the land area used for growing plants and grazing livestock with a stone fence called "drywall", which leaves a trail in the karst as *Anthroscape* - anthropogenic landscape, visible from space. Retired Roman military officers, as educated people of the time, received privileges for land use, transferred to their estates the achievements of Roman agriculture, brought books of Roman writers on agriculture to libraries, and no less significantly accepted the wider value system in which cabbage growing is more valuable than the crown.

Starogradsko polje on the island of Hvar is the 7<sup>th</sup> Croatian protected cultural landscape on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the best-preserved cadastral in the Mediterranean, in which ancient Greece left a system of roads, terraces and plots of land.

*It seems unreal that the Roman Empire ate bread made from wheat grown in Egypt, and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD the whole of North Africa<sup>2</sup> from Tunisia to Tangier was a large, wavy, Roman wheat field. Hundreds of thousands of nomads succeeded in creating peasants in Rome, and Berber's "desert wolves" were "taken off their horses" and given a plow in the hand (Jacob H.E. 1957). We add; fiercer and tougher resistance to the "plow" will be provided by Croatian tribes.*

The Roman Empire disintegrated into small states with numerous feuds, the feudal lord becomes the master and protector of his land and property with the associated serfs. As a participant in war campaigns, the feudal lord brought new knowledge on agriculture from the world, as varieties of vegetables and fruits, plant growing<sup>3</sup> and culinary skills<sup>2</sup>. Accustomed to coercion, Croats do not have a hard time with the law of Charlemagne, which introduces the so-called feudal three-field crop rotation: one third of the land area of village "bare fallow - vacation", intended for grazing cattle of the whole village, with free grazing on stubble, after the harvest of grain on the whole land of village.

At the end of the feudal period, *Family cooperatives* will be established (Jurić 2016), the first in Srijem and Slavonia. For the needs of livestock facilities of occasional termination of cooperative members with livestock, (today rural tourism) *apartments* (stanovi in Cr.) in Slavonia (Jurić 2016), *salaš farms* in Srijem (Rukavina 2012) and lodgings (konaki.) across of Drava River valley from Legrad to Pitomača (Feletar 2017).

The historical change is the discovery of America and the spread of "American crops" in European and our fields (corn, potatoes, tobacco, peppers). A special farming system was the *Old Slavonian three-field crop rotation* is emerging; *Wheat* (for bread) - *Corn* (family food and fodder for cows, pigs, poultry and horses as a traction force and the pride of Slavonians) – *Vetch* (voluminous fodder for livestock). For the destruction of weeds inherited from the feudal period (which Slavonia has not solved until today), hemp, industrial culture and export products were used, and for fertilizing "sheep breeding" on stubble. *After Sumerian-Mesopotamian and ancient Egyptian agriculture, in which soil fertility is restored by floods (Nile, Euphrates, Tigris), it is undoubtedly the only, practically permanently sustainable, most harmonious, and most favourable system of cultivation of arable land (Bašić, Herceg 2010).* The imperative of the Slavonian three-field crop rotation and the sustainability of the farming system, as its greatest value is *the inseparable connection between plant and livestock breeding, which ensures soil fertility and balanced circulation of matter and energy in the agroecosystem.* Thanks to fodder from own breeding and the progress of genetics and selection, livestock is booming, and Croatia is among the largest exporters of livestock in Europe at the time, holding this position for a long time, to export baby-beef to rich Italy - Tuscany!

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<sup>2</sup> The preserved, rich library of the powerful noble family Zrinski from 1660 has a cookbook with over 250 recipes (Varga 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Feudal nobles were not just exploiters, as we read from school textbooks. To instill in the "warrior spirit" of the followers (*plebs*), necessary for recruiting warriors to defend the home, faith... a reliable way is to call to the feud, religion, and homeland, so faith and patriotism. Harambasic will sing about the famous Croatian noble-families: *Where the days of freedoms are now, which Croat appreciate know, where Zrinski and Frankopans are, where the two lions are.*

The beginning of the end of that era is announced by machines, the tractor suppresses horses and legumes, its place is taken by soybeans and oilseed rape, synthetic fibers and herbicides displace hemp and flax, mineral fertilizers manure, epilogue: *instead of traditional "eating with the soul" around of family table - fast food!*

### 3.2. Determined for the development of Croatian identity - 19<sup>th</sup> century

Across Europe, the village has been a source of poverty, disease, scarcity, backwardness, superstition, persecution, and the burning of witches for centuries, dating back to Maria Theresa and Joseph II. The most severe consequence is starvation, deeply etched in the consciousness of all peoples who knew about it but were powerless to resist<sup>4</sup>.

Key to the history of Croatia, the village and the "rural", are the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Father of the Nation" – jurist by profession Dr. Ante Starčević designs the state-legal framework of national identity, solid, long-term foundations, and goals of the Croatian nation in resolute words: *Neither under Vienna, nor under Pest, nor under Belgrade, but for a free and independent Croatia*. The implementation of these ideas requires other greats on the path of identity formation and national maturation. History assigns this role to a slightly older student at the same Royal University in Budapest, J.J. Strossmayer, who will (later) become his political rival due to differences of opinion<sup>5</sup>. At the cultural level, Strossmayer advocated that the Croatian people keep pace with other culturally developed nations of Europe, emphasizing the importance of institutionalizing science and the arts, which are the guarantors of ensuring a stable free society. For this purpose, he financially supported numerous educational and cultural activities in the South Slavic countries (Serbia, Montenegro). Bishop Strossmayer calls University (of Zagreb) and CASA *sublime corporations and the pupil of the eye in the head of our people*.

From the confrontation with the aggressive Hungarianization, Germanization and ambitions of the then Serbia bishop Strossmayer declare the solution of *Question of Croatia* within *Austro-Slavian federal state*<sup>6</sup>. For realization of these ideas, he accepted the enlightenment Cyrillic Methodist approach, illustrated in the sentence: *The People's Book is the main fruit of the spirit of every nation and the main driver of its development*.

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<sup>4</sup> Not even 100 years have passed since the last Holodomor, when 7-10 million Ukrainians were starved to death in the Europe-Ukraine granary affected by the war today. They bring the Russians to the houses of the slain and "accidentally" deploy them so that the independence of Donbass and Lugansk, obtained by their declaration, seems to be a logical commitment of the minority. The similarity of the "manuscript" of agrarian reforms after both world wars, when from Osijek to Virovitica the settlements of war losers were given the names "deserving of Croatia": Karadjordjevo, Obilicevo, Aleksandrovac ", is a mere coincidence!

<sup>5</sup> In addition, they are permanently separated after Starčević's clergy 'criticism of Strossmayer for: serving foreigners; blaming the backwardness of the masses; abusing the diversity of religions and languages to spread national differences within people. Privileged is position of Starčević as politician, because of belonging to the clergy, at the same time not popular in Vatican, Vienna and Pest, bishop Strossmayer could not use the same vocabulary to answer on the same way.

<sup>6</sup> The image of Strossmayer in the uninformed public was created in large part thanks to Krleža. Krležijana (1994) states: There is too much rigid irony and ridicule in Krleža's approach to Strossmayer, so that it is only a matter of left-wing schemes or moralizing about opportunism. For Krleža, Tuscany is a lie and an illusion: "The Tuscan Yugoslavism of Strossmayer and Rački (the first president of CASA), this cabinet illusionism of an insignificant elite, was interwoven with themes suitable for witty conversations in Đakovo's episcopal salons, but Čulinec, Dubrava, Granešina, Moslavina or Banova Jaruga do not know about it. These lordly and

As the manager of the episcopal estate, for the felling of the oak of the episcopal forests by the settlement of lumberjacks from Slovakia and of Croatian regions, Strossmayer built the settlements of Josipovac and Jurjevo. With the money from the felling, he started the construction of the palace of Academy on Zrinjevac in the Florentine Renaissance style, which began in August 1877<sup>th</sup> and ended in the summer of 1880<sup>th</sup>. Finally, on November 9, 1884<sup>th</sup>, the Academy received the largest gift from its patron: 256 works of art, most paintings (235 in total). Strossmayer Gallery opened in the Academy Palace. From Strossmayer's reflections, the name of today's Croatia, and at that time the *Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts*, was born. From Strossmayer's reflections, the name of today's Croatian, and at that time the Yugoslav was born. The caution that accompanied the decision on the name and the reflections on the state system will remain written.

### 3.3. Agriculture and "rural" in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

... But the distant Austrian emperor and the great emperor of Germany could not have guessed what a little man thought who cried all night for a goat... after the news brought to him by his mother, that a goat was dying... a biography entry...  
Academician Mijo Mirković - Mate Balota  
peasant, fisherman, sailor, academician, poet, the first who wrote 50 books, on the tombstone in Rakljan-Istria

The greatest, uncompromising Croatian politician, fighter for peasants, village, and agriculture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Gandhian-minded people's tribune, founder of the historical *Croatian Peasant Party*, Stjepan Radić<sup>7</sup>.

In the historical times of 1940<sup>th</sup>, Academician M. Mirković sent a message to the authorities of that time: *Measures to improve agriculture should be based on knowledge of the situation and opportunities, bearing in mind that every culture and every economy has special features that need to be considered.*

In former Yugoslavia, after conflict with Stalin and the failed *era of cooperatives*<sup>8</sup> according to the American instructions and model, of farms public estates are established - agricultural combines, serviced by experts and scientists educated in our scientific and

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episcopal conversations had, unfortunately, no idea (Krlježa deliberately kept silent that for people "from Čulinac to Banova Jaruga" the physiocracy advocated by Strossmayer would be more appropriate, that one could choose between Krlježa's "dictature of proletarianism" and Tuscany I am sure of the outcome! obs. of author). Until yesterday, Ban Jelačić - the symbol of the abolition of serfdom and the Croatian Gandhi Stjepan Radić - received an unconditional prison sentence for the song to the announcer of progress - the Croatian Gandhi Stjepan Radić! It is noted that Strossmayer at the Vatican Council disputes the dogma of the Pope's infallibility, similarly from Krlježa to his "pope" to his "departure through Romania" (in vain) was expected but did not fail to maliciously sew "Tuscan Yugoslavism" to the Grand Bishop. Yugoslavism began and ended in the blood of the Croats, was a phenomenon that Krlježa was not aware of.

<sup>7</sup> killed 1928<sup>th</sup> in Belgrade by Serbian nationalist in Parliament of Monarchy of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenian In the foreword to the title: *Croatian Peace and Indian Nonviolent Movement* S. Radić writes (quote): *Our Croatian, peasant pacifism has been unbreakable so far, from now on it will be even more invincible Our peasant leaders will remember Gandhi's basic message: evil from violence, a coward is worse than a tyrant: I am against any force, but I like to draw a sword rather than fall to my knees like a slave before a tyrant..*

<sup>8</sup> it is a pity, but, all called "cooperatives" become a negative accent in national consciousness of generation of Croatian people, as consequence of historical memory on „Staljin type of democracy“... today in the last practice in Ukraine.

educational institutions, modern chemical and biological methods and practices. There is an expansion of agriculture and the general progress of agriculture and the countryside - rural. Such a development is interrupted by the aggression from which Croatia emerges with displaced people and destroyed agriculture, destroyed livestock fond, and the *privatization* of equally destructive effects continues, the repercussions of which are still ongoing, so it is too early to give a final assessment.

### 3.4. 21<sup>th</sup> century - contribution of the CASA to the vision of Croatian Tuscany

The CASA has been working to implement the vision of its Founder since its founding. Great minds of Croatian science in agriculture and forestry worked in it (Kišpatić, Tavčar, Gračanin, Ogrizek, Maceljčki, Mihalić, M. Anić, Klepac, Prpić, Vidaković, Matic). The Academy established *the Scientific Committee for Tourism and Spatial Planning*, which recently addressed the public with a special declaration (N. Bašić 2021). Within *the Department of Natural Sciences* there is a *Scientific Council for Nature Protection*, with sections for *soil, water, climate, biodiversity, waste management, Scientific Council for Agriculture and Forestry, Adriatic Protection Committee*, through which it organized numerous meetings for continental and Mediterranean Croatia. We highlight the round table of the *Department of Economic Research (Academician G. Družić)* from 2014<sup>th</sup> in cooperation with the University of Zagreb with a Proceedings book entitled *Development Potentials of the Croatian Economy*, in which a special topic is *the development potential of Croatian agriculture* (Bašić, Tomić 2014). The incompetence of the time best illustrates the attitude towards the rural.

Among the publishing ventures we can single out that the then president, Academician Kusić, founded *the Committee for the Protection of Goods of National Interest of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts*, chaired by Academician Neidhardt (members - academics: M. Zelić; M. Ježić; G. Družić; M. Juračić, AW Baletić; L. Klasinc and Prof. Dr. B. Skoko) launched *the publishing project Croatian Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage - Protection and Responsible Development*, and in 2016<sup>th</sup> the first part - *Croatian Natural Resources* was presented, with a detailed description of the state of the national treasury.

## 4. RURAL PATRIMONY OF CROATIA

Fig. 1 shows the *Map of Rural Patrimony (later in text MRP)*, as the basic document of the *Atlas of Croatian Rural Patrimony*, which we are advocating for within the multidisciplinary project. In its full content, this atlas should include the contents of other thematic atlases and maps important for rural areas and the offer of rural tourism, such as: ampelographic atlas, atlas of viticulture and winemaking; endemic plants of rural areas; archaeological sites; prayer and sacral buildings; catering offers, which will be decided by experts from several professions gathered in this multidisciplinary project.

Figure 1. Map of Rural Patrimony



As you can see, the basic units of the map are rural areas: Eastern, Central and Western in RURAL PANNONIA, Pre-mountainous and Mountainous in RURAL MOUNTAINS, and Northern, Central and Southern areas of the CROATIAN COAST AND ADRIATIC ISLANDS. In the practice of rural tourism, the term Tuscany is used to promote rural values in Pannonia, the Coast and Istria, which is close in achievements and appearance to Tuscany.

Source: author

#### 4.1. Rural Pannonia

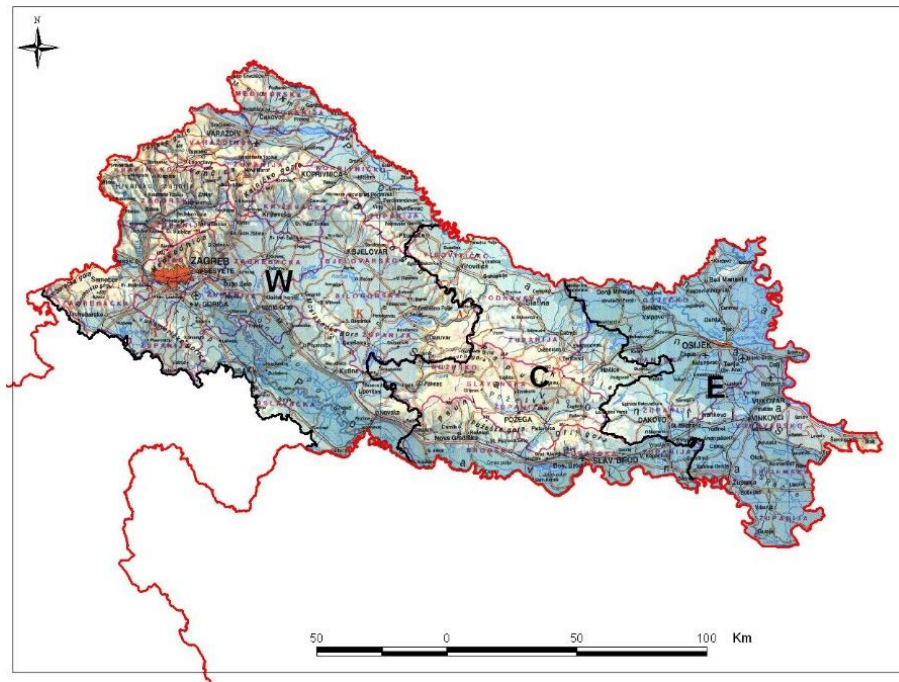
Shown in Fig. 2, rural Pannonia stretches from the eastern border of the Danube River through the Pannonian plain and the Peri Pannonian belt to the western border with the Republic of Slovenia. A common feature of Eastern and Central Pannonia is the geological structure – aeolian loess and its derivatives - washed loess, under fluvio-glacial influences altered Pleistocene loams with typical marbling. Unlike the eastern and central, western - (peri Pannonian) Pannonia is built of tertiary sediments, deposited at the bottom of the shallow Pannonian Sea, (residue of which are lakes Balaton, Neusiedler in Hungary, Austria, but marshes in western Srijem Vukovar county (Tompojevci, Tovarnik), after the withdrawal of the Pannonian Sea through the Djerdap Strait. In these, once perfectly flat bottoms, the riverbeds were cut by numerous watercourses that in the east dried up or dried up in dry valleys (Drljanski potok in Ilok, cuts in loess Šarengrad and Mohovo) and to the west first "lazy Slavonian rivers" Vuka, Bosut, Spačva, Karašica "living" rivers Orjava, Ilova, Pakra, Lonja, Česma, and finally the longest river, which has its source and mouth in Croatia - Bednja.

Pannonia has historically gone from hand to hand from pre-Illyrian times to powerful lords, from the Huns, Avar, Roman, the Frankish state, the Ottomans, which of course left a mark on the entire heritage. The literary heritage of Croats is rich in descriptions of natural beauty and socio-economic turmoil in the Slavonian countryside. In the new Croatian literature, Slavonia was most spiritually described by our (CASA Centre in



Vinkovci) Dr. Anica Bilić, describing *the word arcadia*<sup>9</sup>. Since 1762, when Matija Antun Relković published the poem Satyr or the Wild Man with the initial invocative verse Slavonia, the noble land has often been represented as an Arcadian area (Bilić 2022).

Figure 2. Rural Pannonia



Source: author

#### 4.1.1. The rural area of Eastern Pannonia (E in MRP)

Eastern Panonia is a picturesque plain (*illustrated by a question: what is wider - the soul or the plain?*), bordered by three rivers from the Croatian anthem; Drava, Danube and Sava, and interwoven with the beds of "lazy" rivers (Bosut, Spačva, Vuka), from which rise the slopes of Fruška gora (251 m a.s.l.) and Baranjsko brdo (244 m a.s.l.). Along the Danube River, especially in Baranja, there are numerous marshes, and at the confluence of the Drava and the Danube, the most valuable pearl - the unique Park of Nature Kopački rit occupies 10,500 ha. This area starts in our easternmost city on the Danube River, the city of vines and wine - the pride of Croatian (rural) tourism Ilok - *Dubrovnik of north* with a tower above the Danube, going upstream in Šarengrad crosses the Danube and forms a unique ecosystem in the EU Šarengradska ada, followed by *City - Prometheus, a symbol of strength and Croatian resistance Vukovar*.

<sup>9</sup> ...according to the Peloponnese region, as a utopian space that does not exist in extra-literary reality - an ideal landscape with eternal spring, idyllic life. and a shepherdess in harmony with nature, a natural and rural landscape, a place of residence without worries and problems where peace, happiness, and love reign. Such a space of happiness and well-being is a rural space as opposed to hectic urban life.

The area is a rich Croatian breadbasket, with soils of the highest fertility and traditionally intensive farming and urban centres Osijek, Vinkovci Županija and Đakovo, surrounded by "green sea" of crops on endless arable land, where on world-famous farms - PIK Belje and VUPIK, as well as in the time of famous original owners, from Eugene of Savoy, Odescalchi and Eltz to the present day, world-class results have been achieved! Slavonia is sung in numerous works by Croatian writers, whose works and heroes are taken from oblivion by the "lady of the beautiful words of Slavonia", from unique Vinkovci dr. Anica Bilić (2012, 2018). The pearls of Srijem warmly describe Rukavina (2001). Let us also emphasize that the contribution to the renewal of agriculture in Western Srijem after the return of the people of Ilok after the exile finding destroyed by military all plantation<sup>10</sup> with the wholehearted support of N. Mirošević, an expert on the "unique values of Ilok" in vine growing, is given by the Faculty of Agriculture (Bašić et al. 1999).

Eastern Pannonia depicts the attitude towards soaking in us. Lack and improper distribution of precipitation reduces the yield of all the cultures that are grown here, while endless amounts of water flow through the Danube... "of course" - irrevocably! Based on data from the beginning of the century, up to 1,600 m<sup>3</sup> / ha / year of water should have been added by irrigation in the average year. In the dry years, and the last few have become more frequent, these needs are greater, and the economic viability of investment is unquestionable.

The treats of rural tourism are four vineyards: Srijem, Baranja, Erdut and Đakovo, each of which has its own "story", specialties, traditions, and place in the wine market. The most famous wine in this area is Ilok Traminer - Prince of Principovac (a famous terroir), known to the English queen Elisabeth and royal court! The palate of the destination for the atmosphere on the table of rural tourism in this area should be ruled by meat and pig products, along with fish and game meat, while the architectural specialty are buildings (cellars) in the woods, reed roof, oak... of course with the story, and there are really a lot of stories<sup>11</sup>.

#### **4.1.2. The rural area of central Pannonia (C in MRP)**

This area includes Brod-Posavina, Požega-Slavonia and Virovitica-Podravina counties, ie part of western Slavonia, Podravina and central Croatia, Međurečna gora and central Posavina. The Slavonian highlands rise from the plain, which gives a stamp to the landscape, increases the biological diversity and the diversity of rural offer. There is also part of the Park of Nature Papuk (33,600 ha), and jewel of area Golden Valley - *Valis aurea*. At elevated positions and slopes are favourable conditions for growing fruits and vines. Towards the west, the representation of livestock and areas under fishponds is gradually increasing, with the supply of water from watercourses, so the protection of water from pollution in agricultural land management is of particular importance.

Both key hydro melioration practices - drainage and irrigation have their place in the area. Our estimate speaks of the need for drainage by pipe drainage of an area of 203,000 ha of hydromorphic soils. All soils are suitable for cultivation, ie 303,318 ha are also

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<sup>10</sup> the same manuscript visible in Ukraine, very similar (the same school) nineteenth last century in Croatia...

<sup>11</sup> Ilok (Cuccium) fortress was built from bricks of 42 km distant Sirmium, transport by hands of 42,000 people!



suitable for irrigation, 88,731 ha without restrictions, and on other areas the excess water should be previously regulated by hydro and agrotechnical amelioration. For optimal cultivation of crops in average climatic conditions, about 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> / ha / year should be provided by irrigation.

In the northern part, there are hotbeds of Aeolian erosion on the Aeolian sands of Podravina, around Virovitica and Pitomača. The natural peculiarities of Podravina under international protection of nature are inspired by the works of “evergreen friend of nature in Podravina” Kranjčev (1997), who call for knowledge of the smell of freshly plowed soil<sup>12</sup>. Recent works on this topic are highly documented monographies of Petrić (2012) and Cik (2016) as well as “evergreen friend of book in Podravina” Feletar (2017).

In this area are located vineyards, known to lovers of good drops and beyond: Slavonski Brod, Kutjevo-Požega, Pakrac, Feričanci-Orahovica and Virovitica - Slatina. They are located on the slopes of the Slavonian Mountains and Bilogora - Međurečka gora, with varieties for top wines; Graševina, Pinot Noir white and gray, Chardonnay white, Sauvignon, and of the Pinot Noir black and Frankovka, which results by a memorable wine.

#### **4.1.3. The rural area of Western Pannonia (W in MRP)**

Covers the western, Peri Pannonian part, Zagreb, Koprivnica-Križevci, Bjelovar-Bilogora, and the northern part of Sisak-Moslavina County, Krapina-Zagorje, Varaždin and Međimurje counties. The area is home to most of the Croatian population with a population density of as many as 142 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The area is also home to the capital Zagreb, most of Croatian industry, all valuable oil fields, and all gas fields. All works from drilling to pumping and transport cause damage of soil, especially gas refining and transport by underground pipelines, so the area is intersected by a network of pipelines. The feature is an exceptional variety of impressive landscapes, green hops, and mountains, from the western slopes of Papuk, through Međurečka gora - Bilogora, Kalnik, Medvednica, Moslavačka gora, Vukomeričke gorice and Samoborsko - Žumberačko gorje. The data on the huge area of over 110,000 ha of protected areas speaks on volumes. In addition to the western part of Papuk, there are nature park Lonjsko polje (50,650 ha)<sup>13</sup>, traditional breeding of horses, pigs and cattle on natural pastures, Park of nature Žumberak and Samoborsko gorje on 33,300 ha, and Medvednica on 22,826 ha of land. For stable and safe cultivation of all crops, investing in land reclamation is a safe and reliable, and very promising path and prerequisite. In this area, it is necessary to perform detailed drainage of hydromorphic soils on an area of 185,000 ha, and the implementation of agro-ameliorative interventions on twice the area. For optimal growth and development of crops in average climatic conditions, 850 m<sup>3</sup> / ha / year should be provided for irrigation, especially in growing of vegetable crops in summer sowing / planting periods, on shallow and texturally lighter soils - fluvial soils in the Sava River Valley. In this rural area there are vineyards: Plešivica, Vukomeričke gorice, Zagreb, Dugo Selo - Vrbovec, Moslavina, Kalnik, Koprivnica, Bjelovar, Daruvar, Međimurje, Varaždin and Hrvatsko Zagorje. What they have in common is many old, domesticated grape varieties; among which are the autochthonous white Kraljevina, Škrlet, Stara belina, Moslavac,

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<sup>12</sup>... in the soil he sees the beginning, the end and everything in between.

<sup>13</sup>...with famous Čigoč, declared as the first European village of corks, settled by more corks than people.

Lipovina and Mirkovača, and the black varieties (Potugizac, Kadarka, Frankovka, Črmine). Today it is dominated by Graševina, followed by Pinot Noir and Gray, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Rizvanac, Traminac red and fragrant, Riesling Rhine. Of the black cultivars, Portugizac, Pinot Noir, Zweigelt etc. are significantly better in the Varaždin vineyards, where in recent years there has been a significant change in favor of quality modern cultivars for wines of good and high quality. In the Međimurje vineyards, which is one of the tops, Graševina, Moslavac, Pinot, Chardonnay, Traminac red and fragrant, Sauvignon white, Muscat yellow are the most represented.

Positive changes in the traditional assortment are becoming more frequent in other vineyards, and we consider even more important changes in more modern wine processing and storage, so they sovereignly rule the tables of rural tourism. Given the proximity of large consumer centres in the area, there are conditions for the expansion of all management systems - from intensive agriculture on large estates in the lowlands, to organic farming on many hops. *The results obtained in improving the agriculture of the City of Zagreb and Zagreb County in a short time of several experts - agronomists, veterinarians, foresters, are impressive, and most eloquently speak of great potentials that have not yet been exploited, but also indicate the path to follow.*

Some Fluvisols, Pseudogley and Luvisol soil of this area have high active and potential acidity, so they require liming. It should be said that there are natural sources of lime material, good quality, such as quarries in Ljubeščica, Varaždin region and Lepoglava, which opens wide opportunities for application and affirmation of this valuable and economically acceptable practices. Own experiences with liming of acid soils of this area (Varaždin) in the cultivation of all arable crops, including sugar beet, as a very demanding crop, are more than affirmative.

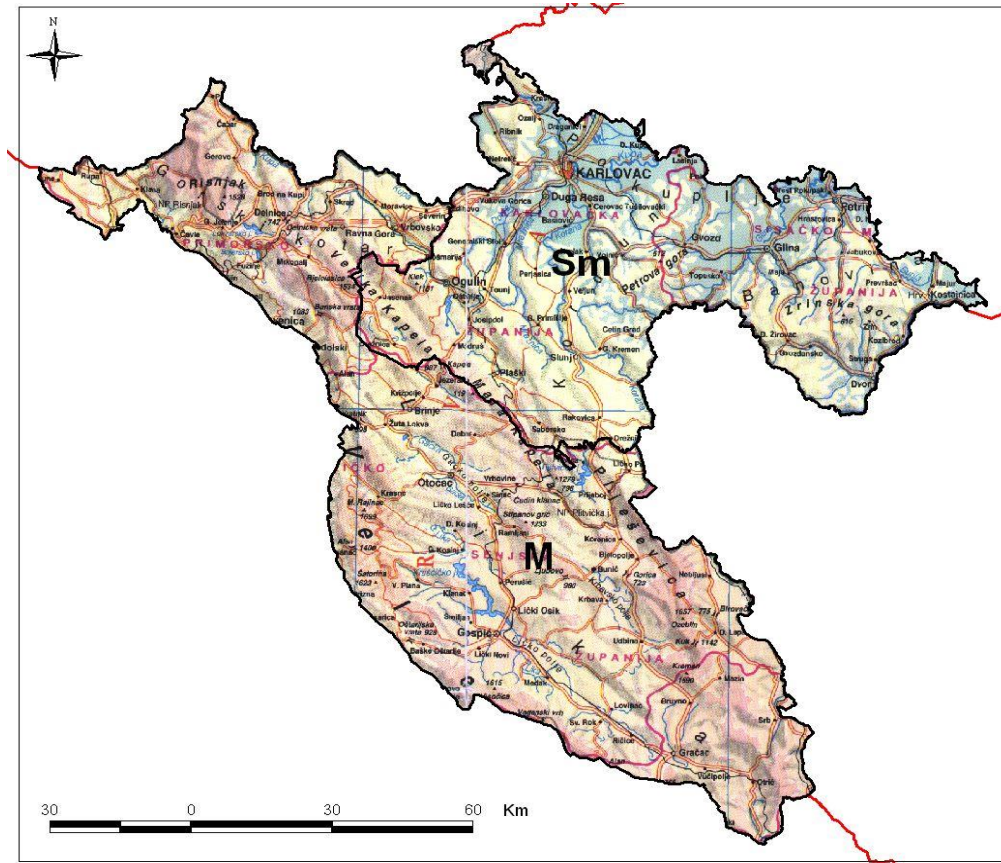
There are good conditions for the development of all farming systems, but traditional, sustainable with livestock and farmyard manure use will dominate organic agriculture<sup>14</sup>. *Due to the large number of weekend estates, the huge area they use is respectable a large group of "weekend or hobby farmers". This otherwise educated group, connected by a love for plants, deserves far-reaching support.*

Special attention should be paid to protecting the soil from erosion. For this purpose, the cultivation and orientation of rows of permanent crops - vineyards and orchards down the slope, and then the bare soil in the inter-row space must be excluded from practice. Effective protection against erosion can be achieved only by grazing the interrow space of plantations. Generally, recommendation of Kisić (2021) is tillage system with obligate tillage across of slope and keeping the surface of arable land under green vegetation (crop) cover. Rural practice of area is sowing of beans and/or pumpkin in sowed maize.

### Figure 3. Rural mountains

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<sup>14</sup> „Father“ of organic agriculture and founder of Anthroposophy R. Steiner is born in Križevci - Međimurje.



Source: author

#### 4.1.4. The sub mountainous rural area (Sm in MRP)

This area is a natural transition between the Pannonian Plain and the Dinaric Alps. It covers part of Lika, Banovina and Kordun, the whole of Karlovac and the part of Sisak-Moslavina County. In landscape dominate two significant mountains from our distant and recent history stand out - Zrinska and Petrova, whose historical heritage is very attractive for the offer of rural tourism. At the end, there are attractive "karst beauties" - Dobra, Mrežnica, Korana and Kupa.

The calculation of the soil water balance shows an average annual surplus of 470 - 970 mm, while requirement in dry years is up to 1 350m<sup>3</sup> / ha / year, which are high values, drought often destroys the entire yield on shallow soils, which dominate in the area. At the same time, in wetter years the excess water exceeds 1,200 mm.

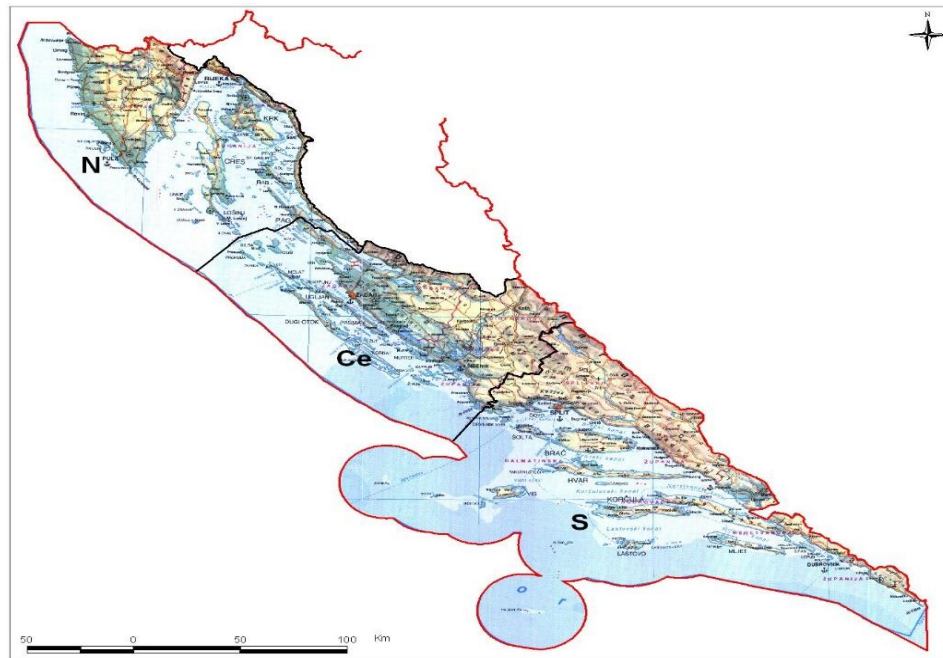
Our calculation is that for a more ambitious development of agriculture, we should count on detailed drainage by pipe drainage about 35,000 ha of hydromorphic soils in the area. Considering the chemical characteristics of agro-technical land reclamation (lime), they are needed on an impressive area of as much as 110,000 ha.

The area is our traditionally known livestock area, especially the area of Banovina, once, (before "import era ") connected with the meet processing family factory "Gavrilović". After the earthquake, the CASA in cooperation with the University of Zagreb - Faculty of Agriculture and RGN, the Academy of Agricultural Sciences prepared a study on the renewal and development of agriculture and rural Banovina, as a contribution to vulnerable populations. It should be said that the capacities for the development of livestock, especially for grazing cattle, sheep, and goats, then for game breeding are extremely large, and this area needs, awaits, and deserves investment and entrepreneurial moves in this direction. The indigenous product of Tounj cheese and beekeeping with exceptional bee pasture and top-quality chestnut honey deserves attention. The results of our research of soil for the needs of growing components for the baby food factory, have shown that soils are extremely clean and suitable for growing vegetables of top quality.

#### **4.1.5. The mountainous rural area (M in MRP)**

This rural area include Gorski kotar and Lika, the northern - continental part of the Primorje-Gorski Kotar and Lika-Senj counties. The unique, UNESCO-protected Plitvice Lakes and the most beautiful Croatian mountain Velebit contribute to the exceptional beauty. In addition to the UNESCO heritage of Plitvice Lakes (29,400 ha) of protected areas, there is the Risnjak National Park (6,400 ha) and Northern Velebit (10,000 ha), and the strict nature reserve Bijele and Samarske stijene (1,175 ha). In addition, the area bounds in picturesque watercourses with clean water rich in ichthyofauna - Gacka, Lika, Lokvarsko lake, Gušić polje, as part of the rural offer. Agroecological conditions of Gacko and Ličko (from Lič) polje are suitable for growing of virus-free potato.

Figure 4. **Rural Coast and Adriatic Islands**



Source: author

#### 4.1.6. The area of the North Adriatic rural coast (N in MRP)

This area includes Istria, the Velebit ridge extends to Starigrad near Zadar, including islands Krk, Cres, Lošinj, Rab, Istria County, and then the peripheral and island parts of Primorje-Gorski Kotar and Lika-Senj County. The area of Istria and the Kvarner islands is very diverse and attractive in terms of landscape and is already on a par with the "Italian Tuscany". This area is described in detail in the paper on the anniversary of the Institute of Agriculture and Tourism, which serves agriculture and tourism, not only in this area (Tomić et al 2020). There are several protected areas, which affect the direction of management, especially the spread of organic plant and livestock breeding: Učka Nature Parks (14,600 ha); Northern Velebit (10,000 ha), Telaščica (6,706 ha); strict nature reserve Hajdučki and Rožanski kukovi (1,220 ha) in northern Velebit, and the glittering "low in the necklace of Tuscany" Brijuni National Park (3,635 ha).

The most widespread soil type in the area is red soil - terra rossa (69,481 ha), followed by Calcic-cambisol (59,325 ha) and Melanosol (30,367 ha), while other soil types are less represented. Soil formation on limestone is a very slow process, because limestones are very clean rocks, containing less than 5% of the insoluble residue from which the soil on limestone and dolomites is formed. It takes about two million years to form a layer of red soil 100 cm thick. It has very favourable physical, chemical, and biological characteristics and high fertility, so it is not surprising that it was attributed to the "chernozem of the Mediterranean". Soaking is necessary for growing plants. We calculate that the total area of drainage soil does not exceed 1,000 ha.



*There are far larger and more significant areas that require irrigation, practically all arable soils, about 90,000 ha. Investments in infrastructure for irrigation, which would enable the irrigation of red and brown soils on Istrian limestone, then the soils of Vinodol valley, Vrbničko polje on Krk, soils of the central part of Cres, soils Susak, Unija, etc., have full economic justification as the right path demographic and all kinds of other renewals of these areas, and rural tourism would be given new incentives and content. Livestock farming has a long tradition in the whole area. In Istria it was known for its goat and podolac (old race of cattle), and the islands of Cres, Krk, Plavnik for exceptionally suitable conditions for sheep breeding. Despite everything, far below the possibilities, and especially below the needs, is the coverage of UG livestock, with a constant trend of decline. All agricultural products offered to rural tourism in this subregion - fruits (olives, figs, cherries, hazelnuts, peaches), cheese, lamb, grapes, wine and vegetables have an exceptional, recognized quality.*

*Irrigation is the most important project, which is also a prerequisite for intensification in all management systems, and for these needs in average conditions up to 2,400 m<sup>3</sup> / ha / year should be provided. But in some years, deviations from the average can be significant. Available surface and groundwater can be used for irrigation, and it is advisable to create larger and smaller multipurpose accumulations. Surface water quality is generally satisfactory, except near the mouths of rivers, and groundwater in the coastal area may be saline and / or alkaline due to seawater intrusion, as is the case with soils in the Mirna River valley, where salt water for high the tide penetrates deep into the continent to Ponteporton. In the "wine atlas" of this area are the famous vineyards: Western, Eastern and Central Istria, Rijeka and Kvarner. The assortment varies greatly by vineyards and individual cultivation habitats. Of the white varieties in the Istrian vineyards, Istrian Malvasia predominates, followed by Chardonnay, Pinot, Trebbiano toscano and Muscat of Momjan. Among black cultivars, Merlot, Cabernet sauvignon, Cabernet franc, Teran, Hrvatica, and others are represented. In the wine-mountains of Rijeka and Kvarner on Krk reigns Žlahtina white, Bašćanac black, Brajdica black, etc., in Susak Trojščina red, Krizol white, Sušćan black, and to a lesser extent Pljeskunaca white, Sauvignon white, and on Pag it is known Gegic white. Economically designed support should be given to traditional - sustainable agriculture and rural tourism, which in this area is experiencing an unimaginable expansion until yesterday and is confirmed as Tuscany in the making!*

#### **4.1.7. The area of the Central Adriatic rural coast (Ce in MRP)**

The area includes central part of the Adriatic coast, the area of Zadar with the hinterland - Ravni Kotari and its islands, and the Šibenik County with its islands Pag, Ugljan, Pašman and Dugi. The area is relatively low, built of various limestones, mostly Cretaceous, with brown soil on the limestone as the dominant type, less redness, rendzina on soft limestones, and limestone dolomite on higher elevations. rocky or bare rock. Karst beauties with their top-quality water - Zrmanja, Čikola and Krka, whose valley represents a national park, in which management is limited, have cut their picturesque riverbeds into the karst plateau. We have explained it in detail in the paper published in the monograph Promina (Tomić, Bašić 2020). Krka forms through waterfalls, there are

several extensions, the largest of which is Lake Prokljan, and at the mouth of the beautiful picturesque waterfalls with travertine barriers. In the subregion there is a pearl of nature, our largest freshwater lake - Vrana Lake.

The area of the area is 570,946 ha, or 10.1% of the area of Croatia, and it is inhabited by 267,171 inhabitants, almost half less than in the northern area, but the population has three times more agricultural land per capita - 1.53 ha. This area traditionally has advanced agriculture, especially vine growing, fruit growing and vegetable growing, ie developed livestock. It grows naturally or is grown and could serve to promote the natural insecticide pyrethrum. And the Zadar market is certainly one of the richest and most picturesque in the whole Mediterranean, a symbol of wealth and luxury of the offer of top-quality food, grown practically in nature protection conditions. In the Homeland War, it was exposed to severe destruction, persecution of the Croatian population, and in the post-war period, the return of the population was and is very slow. Excellently organized and professionally run former socially-owned agricultural enterprises from Zadar and Vrana have failed economically, although it is undeniable that the backbone of the economic recovery of this area is agriculture, especially livestock, which was practically destroyed by the war. The most represented soil in the pedosphere of this area is Cambisol on limestone and dolomite (94 890 ha), followed by red soil (49 951), limestone-dolomite black soil (48,064 ha), and a large presence of anthropogenic soils of as much as 32,041 ha and 4,397 ha hydromeliorated soil eloquently speaks of the importance of agriculture and rural tourism in this area.

We believe that drainage systems should be renewed, stable karst soil regime should be ensured in karst fields by flood control, and detailed drainage should be planned on the new 3,000 ha. But far more important and necessary is the soaking. There are few examples of such high needs, equally high expected effects, available water of exceptional quality, and so few, we would say without exaggeration, inadmissibly little investment in irrigation systems. Safe cultivation of vegetables sown in late spring or early summer months in this area is possible only with soaking. The water balance shows that the construction of multipurpose water reservoirs would not only suppress floods, stabilize the chaotic and unfavourable water regime, but would enrich the landscape and ensure a stable and secure supply of crops and plantations with quality water. Investments should be planned in the area of this area in the future, which would ensure irrigation on 60,000 ha. For optimal growth and development of common crops in the coastal zone in average climatic conditions, an additional 3,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water per ha / year should be provided. We attach special importance to the construction of multipurpose reservoirs in karst fields, on the mainland and on islands. There are several vineyards in the area: Zadar, Benkovac, Šibenik, Drniš and Knin, with similar varieties; of the domesticated blacks, the most common is Plavina, followed by Lasina and Gustopenjica, and of the introduced Carignon, Grenoche, Syrah, etc. Of the old white varieties, the leading one is Maraština, and the introduced ones are Ugni blanc, Grenoc-he and others. All management systems in the area have realistic prospects for unprecedented development and support should be given to all. Intensive agriculture, especially vegetable growing, should certainly be counted on in the Vrana basin, which should be restored to its former glory, the path to intensive cultivation of vines and fruits should be opened in the Zadar hinterland.

#### **4.1.8. The area of the South Adriatic coast**

This area includes islands Brač, Hvar, Vis, Korčula, Lastovo, Mljet, Elafiti in Split - Dalmatia and Dubrovnik - Neretva counties, ie the rest of the coastal part to Dubrovnik-Konavle and the state border, with the islands. From the many pearls of nature, we single out the pride of garden architecture Arboretum Trsteno, on 23 ha the oldest monument of garden architecture in Croatia and the only arboretum on the Adriatic coast, which is superbly managed by Academician Anić from the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The area is built mostly of limestone and dolomite, which is dominated by bare karst, ie Calcic-Cambisol and Terra rossa (red ferallitic soil), with the exception of the Neretva valley and fertile karst fields, on the mainland and islands, where alluvial and colluvial soils occur. The Neretva Valley is a special natural whole - "the pearl of the rural area of the southern coast" - a wetland habitat, with shaken or peat soils, drained for cultivation. The Neretva Valley, as the most important agricultural area in this area, in addition to its richness in water, also has the biggest problems with water quality. There are huge, immeasurable potentials of our island agriculture, which are insufficiently known and which are underestimated, although for example Korčula, Hvar, Brač, Pelješac are our famous growing areas of vines.

The area of the South Adriatic coast with its islands (Brač, Hvar, Vis, Korčula, Lastovo, Mljet, Elafiti) includes Split - Dalmatia and Dubrovnik - Neretva counties, ie the rest of the coastal part to Dubrovnik-Konavle and the state border, with the islands. From the many pearls of nature, we single out the pride of garden architecture Arboretum Trsteno, on 23 ha the oldest monument of garden architecture in Croatia and the only arboretum on the Adriatic coast, which is superbly managed by Academician Anić from the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The area is built mostly of limestone and dolomite, which is dominated by bare karst, ie Calcic Cambisol and Terra rossa, with the exception of the Neretva valley and fertile karst fields, on the mainland and islands, where alluvial and colluvial soils occur.

The Neretva River valley is a special natural whole - "the pearl of the rural area of the southern coast" - a wetland habitat, with shaken or peat soils, which are cultivated after amelioration using pipe drainage. The Neretva Valley, as the most important agricultural area in this area, in addition to its richness in water, also has the biggest problems with water quality, eutrophication, salinity, heavy metal and agrochemicals pollution. Dubrovnik hinterland in Konavle is potentially "centre of rural tourism" of area. There are huge, immeasurable potentials of our island agriculture, which are insufficiently known, and which are underestimated, although for example Korčula, Hvar, Brač, Pelješac are our famous growing areas of vines.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

By constantly fair evaluation of social phenomena, the Academy gradually leads to the acceptance of new social standards and value systems and thus acts as a corrective of social events.
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Academician Z. Kusić 2017<sup>th</sup>



An analysis of the development of agriculture and rural areas from the sources of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts from the independence of Croatia to the present, presented in the previous text, with the aim written under the title, points to conclusions:

1. With the phrase "Croatian Tuscany" the founder of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in the middle of the 19th century, J.J. Strossmayer marked a vision of the desirable development of South Slavic people that sees the way of life "under its own sky" as a combination of past and present, spiritual, and secular in a harmonious economically, socially and environmentally sustainable whole.

2. The vision represents "physiocracy in a new guise" - a sustainable development in the solidarity of the present is embedded, with past and future generations, it is climate neutral and in line with the EU's declared commitment to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

3. Global socio-economic and political circumstances support the statement of the participants of the Congress on self-sufficiency in food production, according to the Rome declaration of the World Food Summit - Rome 1996, based on the concept of socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable intensification of agriculture.

It is proposed to create an Atlas of Rural Space in Croatia, and in support of this a Map of Croatian rural heritage and briefly described features of selected rural areas.

4. Time lag from the assessment of the founders who place the Founder of the Academy on the "Gray / black side of history,, it is sufficient to reconsider these assessments, their holders and put them in the right place. Because, judging by numerous indications, these ideas are at the very roots of today's world conflict.

If Venezia, according to legend, rests on the Velebit oak, then modern Croatian culture, without any doubt, lies on Strossmayer's Slavonian oaks.

*Ivo Frangeš 1987<sup>th</sup>*

Work is the dearest prayer to God, and I do not know a more beautiful and pleasing scene to God, than when a peasant in the field stares at the sky and cries out with all his soul: God! Bless my labour and work!

*J.J. Strossmayer 1860<sup>th</sup>*

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## **CROATIAN TUSCANY – OVERTIME VISION OF J. J. STROSSMAYER, FOUNDER OF THE CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS**

### **Abstract**

Somewhat later, in relation to the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the influence of the Physiocratic School of Economy, the South Slavic area received historical changes announced by civil governor of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia ban Jelačić in the letter on the abolition of serfdom: the founding of the Croatian-Slavonian Agricultural Society. On the wave of these changes, the founder of Croatian Academy of Science and Arts (in the following text: CASA) bishop of Đakovo-Srijem Josip Juraj Strossmayer's syntagm "Croatian Tuscany", according to the Italian region, where the past and present, spiritual and secular/aesthetic - tradition / agriculture / forestry / landscape, / gastro-skills / archaeological and artistic heritage are connected into a unique harmonious economic and social whole. If we add Strossmayer's attitude towards agriculture, farming, and forestry (see below the title!) that phrase is ahead and a timeless vision of sustainable development, with a strong echo to this day. It is the first vision of sustainable development in the Slavic south, uttered long before the Anthropocene and the unimaginable, spectacular changes in it! In the first decades, (judging by current events that are obviously a historical turning point) of a more turbulent century than the previous one (the world from the beginning is something different from the world at the end of this paper), the CASA confirmed consistency with its Founder's vision. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the President of CASA, Academician Zvonimir Kusić, established the Committee for the Protection of Goods of National Interest headed by Academician Velimir Neidhardt (actually president) the first part of two-volume book entitled Croatian Natural Resources. The paper describes the historical development of agriculture in Croatia from the beginning of sedentary life in the Neolithic (Vinkovci, Vučedol) and antiquity to the present day, and Map of Rural Patrimony in which is the Rural patrimony divided into three parts: Rural Pannonia, Rural Highlands, and areas, laid the foundation for the creation of the Atlas of Croatian Rural Heritage. Even without current events on the world stage, the paper emphasizes that the sustainable intensification of Croatian agriculture is a contribution to the vision of the Founder and an indisputable path of development in the direction of Croatian Tuscany. The concept is in full agreement with the commitment and measures of the EU aimed at rural development, in which everything rural, including tourism, has its strong place. It is also a way to ensure much-needed self-sufficiency in food production as recommended by the Rome Declaration of the World Food Summit (Rome 1996<sup>th</sup>), which otherwise binds Croatia as a signatory to the declaration.

**Keywords:** Croatian Tuscany, Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Map of Croatian Rural Heritage, Rome Declaration of World Food summit, School of Physiocracy, Sustainable Development

### **Ferdo Bašić**

Full member of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts  
E.mail: fbasic@hazu.hr

## STRATEGIC APPROACH TO RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: EXAMPLE OF COUNTY TOURIST BOARDS

**Dejan Gluvačević**  
**Damir Jugo**  
**Zdeslav Milas**

**Abstract:**

The crisis caused by the coronavirus very quickly showed strong consequences, not only in society but also in many other areas such as tourism. This was further proof that mass tourism is unsustainable, both in the context of tourist safety and the satisfaction with provided services in tourism. On the other hand, specific forms of tourism have become increasingly pronounced, which, according to their characteristics, respond faster and easier to this new situation. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), trends in tourism developments continue to point to an increase in domestic travel and increased interest in tourism products that can be linked to nature, outdoor activities, and rural tourism. Consequently, more and more strategic thinking is being invested in developing a destination through specific forms of tourism such as rural tourism, and as a key communication trend in the past period, there is a paradigm shift in communication with domestic tourists. The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategic approach to the development of tourism through rural tourism. In order to obtain answers to the questions asked, an analysis of the content of tourism development strategies and the official websites of 20 counties in Croatia will be conducted.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, strategic planning, strategy, tourist boards, trends

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Management development of tourist destinations has changed greatly in recent decades, especially in numerous Croatian destinations, which has realized the importance of strategic destination management, not wanting to leave the development of the destination to unplanned action and coincidences. Management development of tourist destination is nothing but managing its identity, and thus its image. In order for an identity to be recognizable and desirable, as well as to have positive image of the destination, it requires a strategic approach to destination management. Not so long ago, identity and image management were adding value for destinations and currently this process becomes a necessity for all destinations around the world. According to Skoko (2021, 50), it is quite logical that destinations manage their identity, image, and brand because if they do not, there is a danger that someone else will do it and the destination will be labeled against their will and knowledge.

Tourist destination management implies the cyclical implementation of all five management functions, namely planning, organizing, human resource management, and control (Rupčić 2018, 3). The first function, planning, requires those who manage the destination to have a strategic approach to planning, which includes, among other things, setting short-term and long-term goals and achieving them. According to Mintzberg (1994 in: Renko 2009, 74), planning is not just thinking about the future but controlling the future because it means taking action in the future. Furthermore, Mill and Morrison (2013, in: Mašić, Muha, Nešić and Jovanović 2017, 196) state that tourism planning must have a minimum of five results, namely identifying alternative approaches, creating the

desirable, avoiding the undesirable, maintaining uniqueness and adapting to unexpectedly. These results can be found in strategic documents such as namely a strategic plan of tourism development of the destination, a master plan, a marketing plan, and other similar documents. All these documents, regardless of terminology and name, have in common that they all contain an analysis of the current situation, synthesis of analysis, vision of destination development, strategy selection and goal setting, as well as a development plan, implementation, and evaluation of the plan.

Today, tourist destinations strive to follow trends and create uniqueness in their promotion and offer in order to become even more competitive. During the last decades of the 20th century, the process of diversification of the tourist product and the development of new types of tourism that corresponded to increasingly demanding tourist markets began, and this was reflected in the development of tourism in Croatia (Čorak and Mikačić 2006 in: Četković 2019, 7). One of the special forms of tourism, which has been constantly developing in recent years, is rural tourism, which corresponds to tourism trends of sustainability and which has become increasingly attractive due to its specifics, especially after the COVID-19 virus. Moreover, apart from its specifics, rural tourism offers many advantages reflected in preserving the rural population, creating larger areas of the rural economy, encouraging and training the rural population for independent work, reviving old crafts and electoral customs, expanding existing tourist offer, mitigating seasonal character et al. (Bartoluci et al. 2018, 66).

It is an indisputable fact that Croatia has the potential for further development of rural tourism, but the question is to what extent this potential has been used. In order to change the tourist offer in a destination and take all advantages that arise with new tourist trends, it is necessary to think strategically and to have a plan, which is later operationally implemented. Therefore, in order to determine to what extent and in what way Croatian destinations approach strategically in tourism development, with emphasis on rural tourism development, the authors analyze strategic tourism development documents commissioned by county tourist boards and counties, but also websites of county tourist boards. In this way, they want to correlate how much the strategic approach to planning is only the so-called *letter on paper* that has remained in the document or has been implemented, which is visible, among other things, through communication activities that can be seen on their websites.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The modern tourist market is looking for new forms of spending free time, which leads mass tourism based on sun and sea to the point of saturation, and as an adequate response to modern trends, new forms of tourism such as rural tourism appear (Krajnović, Čičin-Šain, Predovan, 2011: 31). Selective forms of tourism, unlike mass tourism, which is available to all, represent originality and high quality that give special prestige to tourist destinations where they take place, and depending a where they take a place and the content they provide, they can largely satisfy the dominant motives in the sphere of tourist demand (Alfieri 1981, in: Jadrešić 2010, 175).

According to Jadrešić (2010, 176), rural tourism is a synthetic and generic term that represents a new quality and feature of modern tourism based primarily on serious and reasonable program selection, responsible behavior of all participants, the principle of sustainable development, quality service, on the original identity and humanity of the tourist service, with a desirable and regular and balanced ratio of the number of tourists and domiciles in a particular area. As one of the selective forms of tourism that is increasingly developing in Croatia, and in countries such as Austria, Italy, and France has taken a very high level of development in rural tourism, this form of tourism is characterized by rural areas rich in natural, cultural and traditional heritage (Smolčić Jurdana et al. 2018, 220). On the other hand, the fact is that rural areas are often faced with a challenge in the development of tourism in destination because they are areas where are problems of depopulation and abandonment of traditional activities highly present (Smolčić Jurdana et al. 2018, 220).

This is confirmed by the fact that the Republic of Croatia has about 93% of rural space, but at the same time rural tourism is one of the least developed types of tourism in Croatia, and the main reason for this is long-term investment investments in the development of rural tourism (Bartoluci et al. 2018, 66). Croatia's potential for rural tourism development is undeniable, but the lack of continuous investment in rural tourism development still classifies this form of tourism as one of the least developed, with exceptions in Istria and to some extent in Osijek-Baranja County (Bartoluci et al. 2018, 63). Despite everything, the growth and development of rural tourism in Croatia in recent years have been noticeable, to which the still current Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to some extent. Rudančić and Kulić (2021, 25) state that this is because rural tourism as such is a response to the fast pace of modern life, and for this reason, the demand for ecologically clean areas is growing. This is supported by the constant increase in the number of overnight stays in rural areas and the growing number of family farms, but also by the fact that the development of rural tourism in the destination expands the offer of the tourist destination.

In order to achieve the goals of tourism development, what is needed is a well-planned and set strategic plan, which according to Thompson et al. (2008, 37) represents the future direction, goals, and strategy of the company, in this case, the carrier of tourism development in the destination. Furthermore, Mintzberg et al. (Oliver 2007 in Jugo 2012: 60) cite five meanings of strategy as a concept, namely:

1. Plan as a consciously intended activity,
2. Work as a specific maneuver aimed at outwitting an opponent or competitor,
3. A sample representing a series of activities,
4. View as a means of positioning the organization in its environment,
5. Perspective as an integrated way of perceiving the world.

Therefore, strategic action can be defined as that action that is oriented toward success, while it can be clearly distinguished from communicative action (Bentele et al., 2005 in: Jugo 2012: 60). According to Smith (2009, in: Jugo 2017, 34) strategic communication can be compared to communication campaigns in which the main purpose is to transform communication weaknesses into opportunities for the organization and its stakeholders, and as such has a clear purpose, the plan is based on research and is subject to subsequent



time and takes place in a competitive environment which implies that the organization and groups of people are influenced in a certain way.

The importance of strategy and strategic plans in all industries indicates only how important it is to act proactively and strategically if you want to achieve the desired results. A more detailed procedure of strategic planning of rural development includes an analysis consisting of elements such as defining planning objectives; resource analysis; analysis of legislative provisions; analysis of development potentials; development of rural tourism, setup of the responsible body for tourism development at the state, county and local level; amendment of existing legal regulations and adoption of new laws and by-laws; detailed development plans for the most significant projects; cost-benefit analysis of individual projects; conclusions (Krajnović, Čičin-Šain, Predovan, 2011: 36).

Also, every industry, including tourism, certainly has some unofficial rules that need to be respected in order to compile a quality and workable strategic plan because without the possibility of its implementation, even the best written and creative strategy has no special value. What distinguishes each plan, regardless of the industry, is the circumstances in which it develops, but there are also some rules that are present in all plans, as well as rules typical of a particular industry that then need to be monitored in order to achieve success. To this end, Krajnović et al. (2011 in: Naglav, Martinović and Mrvica Mađarac 2019, 94) list four key success factors in rural tourism:

- Multidisciplinary approach that includes economic, environmental, and socio-cultural analyses,
- Constant consultation with stakeholders in the destination,
- Openness of the strategy to the public in the context of organizing public hearings, using the media and two-way communication between the bearers of strategic development and the local community,
- Operationalization of the strategic document that should be flexible and ready for potential adaptations to changes in the environment.

Hence, rural tourism as any other profit-oriented business activity is driven by a business plan, and good business plan must be strategically oriented and must effectively use marketing tools (Šimkova, 2007: 266).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

#### **3.1. Methodological framework**

The authors, dealing with the topic of strategic planning and the development of rural tourism from the level of county tourist boards, start their research by asking the following research questions:

*To what extent do county tourist boards and counties strategically approach the development of rural tourism?*

*To what extent have strategic plans for tourism development from the perspective of rural tourism been implemented on the official websites of county tourist boards?*

Through research questions, the authors will get an answer to how many county tourist boards have at least prepared and finished a document of strategic tourism development, but also how many county tourist boards really implement the document itself, leaving it only as *a letter on paper*. To this end, the authors opted for a quantitative method of content analysis, whose main advantages are high heuristic value, easy implementation, and relatively low cost (Tkalac Verčić 2014: 94). Given that the main shortcoming of content analysis is the question of the objectivity of the analysis itself, the authors included key criteria for quality and objective content analysis, which are good preparation and limiting the number of categories (Tkalac Verčić 2014: 94).

The authors analyzed 20 different strategic documents of tourism development, whose clients are either county tourist boards or the counties themselves, and these are documents that are often called in professional terminology master plans, strategic or marketing plans. It should also be noted that the documents were downloaded from the official websites of the county tourist boards, and if they did not have this type of document, then they were downloaded from the websites of the counties, taking over the latest strategic plan, regardless of whether it is still current or not. Thus, the analysis includes 9 strategic documents commissioned by the county tourist board, 10 documents commissioned by the county and 1 document jointly ordered by the county tourist board and the county.

In order to be able to give an answer to the second research question, the content analysis was conducted on a sample of 20 websites of county tourist boards, i.e. on the cause of all county tourist boards in Croatia. The analysis was conducted in the period from February 28 to March 5, 2022. For the purposes of this paper, in order to facilitate and simplify the interpretation of results and provide answers to research questions, the authors set two hypotheses, which by their characteristics belong to quantitative hypotheses (Zelenika 2000: 420), namely:

*Hypothesis 1:* More than half of the counties and county tourist boards in the strategic documents of tourism development cite rural tourism as one of the primary forms of tourism in the destination.

*Hypothesis 2:* A small number of county tourist boards have clearly singled out and emphasized rural tourism on their official websites as one of the main tourist products in the destination.

### **3.2. Research results**

The first hypothesis, which re-examines the validity of the thesis that more than half of counties and county tourist boards mentioned rural tourism as one of the primary forms of destination tourism in strategic tourism development documents, was based on the author's assumption that due to previously explained tourism development trends, rural tourism as one of the potentials for further development and is thus marked as a primary tourist product. The results of the research partially confirm this hypothesis because 50% of strategic documents listed rural tourism as a primary tourist product, while 45% categorized it as a secondary tourist product. Only in one strategic document, rural tourism was not mentioned as a form of tourism that should be developed in the

destination. The results indicate that rural tourism was more often represented as a primary product in strategic documents commissioned by the county (30%, six (6) documents) than the county tourist board where 20% of documents or four (4) in total. If we look at strategic documents and how frequently the emphasis on the potentials of rural tourism development in the destination was placed, it can be seen that three quarters (75%) of the documents (15 in total) have a strong emphasis on the potentials of rural tourism development in the destination. Of the 75% of documents emphasizing the existence of a potential for rural tourism development, 30% of documents (6 in total) were classified with a strong emphasis on potentials, while 45% of documents (9 in total) had a slightly weaker but still present emphasis on potentials for the development of rural tourism. Furthermore, every fifth document was difficult to determine (4 in total) and in one document (5%) is rural tourism and its potentials were not even mentioned. How the mentioned potentials of rural tourism development were distributed in relation to who the client is and the results are shown in the following table.

**Table 1. Potentials of rural tourism development distributed by clients**

Type of strategic document	County Tourist Board	County	Both
Strongly emphasized	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	0
Mostly emphasized	5 (25%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)
Neither emphasized nor atonic	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	0
Mostly atonic	0	0	0
Strongly atonic	1 (5%)	0	0

Source: Author's Research 2022

Furthermore, regarding the topicality of strategic documents, the results showed that the representation is almost equal, so 11 strategic documents (55%) are still relevant, while 9 are no longer. Due to the simplified categorization of 20 Croatian counties, 7 are categorized as coastal counties, while the remaining 13 are categorized as continental counties, although there are counties that have features of both categories. For this reason, the results of the research show that there is no significant difference between coastal and continental counties in terms of topicality, so 54% of continental county documents (7 out of 13 documents) are still relevant, as well as 57% of coastal county documents (4 out of 7 documents).

Of the remaining results obtained from the analysis of strategic documents, it should be noted that rural tourism is most often mentioned in strategic documents using some of the following related terms: eno-gastro rural tourism (21%), rural architecture (21%), rural ensemble and landscape (14%) and culture, agritourism/agrotourism and active rural tourism 8% each. It should also be noted that two-thirds of the documents provide strategic guidelines for rural tourism development and that in slightly more than half of the documents (55%) rural tourism is placed in a separate chapter, which also indicates the importance of rural tourism in strategic destination development planning. A more detailed presentation of the results can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Other survey results obtained by content analysis

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Does a document mention rural tourism?	19 (95%)	1 (5%)
Is there a separate section in a document that only applies to rural tourism?	11 (55%)	9 (45%)
Does a document provide specific strategic guidelines for the development of rural tourism?	13 (65%)	7 (35%)
Does the development of a tourist destination envisage the existence of a cluster in the county?	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
Does a document include a financial frame/recommendation for the development of rural tourism projects?	6 (30%)	14 (70%)

Source: Author's Research 2022

Having established through testing the first hypothesis that there is a certain level of strategic planning of rural tourism at the county level, it is necessary to test the second hypothesis behind the claim that a small number of county tourist boards on their official websites have clearly singled out rural tourism as one of the main tourist products in the destination. The authors put forward this thesis for two reasons, the experience of the profession which shows that a large part of strategic plans to a small extent or almost never implemented later, and the second reason is that many strategic documents on tourism development in the county thus leaving the possibility that the counties have not yet managed to implement all that is stated in the strategic documentation.

From the aspect of the existence of a special category exclusively related to rural tourism, only 25% of the websites of county tourist boards have such a site architecture. This leads to the conclusion that rural tourism is still not differentiated as a vital tourist product in the destination. Strategic document and previously presented results. Furthermore, the survey results showed that every third website (35%) has a special emphasis on rural tourism and can be viewed as a primary tourism product, but this is still less than the importance of rural tourism as a tourism product emphasized as a primary tourism product in strategic documents (50%). Therefore, the second hypothesis can be confirmed from the presented results.

Comparing the representation of products related to rural tourism with some of the other tourism products, it can be seen that rural tourism is shown as the dominant tourism product on every fourth website, while on the other hand, 40% of websites are in a subordinate position. A more detailed presentation of the results on the representation of rural tourism products on the website can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3. Degree of representation of rural tourism products in relation to other specific forms of tourism on the website of the county tourist boards**

<b>Degree of representation</b>	<b>%</b>
Uppermost	5 (25%)
Equally	7 (35%)
Subaltern	8 (40%)

Source: Author's Research 2022

Furthermore, by analyzing the content on the websites of county tourist boards, the research showed that in the vast majority of cases, the content offered to visitors to the website is on the one hand outdated and unattractive. The arguments for this claim lie in the fact that no county tourist board has any video content that would bring closer the rural tourism product and the experience that a potential guest can expect. Also, photography was not a medium in the presentation of content on every fourth website, so the reliance on providing experience related to rural tourism was mostly related to the descriptive text on 90% of websites. Also, except for Croatian, which appears on all websites, as the languages in which it is translated, English (85%) and German (60%) language options are mostly offered, while other languages are represented by less than 25%, namely are Italian (25%), French, Polish and Czech 20% each, Slovenian (15%), Hungarian, Dutch and Spanish 10% each, and Chinese, Russian and Slovak 5% each.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Rural tourism is certainly one of the specific forms of tourism that are becoming increasingly relevant and attractive to modern tourists. The practices of other countries such as Austria, France, and Italy show all the benefits for the destination by developing rural tourism. Jadrešić (2010, 177) describes rural tourism as quality, balanced, heterogeneous, self-sustainable, inventive, authentic, environmental, environmentally and infrastructural sustainable and tolerable, individual, intensively responsible, supportive, reasonable, special, sociable, etc. Many of these attractive attributes are also recognized in Croatia, where there is an increased interest in the development of rural tourism, especially the fact that there is much potential for the development of this form of tourism in Croatia.

Moreover, Mesarić Žebčić (2008 in: Naglav, Martinović and Mrvica Mađarac 2019, 94) states that the importance of rural tourism is reflected in the interaction of agricultural production, production of traditional products, preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the village, presentation of tradition and traditional cuisine and other services that can be placed through tourism.

In order to develop tourism in a destination at all, and especially if you want to manage tourism development in the destination, this requires strategic planning and strategic development. That's why it is necessary to establish the mission and vision of the development of a tourist destination. In this process, destinations, in addition to stating the mission and vision, state the current state and potential for the development of tourism in the destination, while classifying primary and secondary tourism products. Rural tourism will mainly play the role of a primary tourist product in less touristy

destinations and will be one of the main products in the destination, while in already tourist destinations this form of tourism if included in strategic planning, will be classified as a secondary tourism product. Without giving special and priority importance. In the context of Croatian Dalmatian counties, this form of tourism is often cited as secondary, with the aim of developing either the hinterland or sparsely populated islands that have great potential to develop in this area and still represent a slightly different tourism product which is more attractive in destinations, as such as sun&sea, nautical or cultural tourism.

In order to successfully manage the tourism development of the destination, having a strategic document is only a prerequisite. Namely, it is often the case that many strategic documents that have been written have not been implemented. The reasons for this are often stated that they were written too extensively, but without specific and operational goals, that they were not understandable to those who were supposed to implement them, etc. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that a good part of the document is never implemented. This situation prompted the authors to conduct a study to examine the extent to which county tourist boards and counties strategically approach the development of rural tourism, as well as to check the extent to which these same strategic plans for rural tourism are implemented on the official websites of county tourist boards. The results showed that strategic documents for county tourism development exist, but slightly more than half (55%) are still relevant, and that half of the documents (50%) mention rural tourism as a primary tourism product. As stated earlier, a strategic document must not remain just a document but must be implemented. An analysis of the websites of county tourist boards found that to a lesser extent (35%) rural tourism is communicated as a primary tourism product, and from the aspect of communication special attention should be paid to poor compliance with standards and trends in digital content creation. Thus, there is no content related to rural tourism that has a video, but the text dominates (90%), and the photos are not on all posts (75% of the content with photos).

Aware of the fact that rural tourism in Croatia is still in its infancy, as well as methodological shortcomings in conducting research, the authors emphasize the importance of research to point out the importance of understanding the existence and implementation of tourism development strategies. Given the lack of literature in this area, despite a brief insight into the topic, this research can certainly serve for all future research and a better understanding of the topic of strategic development of rural tourism.

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## **STRATEGIC APPROACH TO RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: EXAMPLE OF COUNTY TOURIST BOARDS**

**Abstract:**

The crisis caused by the coronavirus very quickly showed strong consequences, not only in society but also in many other areas such as tourism. This was further proof that mass tourism is unsustainable, both in the context of tourist safety and the satisfaction with provided services in tourism. On the other hand, specific forms of tourism have become increasingly pronounced, which, according to their characteristics, respond faster and easier to this new situation. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), trends in tourism developments continue to point to an increase in domestic travel and increased interest in tourism products that can be linked to nature, outdoor activities, and rural tourism. Consequently, more and more strategic thinking is being invested in developing a destination through specific forms of tourism such as rural tourism, and as a key communication trend in the past period, there is a paradigm shift in communication with domestic tourists.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategic approach to the development of tourism through rural tourism. In order to obtain answers to the questions asked, an analysis of the content of tourism development strategies and the official websites of 20 counties in Croatia will be conducted.

**Keywords:**

Rural tourism, strategic planning, strategy, tourist boards, trends

**Dejan Gluvačević, PhD**

Edward Bernays University College

[dejan.gluvacevic@bernays.hr](mailto:dejan.gluvacevic@bernays.hr)

**Damir Jugo, PhD**

Edward Bernays University College

[damir.jugo@bernays.hr](mailto:damir.jugo@bernays.hr)

**Zdeslav Milas, MSc**

Edward Bernays University College

[zdeslav.milas@bernays.hr](mailto:zdeslav.milas@bernays.hr)



## ATTITUDES OF THE LOCAL POPULATION ABOUT EU FUNDS AS A MEANS FOR OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY

**Rikard Bakan**  
**dr.sc. Dejan Tubić**  
**Miroslava Bato**

**Abstract:** In Europe, the strongest receptive tourist region in the world, tourism plays an extremely important role. There are thus many opportunities for funding and / or co-financing through EU grants for projects related to the promotion and development of tourism, especially in underdeveloped regions and rural areas. The availability and number of opportunities offered by European funds for tourism development are becoming of a significant importance for Croatia as a full member of the EU and a country where tourism is a fairly important sector. This is especially true for underdeveloped tourist destinations of continental Croatia and its rural areas, so many continental counties are becoming exemplary examples of successful withdrawals and implementation of projects aimed at improving tourism. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the success of the use of grants for the purpose of tourism development, but also to assess whether public calls for EU grants are adapted to real needs of Croatian rural tourism. The theoretical part of this paper questions these issues. As tourism development has a significant impact on the life of the local community in which it takes place, the empirical part of the paper examined the attitudes of the local population of Virovitica-Podravina County on the purposefulness of the use of available grants, as well as their perceptions of the benefits that the implemented projects brought to the local population and improving the county's recognition as a desirable tourist destination.

**Key words:** EU Funds, EU grants, tourism, projects, local population, Virovitica-Podravina County

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, being a dynamic and interdisciplinary activity, is the driver of many movements of people and goods. The importance of tourism is reflected in its contribution to the economy of a particular country, and for many destinations nowadays, tourism is one of the most important sources of their income. Europe is one of the most visited tourist destinations, and the European Union includes tourism in its development goals. Moreover, tourism is seen as a powerful tool that not only achieves financial benefits but also strengthens the Union's identity and recognition in the world. To strengthen tourism development, the European Union provides significant financial resources to its member states, and it is the goal of individual member states to find the best model for ensuring further tourism development (Devčić and Šostar, 2015). The Republic of Croatia has had access to these funds even before its accession to the EU and becoming an equal member of the EU has opened up new opportunities for development through EU funds. Grants through EU projects are thus currently the driver of development of many sectors, including tourism (Panasiuk, 2017). The funds are available to both public and private sectors and are used both for strengthening of staff in tourism as well as for infrastructure interventions and "soft" content that values the tourist attraction base of many Croatian tourist destinations. In less developed

destinations, the responsibility for tourism development in the early stages of the life cycle often lies with local government and self-government, which, fitting into higher-level strategies, is an ideal partner for connecting all stakeholders interested in sustainable tourism development (Richie and Crouch, 2000; UNEP, 2003; UNWTO, 2019; Žibert et al., 2020; Popova et al., 2021). However, as tourism is a very heterogeneous sector, planning its development and long-term sustainable management of an integrated tourism product requires active involvement of a number of stakeholders at the local level in which the local population plays a very important, if not crucial role (Fabić and Jurdana, 2018). It often happens that the local population, which should be actively involved in all phases of planning and implementation of tourism development projects, is simply left out of this process or not properly included (Saufi et al., 2014; Buljan et al., 2020). The attitudes and opinions of the local population regarding the projects aimed at tourism development should be viewed in two ways – from the aspect of their expectations related to the implementation of projects and with regard to the impact that the new tourist offer will have on the local community and various economic and social benefits that the development of tourism could bring them (Birkić et al., 2019). Due to many stakeholders that may be affected by the implementation of individual projects (Krce Miočić et al., 2016), it is necessary to analyse the purpose and consider the usefulness of the spent grants. In addition to the figures that are the main indicator, we should also consider the impact of tourism development on the local community and population, and the relative costs and benefits that such development brings. In order to approach a quality and comprehensive analysis, i.e. to study the possibilities that EU funds and grants bring to a particular member state or local community, it is necessary to start from theoretical knowledge, but it is crucial to observe that through practical examples, i.e. projects that have been implemented in the territory of the Republic of Croatia and Virovitica-Podravina County, which was taken as an example destination for evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of EU projects aimed at the development of tourist facilities and infrastructure. Finally, to gain knowledge about the impact of EU funds spent on the local community, an empirical survey of public attitudes was conducted in order to answer the question of the perception of the benefits that the local community enjoys from using EU grants.

## **2. TOURISM POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

Tourism is an important economic activity with numerous positive effects on the economic growth and employment in the European Union (Eurostat, 2021). In addition to economic benefits, tourism is a significant tool for the EU for emitting a positive image of the Union and promoting the values of the EU in the rest of the world. The European Union as an organization seeks to ensure a coordinated approach and encourages a number of initiatives to increase the competitiveness and capacity of EU tourism through sustainable development. Following global trends and the state of European tourism, the Union has laid the foundations of European tourism policy, highlighting the factors that will determine competitiveness by respecting the principles of sustainable development (Europe Council, 2010). The aim of European tourism policy is to make European tourism a competitive, modern and sustainable industry. As a member of the European Union, the Republic of Croatia pursues tourism goals that are defined at the community

level. However, the specifics of state organization define the manner of monitoring and organizing the tourist system of Croatia as well each other member state. (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2020). As part of its activities in the period from 2020 to 2024, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports will carry out the following activities to improve the tourist climate in Croatia: improving the quality of human resources in tourism; improving the availability of ICT technology; developing prerequisites for smart and sustainable tourism; participation in the work of international bodies (UNWTO, OECD, Council of Europe, etc.); protection of natural heritage from the negative effects of invasive tourism; ensuring security; investing in public tourism infrastructure to raise competitiveness; supporting the development of special forms of tourism; encouraging consumption in catering; raising the competitiveness of the tourism industry and subsidizing credit programs in tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, 2020). The tourism sector is one of the most important industries that brings many benefits to the domestic economy. This is confirmed by the fact that in 2019 the share of tourism in the GDP of the Republic of Croatia amounted to as much as 19.5%. (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia, 2021). To that end, one of the goals of the Government of the Republic of Croatia is development of tourism in order to achieve competitive advantage and international recognition through the preparation of strategic documents efforts are being made to make the best possible use of the tourist potential through the preparation of strategic documents.

### **3. SHORT REVIEW OF PUBLIC CALLS IN THE PERIOD 2014-2020 WITH REFERENCE TO THE NEW PROGRAMMING PERIOD**

Following the analysis of the opportunities of using EU grants to implement projects aimed at developing tourism infrastructure and content for visitors, it can be concluded that during the financial period from 2014 to 2020, Croatia has had significant financial resources available for that purpose through many EU funds and programs. Although each ministry publishes information on public calls for beneficiaries from the territory of the Republic of Croatia, there is a central portal that brings together key information on funding opportunities from EU funds and public calls for grants<sup>1</sup>. The period from 2014 to 2017 included 4 public calls that directly financed activities aimed at capacity building in tourism, and the following is a summary of the data on these public calls:

- *Improving the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market in the tourism and hospitality sector* - European Social Fund, OP Effective Human Resources 2014-2020<sup>2</sup>, total financial allocation: HRK 31,500,000.00

- *Support to the development of SMEs in tourism by increasing the quality and additional offer of hotels* - European Regional Development Fund, OP Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014 - 2020, total financial allocation: 304,000,000.00 HRK;

- *Preparation and implementation of integrated development programs based on the restoration of cultural heritage* - European Regional Development Fund, OP Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020, total financial allocation: 903,005,800.16 HRK;

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<sup>1</sup> [https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/funding-grants-subsidies\\_hr](https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/funding-grants-subsidies_hr)

<sup>2</sup> OP refers to the "Operational Program".

- *Increasing economic activity and competitiveness of small and medium enterprises* - European Regional Development Fund, Regional Competitiveness Operational Program 2007-2013, total financial allocation: HRK 255,714,160.00.

The four above-mentioned calls, which were directly aimed at allocating funds for the tourism sector, made HRK 1,494,219.16 available to applicants. Areas funded included tourism, social inclusion, small and medium-sized enterprises, crafts and culture<sup>3</sup>.

The period from 2018 to 2021 included 7 public calls and 14 ITU calls and one direct grant award. The following is a summary of published public calls from 2017 to 2021, giving an overview of available public calls that enabled financing of activities in the tourism sector:

- *Preparation and implementation of integrated development programs based on the restoration of cultural heritage in Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem* - European Regional Development Fund, OP Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020, total financial allocation: 332,000,000.00 HRK;

- *INTERREG V-B Mediterranean – 3<sup>rd</sup> call for proposals* - European Regional Development Fund and IPA funds, European Territorial Cooperation, Transnational Cooperation Program INTERREG V-B Mediterranean, total financial allocation: ≈ EUR 30 million;

- *Interreg IPA CBC Croatia - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro 2014 - 2020 – 2<sup>nd</sup> call for project proposals* - European Regional Development Fund, European Territorial Cooperation, Cross-border Cooperation Program INTERREG IPA Croatia - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro, total financial allocation: 25,966,626.00 EUR,

- *Interreg IPA CBC Croatia - Serbia 2014 - 2020 – 2<sup>nd</sup> call for project proposals* - European Regional Development Fund, European Territorial Cooperation, Cross-border Cooperation Program INTERREG IPA Croatia - Serbia, total financial allocation: 17,915,469.24 EUR ;

- *INTERREG Adria – 2<sup>nd</sup> call for Proposals (EUSAIR Strategic Call)* - European Regional Development Fund, European Territorial Cooperation, INTERREG V-B Adriatic-Ionian Transnational Cooperation Program, total financial allocation: ≈ EUR 35 million;

- *6.2.1 Investment support for starting non-agricultural activities* - European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Rural Development Program of the Republic of Croatia, total financial allocation: HRK 187,787,500.00;

- *Improving the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market in the tourism and hospitality sector II* - European Social Fund, OP Effective Human Resources 2014 - 2020, total financial allocation: HRK 27,655,000.00.

In addition to the above-mentioned calls, in the observed time period, numerous projects were financed through the ITU instrument. ITU, i.e. integrated territorial cooperation is an instrument intended to integrate funds from various EU funds and OPs in activities that seek to strengthen the role of cities as drivers of economic development<sup>4</sup>. In the mentioned period, 15 projects were financed through the ITU from the following areas of Croatia: Vukovar, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, Pula, Zadar, Rijeka, Zagreb, and the non-refundable funds amounted to up to 85% of the total eligible value of projects. Thus, the development of tourist facilities through ITU instruments has so far included cities from

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<sup>3</sup> European Structural and Investment Funds: [http://arhiva.strukturnifondovi.hr/natjecaji?contestStatus=&fond=&sector=5&podrucja\\_ids=5&applier=&kljucne\\_rijeci=](http://arhiva.strukturnifondovi.hr/natjecaji?contestStatus=&fond=&sector=5&podrucja_ids=5&applier=&kljucne_rijeci=)

<sup>4</sup> European Structural and Investment Funds: <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/en/integrirana-teritorijalna-ulaganja/>

the area of Continental Croatia as well as cities from the area of the Croatian coast. The upcoming financial perspective brings new priorities and strategic goals that will enable further development of Croatia as an EU member, and many authors are already considering the upcoming possibilities while the competent ministries at the state level in cooperation with EU bodies finalize new Operational Programs. The new financial period brings a total of 1,824.3 billion euros, and more than 25 billion euros are available for the Republic of Croatia. Funds will be allocated from the usual Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and in addition to the mentioned source, the next generation EU is new (EU Generation; NGEU)<sup>5</sup>. Cohesion policy will seek to further ensure the development of member states, and the forthcoming seven-year period will be financed from:

- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Social Fund plus (ESF +) and the Fair Transition Fund (FPT)<sup>6</sup>. The management of these funds will be performed by operational programs which will be implemented for the programming period as follows:
- Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion 2021-2027. (OPCK), Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2021-2027 (OPULJ) and Integrated Territorial Program 2021-2027 (ITP).

#### **4. EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA AND VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY**

The development of tourism through EU projects does not only refer to direct investments in the construction of tourist and catering facilities. The development of content for the purpose of improving the tourist offer of a particular destination includes investments in natural and cultural heritage, transport infrastructure, education of personnel in tourism or promotion and marketing in order to achieve excellence and recognition. By looking into the data available on the website of the Central Agency for Financing and Contracting of EU Programs and Projects<sup>7</sup> (CFCA) in the section "Projects" you can find a number of successfully implemented projects aimed at sustainable use of available resources and improving visitors infrastructure and content. The project called "Large carnivores visitor centre" with a total value of 8,180,006.45 HRK per implementation, which was opened by the Centre in Gorski Kotar, and the beneficiary of the grant was the Nature public institution. A successfully implemented project called "Integrated program" Civitas Sacra "- improving the tourist offer of Šibenik based on the valorisation of cultural heritage of St. Jacob's Cathedral and Galbiani Palace", a project worth 36,380,859.92 HRK conducted by the Diocese of Šibenik is an example of investing in sustainable use of cultural / sacral heritage. As investment in tourism development also includes investment in transport and maritime infrastructure, EU funds are used for this purpose, and an example of this is the project

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<sup>5</sup> European Structural and Investment Funds: <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/eu-fondovi/eu-fondovi-2021-2027/>

<sup>6</sup> European Structural and Investment Funds: <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/eu-fondovi/eu-fondovi-2021-2027/legislative-package-for-cohesion-policy-for-the-period-2021-2027/>

<sup>7</sup> CFCA - Central Agency for Financing and Contracting of EU Programs and Projects - acts as an intermediary body of level 2 (PT2) and is part of the management system of programs and projects financed in the Republic of Croatia from the European Union budget (CFCA: <https://www.safu.hr/hr/o-safu> (March 10, 2022))

"Construction of the ferry port Tkon - Phase I, Subphase II". The total project value was 32,591,045.60 HRK and the project was implemented by the Zadar County Port Authority<sup>8</sup>. These projects are just a few examples of a successful use of opportunities from EU funds in order to use the available grants to improve the existing attraction base, but also the development of new content. The last few years have been marked by a positive trend in the implementation of projects in the Virovitica-Podravina County, which are developing visitor centres, often with accommodation facilities, designed to attract more visitors to this destination. When mentioning important projects in the tourism sector, we should certainly mention the reconstruction of Janković Castle in Suhopolje, revitalization of the protected park next to Janković Castle in Suhopolje, reconstruction of Pejačević Castle in Virovitica, reconstruction of Janković manor and Kapela Dvor, reconstruction of Count Janković's summer residence in Noskovci, construction of a visitor center next to a protected redwood tree in Slatina, renovation of Petar Preradović's birth house in Grabrovnica and the development of content for wine tourism in Orahovica (Virovitica-Podravina County Tourist Board, 2021). One of the most significant projects in the Virovitica-Podravina County is certainly the project called "Visitor Center - Janković Castle" with a total contract value of 39,767,716.50 HRK, which was implemented by the Virovitica-Podravina County along with its partners<sup>9</sup>. The most significant result of the project is certainly the reconstruction and equipping of Janković Castle in Suhopolje and a study of valorisation of the cultural heritage of the Janković family, but the implementation of the project also yielded and equipped a multimedia exhibition space to provide space and interactive content for visitors as well as the local community (Virovitica-Podravina County Tourist Board, 2021). Virovitica-Podravina County has been investing significant funds into the development of tourist facilities for many years in order to increase the recognizability of the County as an attractive tourist destination. Tourism is listed as one of the strategic development priorities in the County Development Strategy until 2020 (Virovitica-Podravina County, 2019) which also defined the directions of tourism development in the County.

## 5. METHODOLOGY, AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Upon analysing the available data on the opportunities that EU funds bring to member states and reviewing the policies of public calls for grants, it was necessary to examine public opinion on the usefulness of tourism and implemented projects in Virovitica-Podravina County. The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of residents from Virovitica-Podravina County on tourism as an important sector for the development of the County as well as using European Union funds for the purpose of improving the tourist offer. The authors see this research primarily as a pilot study that will serve as a starting point for further research on the purpose and impact of EU projects on the improvement of the tourist offer in the Virovitica-Podravina County.

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<sup>8</sup> CFCA <https://www.safu.hr/hr/projekti> (March 10, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> CFCA: <https://www.safu.hr/hr/o-safu/primjeri-eu-projekata-u-rh/operativni-program-konkurentnost-i-kohezija/list/centar-za-posjetitelji-dvorac-jankovic> (March 10, 2022).

The research is based on three key research questions:

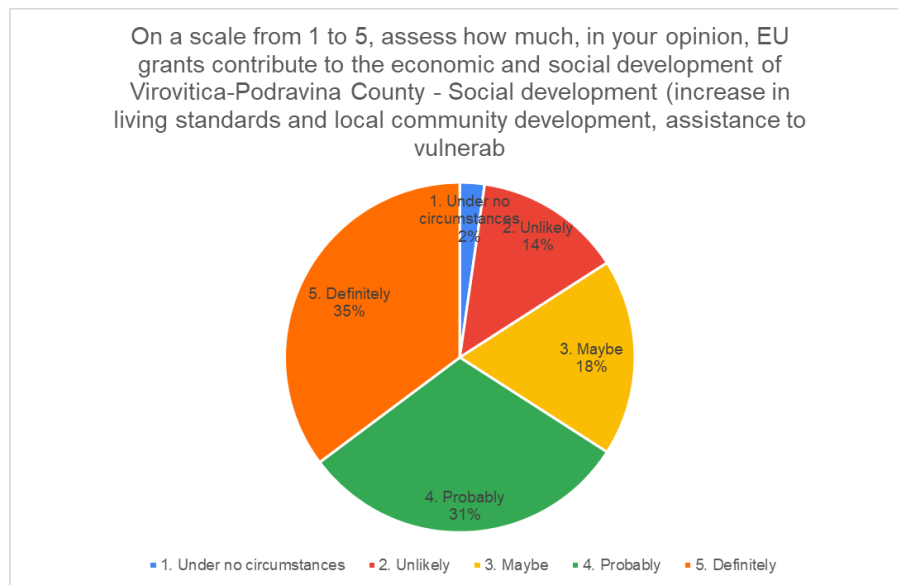
1. What is the level of awareness of the local population about the activities and projects of Virovitica-Podravina County that are financed by grants from the European Union and would that encourage them on more active involvement in activities in the tourism sector?
2. Do the respondents think that the implementation of projects in tourism sector in the Virovitica-Podravina County has increased the attractiveness of Virovitica-Podravina County as a tourist destination and will those activities bring future benefits for the community?
3. Do the respondents think that implemented activities contributed to the attractiveness of selected continental destination (Virovitica-Podravina County) as more attractive tourist destination?

For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was created and distributed via author's Facebook and Instagram profiles. In this way, authors wanted to collect a minimum of 70 completed questionnaires. The survey questionnaire contained 21 closed-ended questions. The first group of questions referred to the attitudes related to the awareness and opinion on European Union funds intended for the development of tourism and its importance for the continental part of the Republic of Croatia. The second group of questions wanted to examine the attitudes of respondents about the appeal of the counties of Continental Croatia as tourist destinations and familiarity with investments in the development of the tourist offer in the Virovitica-Podravina County. The third group of questions related to the examination of respondents' attitudes regarding the purposefulness of spent grants for the development of tourist offer in Virovitica-Podravina County, the impact of implemented projects to raise awareness of Virovitica-Podravina County on the Croatian tourist map and finally the possible involvement of respondents in some of the implemented EU-funded projects. The survey was conducted during a week from September 7 to 14, 2021, through which period 88 survey questionnaires were collected.

### **5.1. Research results and interpretation**

In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents presented their attitudes and views on European Union funds and the opportunities of using them for the purpose of tourism development. Most respondents, 43.2%, answered that they were partially informed about the possibilities offered by EU funds; 18.2% were not familiar with EU funds and development opportunities and 19 respondents (21.6%) said they were sufficiently informed. Fourteen respondents (15.9%) actively use the opportunities provided by grants in their work. The attitudes of the respondents regarding EU funds and their impact on the improvement of tourism in Virovitica-Podravina County are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. **Assessment of the contribution of EU grants to the economic and social development of Virovitica-Podravina County**



Source: author's work according to research data

Regarding the opinion on the impact of tourism on economic and social development at the national, local and micro-location level, the attitudes of the respondents somewhat differ. While the impact of tourism at the national level was assessed by relatively higher respondents (43%) as "extremely significant", respondents' views on the importance of tourism for the development of Virovitica-Podravina County were divided and the answers were much more dispersed. Thus, 30% of respondents consider tourism an activity with a "slight impact" on the development of the county, 15% believe that tourism is "less important" for economic development, 27% believe that tourism as a sector is "significant" for county development and only 18% of people believe that tourism is "extremely important" for the economic and social development of Virovitica-Podravina County. One part of the respondents (10%) did not express their opinion on the impact of tourism on the economic and social development of the county.

From the above it can be concluded that the local population still does not see tourism as a sector that can significantly affect economic and social development in Virovitica-Podravina County, which can be attributed, among other factors, to a poorly developed awareness about the opportunities provided by specific forms of tourism in continental destinations as well as to orientation towards traditional economic branches (agriculture, wood and processing industry) but also to Croatia's focus mainly on maritime tourist area.

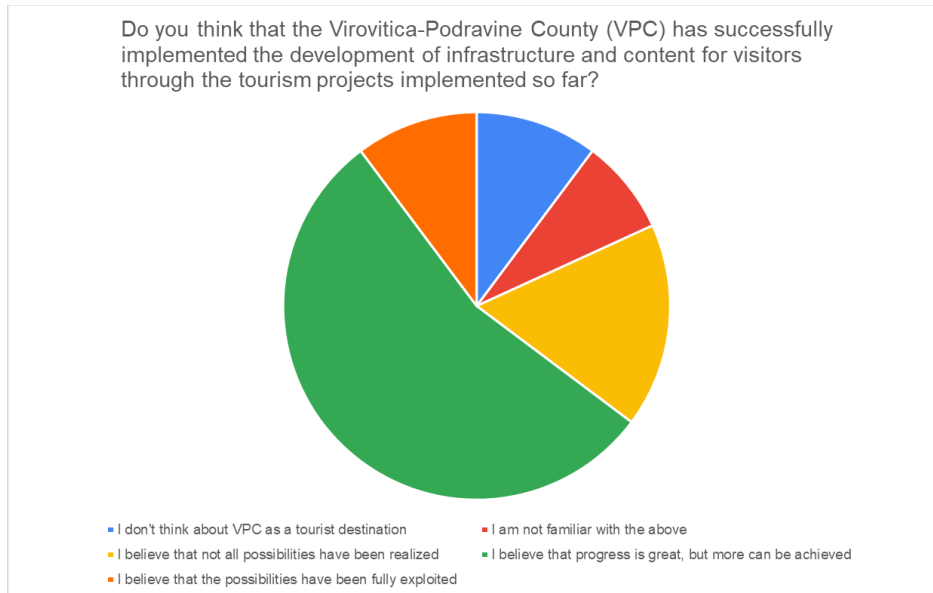
However, regarding the opinion on whether the continental part of Croatia has prospects for an increased number of arrivals and overnight stays, the majority of respondents, 76%



of them, have a much more optimistic view. More than two thirds of respondents agree that the interest of tourists in visiting the destinations of continental Croatia, including Virovitica-Podravina County, will increase in the future and that this will result in an increase in the number of arrivals and overnight stays. These, one could say more optimistic, attitudes of respondents regarding the future of tourism in Virovitica-Podravina County are certainly a result of numerous projects implemented to develop and enrich the tourist offer in the county about which respondents are relatively well informed. Namely, from implemented pilot research could be seen that over 66% of respondents are sufficiently or well acquainted with activities and projects in the field of improving the tourist offer that are implemented in Virovitica-Podravina County and funded by the EU. Almost 7% of them are fully acquainted and as many as 10.2% of respondents have personally participated in the implementation of some projects. Furthermore, when the respondents were asked to estimate the number of financial resources allocated in the period from 2017 to 2019 to Virovitica-Podravina County, the largest number of respondents, 40 of them chose the range from 10,000,000.01 to 150,000,000.00 HRK which coincides with the available data of the Ministry of Finance related to the amount of funds per capita of Virovitica-Podravina County withdrawn from EU funds.

Regarding the current efficiency in the use of EU funds for tourism development in Virovitica-Podravina County, the majority of respondents (54.5%) expressed their opinion that the funds have been used successfully and that positive results can be seen (Figure 2), but that there is still place for improvement. In addition, as many as 83% of respondents believe that there are improvements to be done in the coming financial period regarding the development of additional content. Out of 88 respondents, 17% believe that not all possibilities offered by EU funds in the Virovitica-Podravina County have been used, 10.2% believe that these opportunities have been fully used, and 18.2% of respondents are either unfamiliar with this topic or do not consider Virovitica-Podravina County as a tourist destination.

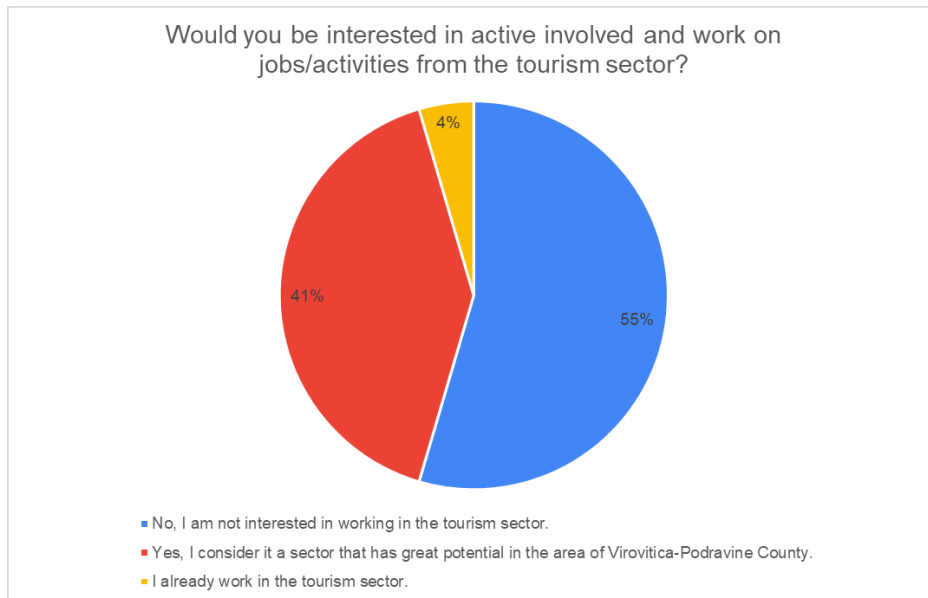
**Figure 2. Opinions on whether respondents believe that the Virovitica-Podravine County (VPC) has successfully implemented the development of infrastructure and content for visitors through the tourism projects implemented so far**



Source: author's work according to research data

Indicative is also the data obtained through the survey that with regard to investments in the tourist offer in Virovitica-Podravina County, that 41% consider tourism a sector that will have great potential in the county in the future and has a very positive attitude towards active involvement in tourism (Figure 4. On the next page) while 4% of respondents already work in the tourism sector.

Figure 3. **Interest in active involvement and work on jobs/activities from the tourism sector**

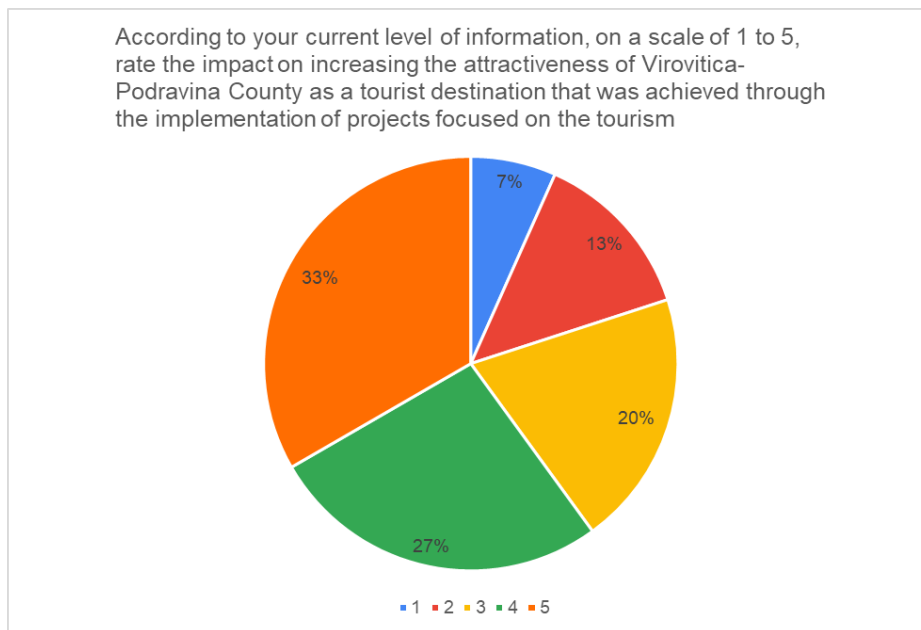


Source: author's work according to research data

Finally, respondents were asked to present their views and assess the usefulness of tourism projects for the Virovitica-Podravina County. Respondents were asked to rate the impact that EU-funded tourism projects had on increasing the county's visibility and attractiveness on Croatia's tourist map on a scale from 1 to 5 (where a score of 5 represented the highest level of utility). The results are shown in Figure 4 on the next page. At the end, the respondents were asked to state their views and evaluate the usefulness of tourist projects for the area of Virovitica-Podravine County. Respondents were thus asked to rate the usefulness for the local population and the recognition of the county on the tourist map of Croatia on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest). The impact of tourism and contribution to the local community was rated 5 by 10 respondents, 4 by 33 respondents, 3 by 33 respondents, 11 respondents chose 2, and 4 respondents rated the above as 1. Impact on the recognition of VPŽ as respondents rated attractive tourist destinations similarly. Most of them were rated as 4 (35 people), 12 respondents gave a rating of 5, and 28 of them gave a rating of 3.

As shown on Figure 4 graph, based on the information they collected by monitoring social events and information available in public local media, the respondents were of the opinion that the invested financial resources and efforts of local and regional self-government units greatly contributed to the recognition of Virovitica-Podravina County on the regional tourist map.

**Figure 4. Evaluate the impact on increasing the attractiveness of Virovitica-Podravina County as a tourist destination, which was achieved through the implementation of projects focused on the tourism sector in the area of Virovitica-Podravina County**



Source: author's work according to research data

## **6. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Considering the available data related to operational programs, funds and programs of the European Union, it is clear that there are a number of options available for strengthening almost all sectors of the economy. However, the available funds do not necessarily mean that they will be properly allocated or used, so it is necessary for each individual member to determine the development priorities on the basis of which public calls for grants are later prepared and published. It is understandable that tourism, which is a strong driving force of the Croatian economy, was one of the sectors in which investments by using EU funds were made.

The period from 2014 to 2020 saw the implementation of a number of projects which today stand as successful examples of how grants can ensure the growth of the competitiveness of the tourism sector and have a positive impact on the growth of the employment.

For the local population from the area of Virovitica-Podravina County, it can be concluded from the analysis of the views expressed that the level of awareness about the

projects and activities funded by grants from the European Union is satisfactory. More than a third of the respondents thinks that they are sufficiently familiar with this topic. More than 15% of respondents either have a high level of awareness on the topic or have actively participated in the implementation of projects. In addition to the above data, the success of Virovitica-Podravina County in withdrawing EU funds at the state level is clear, where the county was ranked among the most successful. As many as 48% of respondents rated the usefulness of EU projects to increase the attractiveness of Virovitica-Podravina County as a tourist county with a score of 4 or 5. A similar score was on the benefits of local people from EU projects where most respondents expressed their positive attitude while as many as 84% of respondents believe that the development of additional tourism facilities should continue through projects co-financed by EU grants.

Regarding the survey of public attitudes about the results of EU funds spent, it is clear that most respondents are aware of the positive changes and expect further development using EU funds in the new financial period, especially with regard to tourism. But the opinion of indirect target groups alone is not the only aspect to consider. It is important to consider the relationship between the invested and the obtained, i.e. costs and benefits that ultimately all newly created tourist facilities should realize. Therefore, in order to enable a comprehensive analysis of the usefulness of invested EU funds in future research, the future research should include economic entities from Virovitica-Podravina County that manage newly opened visitor centre and analyse the success of previous operations, both in terms of profit and through analysis of the number visits and / or overnight stays.

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**ATTITUDES OF THE LOCAL POPULATION ABOUT EU FUNDS AS A MEANS FOR  
OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY**

**Rikard Bakan**  
**dr.sc. Dejan Tubić**  
**Miroslava Bato**

**Abstract:** In Europe, the strongest receptive tourist region in the world, tourism plays an extremely important role. There are thus many opportunities for funding and / or co-financing through EU grants for projects related to the promotion and development of tourism, especially in underdeveloped regions and rural areas. The availability and number of opportunities offered by European funds for tourism development are becoming of a significant importance for Croatia as a full member of the EU and a country where tourism is a fairly important sector. This is especially true for underdeveloped tourist destinations of continental Croatia and its rural areas, so many continental counties are becoming exemplary examples of successful withdrawals and implementation of projects aimed at improving tourism. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the success of the use of grants for the purpose of tourism development, but also to assess whether public calls for EU grants are adapted to real needs of Croatian rural tourism. The theoretical part of this paper questions these issues. As tourism development has a significant impact on the life of the local community in which it takes place, the empirical part of the paper examined the attitudes of the local population of Virovitica-Podravina County on the purposefulness of the use of available grants, as well as their perceptions of the benefits that the implemented projects brought to the local population and improving the county's recognition as a desirable tourist destination.

**Key words:** EU Funds, EU grants, tourism, projects, local population, Virovitica-Podravina County

**Rikard Bakan**  
**dr.sc. Dejan Tubić**  
**Miroslava Bato**

## **CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE RURAL AREA: A NEW APPROACH TO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

**Irena Bosnić**  
**Dejan Tubić**  
**Edita Tolušić**

**Abstract:**

The purpose of this work is reflected in the necessity of a precise terminological definition of the concept of cultural tourism in the rural area and the identification of stimulating and limiting factors for its development, as well as establishing guidelines for the development of a competitive and authentic product of cultural tourism in the rural area. The primary research was conducted using the method of interviews with key participants in the development of cultural tourism in the area of Virovitica-Podravina County. The results showed that the Virovitica-Podravina County is characterized by a unique cultural landscape that provides a stronghold for the development of various forms of cultural tourism. The research also pointed to numerous limiting factors that present challenges and reduce the competitiveness of the cultural tourism product. In particular, the lack of professional staff from the cultural sector for the processing and interpretation of the entire heritage, the passivity of people in the tourism sector who do not follow the development of the cultural offer, and the general lack of intersectoral cooperation and tourism entrepreneurship stand out. Opportunities for the future development of cultural tourism in rural areas should certainly be sought in the integration of cultural identity into the tourist offer and a change of approach in the development and management of the cultural tourism product, whereby the emphasis will be on the redesign of existing and the creation of new competitive tourist experiences and the unification of individual elements of the offer into a unique product. Following the above, this work represents a kind of contribution in making public and political proposals for the further development of cultural tourism in rural areas. Since the research was conducted on a relatively small sample and on the example of only one County, it is necessary to conduct additional research in the future to provide more representative results.

**Keywords:**

cultural tourism, rural area, product development.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Culture, which is often very well preserved in rural areas, represents an exceptional resource for creating original tourism products and generally improving the quality of the tourist offer. According to Tomas Hrvatska 2019 research, culture and art take the sixth place (behind the sea, nature, city breaks, touring, sports and recreation) among the most important motives for tourists to come to the Adriatic, but also to Continental Croatia. If we analyze the activities of tourists during their stay in the desired destination, visits to museums and galleries are among the 10 main activities of tourists on vacation. This is particularly applies to Continental Croatia where tourists, much more than average, spend their time in museums, galleries, exhibitions and visiting national parks/protected areas (Marušić et.al. 2020). The above, on the one hand, represents an opportunity for rural tourist destinations to position themselves on the tourist market with innovative and authentic cultural tourism products, while on the other hand, it represents a kind of challenge in engaging material and immaterial resources, participators in the culture and tourism sector, and the local population. Therefore, based on the conducted research, the key stimulating and limiting factors for the development of cultural tourism in the rural area will be considered on the example of the Virovitica-Podravina County, as well as specific recommendations will be given on how to improve the development



of cultural tourism and approach the design of a competitive cultural tourism product that will enable the creation of a personal authentic experiences of visitors or tourist consumers.

## **2. CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE RURAL AREA**

According to Bakan et.al. (2019) it is needless to say that the number of different motives that attract the tourists into a certain destination as well as the number of activities that these tourists want to experience during their travels, i.e. what the tourists want to experience, grows proportionally with the number of tourists. Mass tourism market has become exceptionally fragmented, which resulted in an array of different market niches, and cultural tourism has become one of the most significant niches (Richards 2014a).

Cultural tourism is "a form of tourism in which interest in the demand for objects and contents of a cultural character prevails" (Vukonić and Čavlek 2001, 86). In the Action Plan for the Development of Cultural Tourism, the technical definition of cultural tourism was verified, according to which the concept of cultural tourism includes "visits to cultural and historical sights, museums and galleries, musical and stage events and performances, festivals, objects of sacred heritage, creative workshops and thematic routes and roads" (Tomljenović and Boranić Živoder 2015, 7). Also, cultural tourism can be "defined as that activity which enables people to experience the different ways of life of other people, thereby gaining at first hand an understanding of their customs, traditions, the physical environment, the intellectual ideas and those places of architectural, historical, archaeological or other cultural significance which remain from earlier times"(ICOMOS 1997 according to Csapó 2012, 204). In general, it can be stated that cultural tourism is a type of tourism that includes the travel of people outside their place of permanent residence or travel partly motivated to get to know the material (museums, galleries, theaters, concerts, monuments and historical sites) and the non-material (customs, traditions, crafts, skills) cultures of a specific locality, region and country. An essential component of cultural tourism is the fun experience that results from combining art with natural and social heritage and various cultural and entertainment events, as well as education, which aims to present the entire culture of the region to visitors.

Although cities have often been seen as major drivers of cultural tourism growth, synergies between tourism and culture can be found in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, there also has been a growth of new types of attractions, events and experiences that have attracted new audiences (UNWTO 2018). When considering cultural tourism in rural areas, the authors Ivanović (2008), Đurkin, Perić and Kljaić Šebrek (2017) and Smith (2009) point out that the forms of culture consumed by cultural (and other) tourists are constantly changing and today increasingly include elements that were not previously considered "cultural". In this context, activities such as "absorbing the atmosphere" of the destination and actively participating in the local traditions of rural areas come to the fore. There is also a growing interest in tradition, local food and the way of life of certain communities. Cultural tourism 2.0 where the supply was mostly the heritage-based product is beginning to shift towards cultural tourism 3.0 (Richards

2014b) where the tourists' interests and motives shift towards the intangible products and creative holidays as well as to the live-like-locals approach, which hence leads to the interconnection of tourists experiences with the everyday lifestyle of the destinations visited by the tourists (Bakan et.al. 2019, 49). A number of interesting tourism developments have taken place in some of the rural areas of Europe, many of which are linked closely to cultural tourism. Rural cultural tourism is significant because it can compensate for the decline in traditional industries, particularly agriculture, and diversify the economy (Smith 2009). The extension of cultural tourism supply in smaller cities and rural areas is also producing a growth in small-scale cultural attractions, such as local heritage and interpretation centers. Part of the challenge for smaller attractions is to bundle their products effectively to be able to compete in the European cultural tourism market (Richards 1999,7).

All that was mentioned above imposes the conclusion that cultural tourism in rural areas should be based on the authenticity of the rural cultural landscape and the integration of the cultural identity of the area into the tourist offer, which will consequently enable visitors to gain new unique experiences. A cultural tourism product which combines elements of the tangible and intangible heritage of a rural area, with a contemporary interpretation, can become a competitive tourism product that meets the interests and needs of today's tourist consumer, and enable the rural tourism destination to develop recognition as an authentic destination for gaining new experiences, local economy and preservation of tradition.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research was conducted in the Virovitica-Podravina County, which is a predominantly rural region, since more than 50% of the region's population lives in local rural areas (Čagalj, et. al. 2021).

The fundamental objectives of the subject research can be summarized in three points:

- research and determine the characteristics of the offer and the foundation of the tourist-attraction basis for the development of cultural tourism in the area of the Virovitica - Podravina County
- research and determine opportunities and challenges, i.e. encouraging and limiting factors for the development of cultural tourism in the area of the Virovitica - Podravina County
- determine guidelines for the development of a competitive and authentic product of cultural tourism in the rural area.

For the purposes of determining the factual situation and position of cultural tourism in the area of the Virovitica-Podravina County, the method of analysis of documentation and secondary sources of data was applied, and empirical research was conducted using the method of interviews with key participants in the process of forming the offer of cultural tourism, its promotion and sales, but also overall development. The analysis of documentation included the analysis of available strategic documents, information from the websites of cultural institutions and the websites of tourist boards as carriers of

marketing activities. In order to gain better and more comprehensive answers about the research problem, an individual interview was conducted, for which a questionnaire was created in advance. The research was conducted during March and April 2022. A total of six interviews were conducted with representatives of cultural institutions, visitor and interpretation centers, tourist boards and receptive travel agencies. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions grouped into 4 thematic areas:

1. Key cultural resources and attractions in the area of the Virovitica-Podravina County that form the backbone of the cultural tourism offer
2. Problems, challenges and limitations in the development of cultural tourism and evaluation of intersectoral cooperation of the cultural and tourism sectors
3. Stimulating factors and opportunities for the future development of cultural tourism
4. Management and development of cultural tourism products.

#### **4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

##### **4.1. Key cultural resources and attractions on the area of the Virovitica-Podravina County**

The Virovitica-Podravina County is a culturally diverse entity that unites the contrasting features of Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem (speech, customs, heritage) on the one hand, and Central Podravina on the other. According to the Register of Cultural Properties (<https://registar.kulturnadobra.hr>) in the Republic of Croatia, there are 88 protected cultural properties in the Virovitica-Podravina County, of which 12 are protected intangible heritage, and 14 are protected as a preventive measure. The above proves the significant resource-attraction basis of the County, which consists of archaeological sites, immovable individual cultural assets, cultural landscapes, cultural-historical entities and intangible heritage. However, most of the protected cultural assets are at a low level of tourism and are currently not suitable to become part of the concrete cultural tourism offer of the county. In the Tourism Development Strategy of the Virovitica-Podravina County until 2030 (Boranić Živoder et. al. 2021), it is emphasized that the strength of the resource-attractive base of the county is above all the rich cultural and historical heritage (forts, castles, palaces, castles, museums, legacy of nobles families) culture of life and work, sacred heritage and events that have gained national and international importance (Table 1)

Table 1: Resource base and cultural attractions of the Virovitica-Podravina County

<b>ATTRACTION CATEGORIZATION</b>	<b>ATTRACTION NAME, LOCATION</b>
<b>cultural and historical heritage</b>	
forts	Ružica grad, Orahovica
palaces	Palace Pejačević, Virovitica

manor houses	Manor house Mihalović, Orahovica; Manor house Janković, Kapela Dvor; Manor house Drašković, Noskovci
castles	Castle Janković, Cabuna and Suhopolje; Castle Pejačević, Virovitica
museums	Virovitica, Slatina
legacy of nobles families	Pejačević, Schaumburg-Lippe, Janković, Drašković and Mihalović
birth houses	Birth house of Petar Preradović, Grabovnica
<b>culture of life and work</b>	Mikeški jestvenik (cookbook); <i>Omamina kuharica (cookbook)</i> ; Park architecture, Virovitica, Slatina, Suhopolje and Noskovci; Winery tradition
<b>sacral heritage</b>	
sanctuary	Church and sanctuary of the Holy Virgin Mary in Voćin
churches and monasteries	Franciscan monastery and church of Holy Rok, Virovitica; ghotic church of St. Peter, Čađavica; the church of Holy Theresa of Avila, Suhopolje, church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Voćin; monastery with church of St. Nicholas, Duzluk; church of St. Lovro, Crkvari; church of St. Joseph, Slatina; church of the Holy Trinity, Gornji Miholjac; church of Holy Barbara, Sladojevci
<b>events</b>	Songs of the Podravina and Podravlje area, Pitomača; The Days of Milko Kelemen, Slatina; ViroExpo, Virovitica; Medieval knight tournament, Jankovac

Source: according to Boranić Živoder et. al. 2021, 44-45

The conducted primary research showed that the key participants in shaping the offer, promotion and sale of the cultural tourism product as the most important attractions also single out the City Museum of Virovitica with the heritage building of the Pejačević Castle in which the museum is located, the Janković Castle in Suhopolje, the Local Museum of Slatina with the story of Mirko Kelemen and the Schaumburg-Lippe noble family, the Interpretation Center - Petar Preradović's birthplace, the Music Festival of Songs of Podravina and Podravlje and the noble heritage. However, in addition to the above, they emphasize the importance of the County's unique rural cultural landscape, which results from the combination of Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem on the one hand, and Middle Podravina on the other, and then point out the gastronomic offer of the region, the Virovitica Theater with the Virkas Festival, the City Library and the Virovitica Reading Room with programs for the local community, Drago Britvić, his legacy and creativity, the ethno collection Grandma's Tales owned by the association Čuvarice-the guardians of cultural heritage from Kladare, the Papuk Nature Park with its overall natural and cultural heritage and traditional intangible heritage (from Ivanje to

Špišić Bukovica, winegrowing customs and traditions through from lacing on bats and traditional combing of the Virovitica region to traditional horse breeding in Višnjica since the Janković family).

In addition to identifying key cultural resources and attractions in the area of the Virovitica-Podravina County, within the researched thematic area, respondents were asked for information and opinions on the inclusion of intangible heritage in the tourist offer and the quality and adaptation of the interpretation of cultural heritage to the expectations of modern consumers. All respondents agreed that intangible heritage is not sufficiently included in the tourist offer. However, the example of the City Museum of Virovitica shows that this is possible. Namely, the intangible heritage is included in the entire setting, from the specific Virovitica speech, traditional customs related to holidays and saints, the Mikeški jestvenik (cookbook), traditional and civil songs, folk beliefs, combing the Virovitica region to spirituality as a form of social interaction. Likewise, part of the traditional cuisine is included in the tourist offer through the services of local restaurants. The research showed that part of the museums, interpretation centers and visitor centers have a themed display that is interactive, interdisciplinary and invites the visitor to get involved. Primarily, the above refers to the City Museum of Virovitica, the Interpretation Center - Birthplace of Petar Preradović, the Janković Castle in Suhopolje and the Dravska priča (The story of the river Drava) Visitor Center. These are newly renovated buildings that are almost completely adapted to the expectations of modern visitors and enable them to experience the history and culture of this region. In order for the current interpretation to be even more successful and contribute to the growth of the competitiveness of cultural tourism, the respondents pointed out that it is necessary to invest more time and money in selected cultural products, brand them and offer them to the market through appropriate marketing activities.

#### **4.2. Challenges and problems in the development of cultural tourism**

When it comes to challenges and problems in the development of cultural tourism, the interviewees pointed out the obvious lack of professional staff from the culture sector for the processing and interpretation of the entire heritage, which would be the basis for creating a competitive, innovative and experiential cultural tourism product. One of the challenges they face is a lack of proactivity, communication and cross-sectoral understanding. In this, a certain amount of passivity of the tourism sector comes to the fore, which does not follow the development of the cultural offer and is not culturally interested and inventive in the organization and creation of new tourism products based on the culture of the region. Although there are several market-ready and internationally competitive tourism products in the field of cultural tourism in the county (Boranić Živoder et. al. 2021), one of the key problems is the insufficient branding of the area as a unique cultural destination, as well as the absence of travel agencies and offers specific package arrangements. A general problem at the county level that hinders the further development of cultural tourism is the low level of tourist entrepreneurship. Partial and individual initiatives are commendable, but they hardly contribute to the development of a competitive cultural tourism product.

#### **4.3. Opportunities and stimulating factors for the development of cultural tourism**

The conducted research has shown that opportunities for the development of cultural tourism should be sought first and foremost in the creation of a personal experiential experience for visitors through the interpretation of heritage, and not dry teaching about buildings, heritage and the past. The focus should be on creating a product that will be a combination of cultural and natural heritage with the addition of the visitor's own experience (for example, make cheese at an OPG (family farm), come to harvest a vineyard, milk a cow). Namely, in order to contribute to the creation of a unique cultural experience for visitors, the integration of cultural identity into the tourist offer is key, as well as a change of approach in the development and management of the cultural tourism product. Only by unifying individual elements of the cultural offer into unique and interesting tourism products can the competitiveness and recognition of the cultural tourism of the region be increased and visitors can be provided with a unique experience of the entire rural landscape.

#### **4.4. Possible approaches and guidelines for cultural tourism management**

The interviewees pointed out that to improve the management of cultural tourism, it is crucial to establish common, high-quality intersectoral communication, but also communication between all tourism and hospitality entities in the County in order to create a quality, comprehensive cultural tourism product that allows the visitor to experience the entire cultural landscape of the area. It is indispensable participants in the implementation of tourism activities are networked, share information and continuously cooperate in the field. It is necessary to strengthen networking, concretely develop the overall tourist offer, create ready-made package arrangements that would unite individual elements of the offer within the county and an original product of cultural tourism in accordance with the situation on the ground. The key goal should be continuous work on the brand with an orientation towards connecting the local population with the cultural locality and the cultural identity of the region.

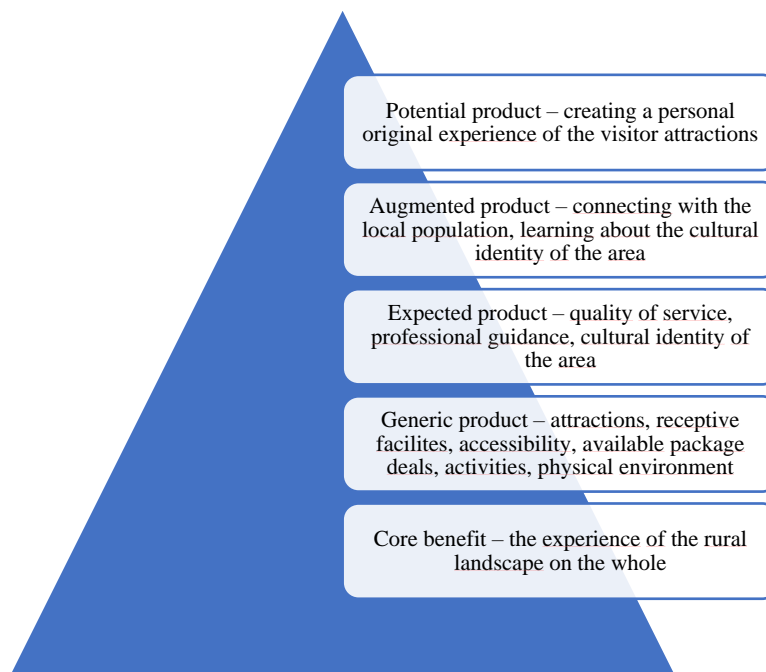
Based on the conducted research, it is possible to set specific guidelines and recommendations for the development of cultural tourism products in rural areas:

- focus on the creation of an integral cultural tourism product/experience in a rural area
- intangible heritage needs to be included in the tourist offer to a greater extent and must become a key part of the overall integral product of cultural tourism
- it is necessary to form a team of equal experts, each from their own field, who will work in true mutual communication and commitment to a common goal, i.e. the development of a cultural tourism product and the entire tourist offer
- it is necessary to continuously work on raising awareness that something concrete can only be done through joint efforts
- consider creating themed routes that will unite the entire culture of the region, cultural and natural heritage, tradition, customs, language, gastronomy, winemaking, vision of the area,

- encourage private initiatives and invest in the development of tourist entrepreneurship and receptive travel agencies that could consolidate the offer and place it on the market in the form of ready-made package arrangements and
- continuously work on the brand and the integration of the cultural identity of the area into the tourist offer.

Another recommendation when creating a cultural tourism product is to think about it on five levels, where, according to Kotler et.al. (2014), each level of the product represents additional value for the consumer, and together represent a hierarchy of values for consumers (Figure 1),

Figure 1: **Five levels of cultural tourism product**



Source: adjusted according to Kotler et.al., 2014

The main benefit that the consumer buys is the experience of the entire rural landscape that the consumer visits, and the basic product consists of cultural attractions, receptive contents and activities, accessibility, available package arrangements and physical environment. The expected product is all other properties connected to provide basic benefits from accommodation, quality of service, expert guidance to heritage interpretations. Additional services and benefits that need to be offered to consumers, which are built around the basic and expected product, form an extended product that should include connecting with the local population, getting to know the cultural identity of the area, and the like. Namely, all the mentioned additional benefits for consumers are an important part of the overall product as well as a potential product that tries to charm the consumer, like creating a personal, original experience for the visitor. A cultural

tourism product created in this way can achieve a high market value and position itself on the competitive realist market.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research showed that the cultural tourism product in rural areas should be thought of as an integral tourism product, that is, a set of tangible and intangible attributes (material and immaterial) that satisfy some consumer need. In addition to the material component of the cultural tourism product, the emphasis must also be on the quality of service, interpretation, professional guidance and establishing contact with the local population. The key is to strive to create a market-recognizable and competitive tourism product that will enchant tourist consumers with original products and a unique experience. On the example of the Virovitica-Podravina County, it was established that this is possible. For example, in Janković and Pejačević castles, visitors can experience history, discover the culture of life and work through the heritage of noble life, and connect with the local population and their products through creative workshops that are a combination of gastronomy, oenology and art of this area. Although there is an evident lack of private interest and tourist entrepreneurship, especially receptive travel agencies, the proactivity of individuals has contributed to the creation of micro-destinations with an original offer of tourism products in this area. Destination management and tourism development in the future period should first of all be directed towards strengthening intersectoral cooperation and communication, more intensive inclusion of intangible heritage and cultural identity in an integral cultural tourism product, but also actively involving the local population in the entire process. Since the research in question was conducted only in the area of the Virovitica-Podravina County, it is also recommended to conduct additional research in a wider geographical area, which would provide more representative results and a basis for creating a concrete model of cultural tourism development in rural areas.

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## **CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE RURAL AREA: A NEW APPROACH TO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

**Irena Bosnić**  
**Dejan Tubić**  
**Edita Tolušić**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this work is reflected in the necessity of a precise terminological definition of the concept of cultural tourism in the rural area and the identification of stimulating and limiting factors for its development, as well as establishing guidelines for the development of a competitive and authentic product of cultural tourism in the rural area. The primary research was conducted using the method of interviews with key participants in the development of cultural tourism in the area of Virovitica-Podravina County. The results showed that the Virovitica-Podravina County is characterized by a unique cultural landscape that provides a stronghold for the development of various forms of cultural tourism. The research also pointed to numerous limiting factors that present challenges and reduce the competitiveness of the cultural tourism product. In particular, the lack of professional staff from the cultural sector for the processing and interpretation of the entire heritage, the passivity of people in the tourism sector who do not follow the development of the cultural offer, and the general lack of intersectoral cooperation and tourism entrepreneurship stand out. Opportunities for the future development of cultural tourism in rural areas should certainly be sought in the integration of cultural identity into the tourist offer and a change of approach in the development and management of the cultural tourism product, whereby the emphasis will be on the redesign of existing and the creation of new competitive tourist experiences and the unification of individual elements of the offer into a unique product. Following the above, this work represents a kind of contribution in making public and political proposals for the further development of cultural tourism in rural areas. Since the research was conducted on a relatively small sample and on the example of only one County, it is necessary to conduct additional research in the future to provide more representative results.

### **Keywords:**

cultural tourism, rural area, product development.

**Irena Bosnić, PhD**  
College Professor  
Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
irena.bosnic@vuv.hr

**Dejan Tubić, PhD**  
Assistant Professor  
Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
dejan.tubic@vuv.hr

**Edita Tolušić, dipl.iur., univ.spec.admin.publ.,**  
Senior Lecturer  
Virovitica University of Applied Sciences  
edita.tolusic@vuv.hr

## **WINE BRAND IN THE FUNCTION OF PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISTRIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION**

**Tena Šola Vujčić  
Dejan Gluvačević  
Krešimir Dabo**

### **Abstract**

In today's world, marked by the impact of information technologies and the growing competitive markets, a large number of Istrian wineries have developed their foreign brands by high quality of their wines, becoming so a recognizable part of the development of the integrated and versatile touristic offers of the Istrian peninsula. There is a thousand-year-old tradition of growing grapes and making wine on the peninsula, just like there is a wide range of wineries which produce and sell high quality wines. Istria has become one of the largest wine-growing regions in Croatia with more than 6,000 hectares of vineyards. During the past 20 years there has been made a great step forward in terms of wine quality. During this time private family farms have become more important and recognized. Istrian winemakers have earned their place on the global market and amongst a harsh competition by producing high quality products. The tourism in Istria is based on autochthonous varieties of wine (Istrian Malvasia, Teran and Muscat Momiano) and by Istria itself being a recognized tourist destination. The focus of the study is on the regional tourism of Istria and the role of Istrian winemaking in the promotion and development of Istria as a tourist destination. On the case of Istrian wineries, this thesis studies the development of the wine brand that has become an integral part of Istria's tourist offer. It includes five distinguished wineries which have given a great contribution to the development of eno-tourism in Istria and creating a wine brand with the mark of Istrian Quality. The analysis is based on conversations and interviews with the owners and workers at the wineries with the aim of presenting the entire tradition, success and way of doing business of Istrian wineries. The analysis includes the following wineries: Veralda, Kozlovic, Cattunar, Deklic and Marceta. Furthermore, the thesis refers to other Istrian wineries that make a significant contribution to the creation of a wine brand and the development of eno-tourism in Istria. A SWOT analysis of Istria as an eno-tourist destination was made based on the analysis and interpretation of winemakers' answers and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Istria, tourist destination, tourist offer, gastro-tourism, eno-tourism, wine brand, Istrian wineries, autochthonous varieties of wine, Istrian Quality, branding, promotion

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Wine tourism has acquired great relevance, becoming a segment of special interests which involves activities that includes visits to wineries and festivities related to wine (Rodriguez et al. 2020, 2) Quality enogastronomic offer is one of the key elements of any and a bit more serious tourist destination. Most popular enotourism destination worldwide includes countries as such as Italy (Tuscany), France (Bordeaux), Spain (La Rioja), USA (Napa Valley), Portugal (Douro Valley) and other (Bekdemir and Aktas, 2016, 658). In the last two decades, it is clear that great changes have taken place in Croatia in terms of enogastronomic offer, and this is confirmed by the fact that Croatian wines are positioned on the global map by the quality of their products. Thus, a recognizable element is realized that contributes to the diversity of the tourist offer. In this context, Istria has made a big step forward and positioned itself as a Croatian tourist region which, in addition to a thousand-year tradition of wine production, nurtures continuous improvement of Istrian wines, and the greatest credit for this goes to local

Istrian winemakers who develop wine tradition through private families. Two decades ago, the wine scene of Istria began its transformation, and they turned the family tradition into a respectable economic activity with the commitment, planned and quality promotion opened the door to the world wine scene. Their contribution to the employment of the local population and the attraction of a large number of tourists to previously undeveloped places is important. With the top quality of products and pleasant aesthetics, Istrian wineries have turned a century-old tradition into emotion and shown that the best places are on the side roads. Until then, unknown places such as Momjan, Buje, Savudrija, Višnjan, Lovreč, Vižinada, and even Motovun, to which the roads were known only to the local population, became a lure and mecca for tourists. Nurturing the production of indigenous wine varieties and appearances at international fairs and festivals are just some of what Istrian winemakers are continuously doing to work together to position Istria as a tourist destination with a rich and quality wine offer. For this reason, the paper focuses on Istrian winemaking in the promotion and development of Istria as a tourist destination where the authors analyze the contributions of five prominent Istrian winemakers, whose work contributes to the development of Istrian eno-tourism. For this purpose, two research questions were asked, which seek answers from the perspective of Istrian winemakers, and these are the following questions:

- To what extent do Istrian wines contribute to the promotion of Istria as a tourist destination?
- What activities and means of the Istrian winery can contribute to even greater recognition of Istria as a wine destination?

With the collected answers and the use of secondary data sources, the authors bring a SWOT analysis to describe in more detail the state and strength of the Istrian wine brand in the function of promoting and developing Istria as a tourist destination.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Significant elements for the promotion of ideas, values, identities, and attitudes are food and drink. As George Bernard Shaw says, "There is no more sincere love than the love of food" (Gavranović, 2015, 91). Gastronomic tourism is also called tourism of food, tasting, or culinary tourism, and means the search for a unique experience in eating and drinking. "Gastronomic tourism is a journey in search of enjoying prepared food, drinks and other events related to food" (Gavranović, 2015, 91). The development of the gastronomy of a certain destination contributes to the development of its overall tourist offer. Drpić and Vukman (2016, 66) claim that gastronomic tourism contributes to the creation of a quality and complete tourist product and the enrichment of the overall tourist offer; the development of tourism outside the tourist season and the development of tourism in the continental part; rural development, increasing entrepreneurship and employing local people; preservation of culture, tradition, and environment; strengthening the national image at the international level; placement of domestic products and increasing consumption of foreign tourists; winemakers and farmers place their products at the place of production and have the opportunity to build awareness of the quality of their products outside the local area. Thanks to its tradition, history, and unique geographical position, Croatia has great opportunities for the development of

recognizable gastronomic tourism. The Ministry of Tourism has adopted the Ordinance on establishing a special standard of Croatian indigenous dishes, which serves as a basis for branding Croatian cuisine and restaurants as one of the main foundations of Croatian tourism. Croatia has a large and rich gastronomic heritage that varies according to region, type of cuisine, age and origin of individual dishes. Such a division influenced the choice of food, the way of preparing food, the way of consumption, but also the customs of creating and consuming food. The difference in diet is not only visible between regions, but also within each region. Istria certainly stands out here, representing a combination of continental and Mediterranean traditions. The Istrian region is extremely rich in fish and seafood, but also meat dishes. The Istrian peninsula is also known for its high-quality olive oil, and in recent decades has established itself as a recognizable wine region. Istrian wines include Malvasia and Muscat from Buje, Cabernet, Sauvignon and Merlot from Porec, Teran from Buzet, Vrbnik žlahtina, and many other recognizable indigenous varieties. The importance of direct contact between wine producers and tourists is confirmed by the research of Mili Razović (2015) who states that the involvement of wine producers in wine tourism can contribute to their better market valorization and increase their income through wine sales - tasting and buying wine on the face places - in the winery. Razović's research showed that 52% of Dalmatian wineries are visited by up to 1,000 tourists a year and that more of the half (69%) of wineries covered by the survey, sell less than 20% of their wine production directly to their visitors-tourists. Only 11% of wine tourism entities, in addition to wine rehearsals, also provide catering services (restaurant), while 7% of wine entities tourism also has an ethnographic collection of wine, the results of this study show. According to research Markovic, Mitrovic, and Racz (2019) marketers should take wine and food-related personality traits into consideration when organizing wine and food events because visitors with low neophilic tendencies and high involvement represent loyal customers who will generate more revenue and contribute to reducing marketing costs. Also, the authors emphasize an interesting application that stems from the fact that visitors with lower income levels do not shy away from new food experiences but rather are not that involved for mostly financial reasons. Accordingly, certain marketing strategies and products could be developed to convert the market of lower-income visitors as not all wine and food currently on the market is in the premium category (2019, 229).

TOMAS survey, summer 2017: Attitudes and consumption of tourists in 2017, conducted by the Institute of Tourism, showed that the main motives for the arrival of foreign guests in Croatia: relaxation and passive vacation (55%), new experiences and experiences (31%) , gastronomy (29%), getting to know natural beauties (26%), entertainment (24%), sports and recreation (20%) and getting to know cultural sights and events (12%) (Institute of Tourism, 2018, 32).

Table 1. Motives for the arrival of guests in Croatia

Rank	Motives	%
1.	Passive rest, relaxation	54,9
2.	New experiences	31,3
3.	Enjoying food and drink, gastronomy	29,0
4.	Getting to know the natural beauties	26,2

5.	Fun	24,2
6.	Playing sports and recreation	19,8
7.	Getting to know cultural sights and events	12,3
8.	Visit to relatives and friends	9,8
9.	Wellness	7,6

Source: Institute of Tourism, 2018, 31, <https://www.htz.hr/sites/default/files/2019-07/Tomas-Ljeto-2017-Stavovi-i-potrosnja-turista-u-Hrvatskoj.pdf>, date of accession: 04.08.2020.

Compared to previous TOMAS surveys (TOMAS, summer 2007 and TOMAS, summer 2010), it is evident that there is a gradual increase in the number of tourists looking for new experiences and enjoying the gastronomic offer. From the summer of 2010 to the summer of 2017, the motive for the arrival of foreign tourists in search of new experiences and experiences increased from 25% to 31%. In addition, the most significant increase is seen in guests who come to Croatia to enjoy the gastronomic offer. Namely, from the summer of 2010 until today, the arrival of tourists due to Croatian gastronomy has increased from 22% to 29%. Relaxation and rest, although still the leading motive for the arrival of foreign tourists, are slowly losing their importance. The percentage of foreign tourists coming to Croatia in search of passive rest and relaxation has decreased from 75% to 55% since the summer of 2010.

Graph 1. Comparison of motives for coming to Croatia from 1994 to 2017



Source: Institute of Tourism, 2018: 33, <https://www.htz.hr/sites/default/files/2019-07/Tomas-Ljeto-2017-Stavovi-i-potrosnja-turista-u-Hrvatskoj.pdf>, date of accession: 04.08.2020.

Croatian cuisines and restaurants are becoming the leading assets of Croatian tourism. In recent years, tourist destinations have increasingly promoted campaigns that emphasize the diversity and richness of national cuisine, its naturalness and importance for health,

and its exoticism and mysticism. Wine and gastronomy represent an opportunity to revitalize and diversify tourism, promote local economic development, involve various professional sectors (producers, chefs, markets, etc.), and bring new benefits to the primary sector. This leading role of wine and gastronomy in the choice of destination and for tourist consumption has resulted in the growth of supply based on high-quality domestic products and the consolidation of separate food and wine tourism markets (CNTB, 2020). Here we can highlight Istria as a region that in recent decades has been at the forefront in the production of top-quality wine and unique characteristics and is slowly affirming itself in a significant world wine region whose development is accompanied by a wealth of traditional gastronomic offer. Tourists are increasingly including the content and offer of Istrian wineries in the content of their travels, and the wine brand is slowly taking on the function of promoting and developing Istria as a tourist destination. Istria's fertile soil is rich in vineyards, and throughout history, wine and grape production are a key product of Istrian agriculture. The area has long been known for its beautiful vineyards and quality wine. The peninsula has a thousand-year tradition of grape and wine production, as well as a number of wineries that produce and sell high-quality wines. A significant step forward in improving the quality of Istrian wine has been made in the last 20 years when the private sector is beginning to develop more strongly. A place in a globalized market and among fierce competition, Istrian winemakers have achieved with a high-quality wine. There is a great preference of winegrowers toward the promotion of indigenous varieties (Malvasia and Teran), which is followed by a positive response from consumers. Istrian Malvasia is the leading grape variety (more than 80% of the share in production) and the most represented type of wine. In the last ten years, it has broken through local and national frameworks and has become one of the strongest export trump cards. It is an autochthonous variety that winemakers have brought almost to perfection and has become an Istrian hope. Brščić et al. (2010, 286) claim that the key factor in the development and promotion of Istrian wine is the fact that they have become an integral product of Istria as a tourist destination. The promotion of Istrian wines and wineries is most often realized along with other tourist products and events. According to Perušić et al. (2015, 153) wine offer takes place through wine cellars and tasting halls and represents an important segment in the promotion of Istria as a tourist destination. To this end, promotions are most often conducted by informing consumers, highlighting the value and quality of products, and differentiating themselves from other products. Consumers seek wine information internally and externally. The external way of informing includes the so-called Word of mouth promotion, media, and public relations advertising, and email and brochure marketing. Winemakers very rarely use promotions through public media (television and press) as the costs of such promotions are very high. Mattiacci and Zampi (2004, in: Brščić et al., 2010, 278) state that: "The success of well-known wines, a recognizable brand, which achieve a high price, largely depends on systematic promotional activities based on symbolic components of the product." In order to make quality decisions in forming the strategy of prices, packaging, distribution, promotion, and sales, it is necessary to know the criteria and expectations of customers when choosing wine. It is necessary to make the right offer and then fulfill it regularly. External factors play an important role in the promotion of viticulture and viticulture: the positive social atmosphere created by the implementation of the national program and increasing viticultural production and activities, as well as a number of measures and support from the state and regional sector. The promotion of the Istrian wine sector takes place at the

level of producers and at the regional level. The most common channels of self-promotion of winemakers are social networks and participation in wine fairs and events. Promotion at the regional level takes place with the coordination of the tourist board and the county's professional service in agriculture. Brščić et al. (2010, 280) state that the most important programs for the promotion of Istrian winemaking at the regional level are Istrian wine roads, the Vinistra Association, and the IQ - Istria Quality label, which was created to emphasize the quality of Istrian wine. The County of Istria supports viticulture with a series of financial measures - the purchase of machinery and equipment, planting material, land expansion, etc. Thanks to the partnership and clustering, the wineries made up for the shortcomings and achieved world quality.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

In accordance with the discussed topic, a methodological framework and a research tool have been set up, which are more clearly presented in this chapter.

#### **3.1. Methodological framework**

The main purpose of this paper is to see the extent to which Istrian wines contribute to the promotion of Istria as a tourist destination and to explore the role of recognition and quality of Istrian wines in the promotion of Istria as a wine tourist destination. The paper examines the need to develop and enrich the tourist offer and products of wineries, as well as the importance and role of promotion of Istrian winemakers by local institutions and other economic sectors. To this end, the authors ask the following research questions: answers from the perspective of Istrian winemakers, and these are the following questions:

- To what extent do Istrian wines contribute to the promotion of Istria as a tourist destination?
- What activities and means of the Istrian winery can contribute to even greater recognition of Istria as a wine destination

The following two hypotheses are derived from the above:

Hypothesis 1:

Recognition and quality of Istrian wines are a significant trump card in the promotion of Istria as an eno-tourist destination

Hypothesis 2:

Istrian winemakers do not have a sufficiently developed tourist offer of their products because it all comes down to wine tastings and tours of vineyards

In order to get answers to these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five renowned Istrian winemakers, which contained a total of 24 questions. Furthermore, the interview contained questions about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of positioning Istria as an eno-tourist destination from the answers of which a SWOT analysis will be compiled. Given the situation with the COVID-19 virus, interviews were conducted by telephone with winemakers and emails. Each interview lasted 40-45 minutes and was conducted in the period from 1 to 15 July 2020. For the purposes of this research, the sample consists of those wineries that have



made the most significant contribution to the development of Istrian winemaking and the quality of their wines and successes at various events attracted the world's attention to the wine region of Istria, and which have great potential to fight for a place in the international market. The research sample consisted of five wineries: Veralda, Kozlović, Cattunar, Deklić and Marčeta. Interview participants were Luciano Visintin, employees of the winery Kozlović, Vesna Cattunar, David and Dino Deklić and Luka Marčeta. These participants are owners or close family members involved in the work of the winery.

### **3.2. Research results**

This chapter presents the results of in-depth interviews conducted with winemakers.

#### **3.2.1. Interview with winemakers**

The first hypothesis according to which the recognizability and quality of Istrian wines are a significant trump card in the promotion of Istria as an eno-tourist destination, analysis and interpretation of data has been fully confirmed. The winemakers emphasized that the integration of the tourist offer, accommodation services and gastronomic offer, which continuously monitors and enriches the wine offer, plays a crucial role in the development. Winemakers believe that the quality of their wines is the most important asset in the development of wineries, but also in the promotion of the entire Istrian region. Also, the Marčeta winery emphasizes that the favorable geographical position and the possibility of irrigating vineyards are important trump cards in the development of the Istrian wine region. Kozlović Winery puts the quality of its products in the first place, for which they guarantee with a family name. Gianfranco Kozlović was one of the leaders who laid the foundations of Istrian winemaking, primarily by establishing the standard of basic Malvasia wine. By establishing standards in the quality of Malvasia, the winery gained the trust of customers, which began the development of the wine brand. The main foundation of their success today is the reliable and excellent quality of wine, which has enabled the export of products to the world market and is praised by many world experts. Luciano Visintin says their rise to the top is primarily based on quality. Its main mission is progress, in knowledge, quality, experience, and every area of business. Emphasis is also placed on the lifelong learning of winemakers and continuous investment in production technology that will significantly improve the quality of wine and thus lay the foundations for a strong step into the international market. There is a constant desire and need for progress in the winery. Vesna Cattunar says that every manufacturer must have something recognizable in taste and smell in their production. "There are a lot of customers who come and say they drank some wine, and we immediately noticed it was Cattunar. Every producer has recognizability in his own wine. "In the Deklić winery, the emphasis is primarily on the quality and manner of wine processing: „it is about top and quality wines that have been achieved thanks to modern technology used in production." The research showed that, in addition to the recognizability and quality of Istrian wines, an important role in the development and promotion of Istria as a wine region has a favorable geographical position and the possibility of irrigating vineyards; integration of the tourist offer, accommodation services and gastronomic offer that continuously monitors and enriches the wine offer; and the role of lifelong learning of winemakers and continuous investment

in production technology is unavoidable. The second hypothesis according to which Istrian winemakers do not have a sufficiently developed tourist offer of their products because it all comes down to wine tastings and tours of vineyards, has also been confirmed. For five years in a row, Istria has been named the best olive growing region by Flos Olei 2020, the world's most influential guide to extra virgin olive oils. Unfortunately, no winery, except the Kozlović winery, has taken advantage of this worldwide success and included a significant selection of olive oil in its offer. Veralda Winery offers a tour of the cellar and dinner for announced guests. In the tasting room, cold dishes are mostly offered with wine – salted anchovies (sardines), mushrooms, home-made ham, neck, prosciutto and cheese. The focus is not on hot food, but when it is prepared it includes only ingredients from their garden. Veralda's farm used to be more intensively engaged in olive growing. They operated as part of the Olivier & Co retail chain, after which they lost a significant stake. Olive growing has since remained in the family circle, and olive oil, unfortunately, is not currently a significant addition to the tourism product. The wine cellar of the Kozlović family is technologically the most modern cellar in Istria, but also in the wider region. It is ranked among the 66 best in the world, according to the monograph *Sommeliers Heaven* by the famous sommelier Paolo Bass. The 2000 m<sup>2</sup> basement opened in May 2012, is organized into several floors, and combines architecture, ecology, technology and functionality. The winery has multifunctional spaces for wine presentation and a wine shop with a bar for tastings. They produce high quality olive oil that is obtained by cold pressing, immediately after harvest. Kozlović – Extra virgin olive oil also won three gold medals at exhibitions in Tokyo, New York and Italy. In addition to wine for tasting, the offer includes local Istrian specialties created by chef Zdravko Tomšić. The dishes are prepared from groceries from local farms and small producers. The winery also offers komovica brandy made from Muscat Momjan, and certain types of wine can be tasted only in the winery, such as Svinjon 2018, Sauvignon Blanca and JRE Malvasia 2015. There are a number of programs aimed at presenting the winery and telling the story of wine and family tradition. The winery has also organized an offer in collaboration with prestigious local restaurants that nurture a variety of culinary expressions. – San Rocco, Old Cellar, Morgan, Bevanda. Under the slogan BMW Coast Drive – Enjoy the Sunny Side of Streets in Istria, in 2015 a project was launched involving all Istrian 5-star hotels with the participation of top gastronomic farms. The atmosphere is sometimes complemented by a musical atmosphere, during which the klapa or one of the local performers sings. Last year, the Cattunar family opened their first 5-star Wine Residence, which represents a complex of accommodation services, gastronomic and oenological offerings and promotes the natural and cultural sights of the region. Wine Residence offers 10 rooms, a swimming pool, spa, and gym, and is surrounded by olive groves and vineyards. When visiting the winery, visitors are offered the opportunity to taste different varieties of wine, with Istrian prosciutto, cheese and olive oil exclusively locally produced. Olive oil is sold exclusively in their winery. The oil is environmentally friendly, has no selection and serves as a supplement to the sale. The additional offer also includes sparkling wines and brandy. Visitors are offered cycling recreation that includes a tour of Umag, Novigrad, Brtonigla and Buje. Furthermore, a visit to the Mramornica cave, located at the Drušković Station near Brtonigla, was offered. Deklić Winery is focused exclusively on viticulture and winemaking. Recently, in addition to wine tasting, it offers its visitors the opportunity to plant their own vines in their vineyard. After ripening the fruit and bottling, the wine is sent to the home address of the owner. Marcheta Winery has a tasting

room that can accommodate up to 50 people and offers guests a tasting of products with local food. The winery also offers olive oil with the symbolic name Nona ulika and various types of brandy according to the recipe of “their nonić”.

### **3.2.2. SWOT analysis of Istrian wines in the function of tourist promotion of Istria**

Using primary research sources (interviews with Istrian winemakers) and secondary sources (professional literature, wineries' websites), the authors provide a SWOT analysis that tries to detect the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Istrian wines in the function of tourist promotion of Istria. Istria is slowly and surely establishing itself in one of the largest Croatian wine regions, but also in the wider area. With more than 6,000 hectares of vineyards, Istria abounds in private farms focused on grape and wine production, but also on creating an additional tourist product. What makes Istria a recognizable wine region is the set of common features that is characteristic of all Istrian winemakers. Based on common features, Istrian winemakers build their specialties and recognizable quality of their wines. The advantage of Istria as a wine destination lies in the unique geographical position which is the basis for the production of indigenous varieties of wine: Istrian Malvasia, Teran and Muscat Momjan. A significant asset of Istrian winemaking is the recognizability and quality of their wines. The quality comes from a long family tradition of winemaking and viticulture. By establishing standards in wine quality, customer confidence has been achieved. Innovation in production is also one of the most important assets of Istrian wineries, followed by a wide range of wine varieties. The integration of the tourist offer, accommodation services and gastronomic offer that continuously monitor and enrich the wine offer are a significant force in the development of the wine region of Istria. High attendance of foreign guests enables product promotion and added value. As an advantage, the support of national institutions and local tourist boards should certainly be emphasized, and great strength lies in connecting Istrian wineries into clusters and participating in wine roads. The advantage of Istrian winemaking is the lifelong learning of winemakers and constant investment in the development of viticulture and progress in production and product quality. Furthermore, the advantage is in independently organizing and conducting product presentations and tastings, as well as in the use of modern technology and modernly equipped wine cellars. The wine sector is currently going through a period of difficult business conditions, resulting from forced stagnation over a two-month period. The consequence is a reduced time period of the tourist season and a reduced volume of foreign guests and a decline in the purchasing power of domestic and foreign populations, which is certainly one of the weaknesses detected. Furthermore, a major weakness is that technological development is not sufficiently accompanied by marketing activities. Wineries do not have a sufficient number of promotional channels through which they can advertise significantly. Promotion through public media is rare, only in the case of achieving significant results at world competitions. Promotion through social networks is not sufficiently focused and developed since wineries do not employ marketing professionals but run them themselves. The consequence of this is the unavailability of products for certain customers, especially foreign guests. Most wineries have high credit indebtedness as they constantly invest in development and production. Opportunity can be created in the production of market-relevant quantities of wine and in expanding the range of products of farms. An unavoidable opportunity also lies in

strengthening promotional channels and direct sales of products. More focused use of social networks, as well as other promotional channels, can be a significant opportunity to attract guests. Also, the opening of web shops on the official website of the winery proved to be a significant occasion. Istrian wines are recognized and appreciated all over the world, as evidenced by many awards from the world's most prestigious fairs and which provide an opportunity for further development and participation in local and international fairs. An additional opportunity lies in encouragement and promotion by other economic sectors, especially hotels and restaurants. Great opportunities lie in the automation of production plants and the creation of new projects. A major threat to further development is the impact of the COVID-19 virus, which creates difficult business conditions and can lead to forced stagnation in the operation and development of the wine sector. Furthermore, the threat is posed by competition from the region - from Croatian to Slovenian and Italian wine regions, ie by large producers and international competition that have more capital, better infrastructure and have a better marketing approach.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of Istrian wines in the function of tourist promotion of Istria

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uniqueness of the geographical location</li> <li>• a significant number of family farms focused on grape and wine production</li> <li>• indigenous varieties of wine</li> <li>• recognizability and quality of wine</li> <li>• long tradition of winemaking and viticulture</li> <li>• innovation of Istrian winemakers                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integration of tourist offer, accommodation services, and gastronomic offer support of national institutions and local tourist boards</li> </ul> </li> <li>• wide range of wine varieties</li> <li>• connecting into clusters and participating in wine roads</li> <li>• use of modern technology and technologically advanced wine cellars</li> <li>• the role of lifelong learning and constant investment in development and progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• insufficient production of the necessary quantities of wine for placement on world markets</li> <li>• technological development is not sufficiently accompanied by marketing activities</li> <li>• promotion through social networks underdeveloped and focused                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no marketing experts employed</li> </ul> </li> <li>• poor promotion through public media</li> <li>• High credit indebtedness of wineries</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>independently organizing and conducting presentations and tastings</li> <li>constant customer trust</li> </ul>	
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high attendance of foreign guests</li> <li>production of market-relevant quantities of wine</li> <li>expanding the product range</li> <li>rich cultural and historical heritage</li> <li>more focused use of social networks and other promotional channels</li> <li>greater involvement in local and international fairs</li> <li>promotion by other economic sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>difficult business conditions due to COVID-19</li> <li>competition from the environment</li> <li>seasonality in tourism</li> <li>decline in the purchasing power of citizens</li> </ul>

Source: authors

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In recent years, Croatia, as a tourist destination, has been offering an increasingly diverse tourist offer, which is based on cultural heritage, natural beauty, but also more and more on the enogastronomic offer. The diversity and richness of the (enogastronomic) offer is certainly a strong asset in the promotion of Croatian tourism, but it is especially visible from the scale of the offer of destinations from the coast and the continent. The region, which is considered the most developed tourist region, but also successfully reconciles the tourist offer on the coast and in the interior is the Istrian peninsula. In this sense, Istria, as the most important and most developed tourist area in the Republic of Croatia, has an important role in creating a tourist product and shaping the national image. With more than 6,000 hectares of vineyards, Istria has developed into one of the largest Croatian wine-growing regions. It can be concluded that Istria, thanks to regional and local tourist boards, Vinistra and a modern and educational generation of winemakers, tourism professionals, entrepreneurs and caterers, with the support of local policy, managed to develop into a very attractive tourist region with developed eno-tourism (Brščić et al. 2010, 286). Opportunities for the promotion of Istria in the wine sector have only been partially exploited. Veralda Winery, despite the achieved world-class of its wines, remained mainly focused on sales in the local market. Cattunar wines also receive little promotion from restaurants and hotels. There is a possibility and need to enrich additional products. Vina Deklić and Marčeta have not yet made a breakthrough on the world market, and they need additional encouragement from other economic sectors. Kozlović Winery is certainly a leading brand in the rich offer of content, marketing, and promotional strategies as well as cooperation with other economic sectors. From the above we can conclude that there is no comprehensive and strategic approach to the promotion of wine, but the result of initiatives of individual regional institutions and

individual producers. Winemakers currently use promotional activities according to their needs, but their opportunities are far greater. Wineries have excellent reviews for hospitality, but they deserve to become the content of the trip even before the guest arrives at the destination. The wine region of Istria, with the quality of its wines and diversity of contents, has an exceptional potential to rank among the world's best wine regions such as the Duoro region (Portugal), Napa Valley (USA), Casablanca region (Chile) in northern Chile, the French regions of Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne, Italian Tuscany, Spain La Rioja, and others. Gavranović (2015, 132) concludes that in order to firmly position tourism as a strategic determinant of the Croatian economy, it is necessary for producers, craftsmen and caterers to get involved in creating new products and take advantage of opportunities to create a diverse and rich tourist offer. gross domestic product. By producing and buying Croatian products, we contribute to the development of the Croatian economy and the living standard of the Croatian population.

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**WINE BRAND IN THE FUNCTION OF PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
ISTRIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION**

**Tena Šola Vujčić**  
**Dejan Gluvačević**  
**Krešimir Dabo**

**Abstract**

In today's world, marked by the impact of information technologies and the growing competitive markets, a large number of Istrian wineries have developed their foreign brands by high quality of their wines, becoming so a recognizable part of the development of the integrated and versatile touristic offers of the Istrian peninsula. There is a thousand year old tradition of growing grapes and making wine on the peninsula, just like there is a wide range of wineries which produce and sell high quality wines. Istria has become one of the largest wine-growing regions in Croatia with more than 6,000 hectares of vineyards. During the past 20 years there has been made a great step forward in terms of wine quality. During this time private family farms have become more important and recognized. Istrian winemakers have earned their place on the global market and amongst a harsh competition by producing high quality products. The tourism in Istria is based on autochthonous varieties of wine (Istrian Malvasia, Teran and Muscat Momiano) and by Istria itself being a recognized tourist destination. The focus of the study is on the regional tourism of Istria and the role of Istrian winemaking in the promotion and development of Istria as a tourist destination. On the case of Istrian wineries, this thesis studies the development of the wine brand that has become an integral part of Istria's tourist offer. It includes five distinguished wineries which have given a great contribute to the development of eno-tourism in Istria and creating a wine brand with the mark of Istrian Quality. The analysis is based on conversations and interviews with the owners and workers at the wineries with the aim of presenting the entire tradition, success and way of doing business of Istrian wineries. The analysis includes the following wineries: Veralda, Kozlovic, Cattunar, Deklic and Marceta. Furthermore, the thesis refers to other Istrian wineries that make a significant contribution to the creation of a wine brand and the development of eno-tourism in Istria. A SWOT analysis of Istria as an eno-tourist destination was made based on the analysis and interpretation of winemakers' answers and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Istria, tourist destination, tourist offer, gastro-tourism, eno-tourism, wine brand, Istrian wineries, autochthonous varieties of wine, Istrian Quality, branding, promotion

**Tena Šola Vujčić**  
MA  
Faculty of Political Sciences  
E-mail: tena.sola1812@gmail.com

**Dejan Gluvačević**  
PhD  
Edward Bernays University College  
E-mail: dejan.gluvacevic@bernays.hr

**Krešimir Dabo**  
PhD  
Edward Bernays University College  
E-mail: kresimir.dabo@bernays.hr

## THE CHALLENGES OF STARTING AGRITOURISTIC ESTATES IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA

**Edita Tolušić**  
**Rikard Bakan**  
**Dino Dominik Magić**

### **Abstract**

The rural area with all of its unique facets of life and work, which stands in stark contrast to the everyday environment of most of today's travelling population, has tremendous potential and foundation for the development of authentic tourist experiences. This is confirmed by trends observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where there was a noticeable increase of tourists visiting rural areas and tourism-catering facilities that could offer to them a place for relaxation outside of massive tourism streams, peace and relative isolation, and personalised service and food made from locally grown produce. Therefore, the rural space of continental Croatia has great, albeit underutilised potential in the agritourism segment. One of the reasons is undoubtedly the relative low interest of Farm facility (hereinafter FF) owners for expanding their business with tourist services. Some of the previous studies had indicated that owners frequently emphasize problems with their lack of knowledge of legal regulations, and the sheer complexity of the regulations they came across while starting their own agritouristic estates, which has had a disincentivising effect on them. The goal of this paper is to give a theoretical contribution to the understanding of agritourism and its potential for the development of the tourist offer in rural areas and interpret the legal framework necessary for establishing agritouristic estates, and in the empirical part, through a survey carried out on ten FF from the Virovitica-Podravina county area, determine what challenges owners face when they consider or plan to expand the offer of their estate to include tourist services. The results of the survey can serve as useful data for FF owners and as encouragement for them to think about the possibilities, i.e., challenges of participating in the tourist offer.

**Keywords:** Agritourism, rural tourism, entrepreneurship, continental Croatia

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The growth of the demand for rural and less populated areas has become noticeable in the last couple of years, primarily due to the negative consequences of globalisation, the all-encompassing megatrend of today, and due to the structural transformations and/or changes in the tourism market's supply and demand. In the era of COVID-19 pandemic, during a great fall in the global tourism demand and in the newly created circumstances where there is a need for social distancing and large uncrowded areas, products, and services of special forms of tourism, especially the ones which are created and occur in rural areas, are becoming increasingly sought after (Oleksenko et al. 2021). A general lack of safety, healthcare, a touristic escape from urban centres, social dislocation, the laws and postulates of the market, and a changed perception and consumer characteristics of modern tourists have greatly contributed to the increase in demand for special tourism forms. With the descriptive analysis of modern tourists, who can be described as independent, ecologically cognizant, curious, willing to learn, on a lookout for new, different, and more intense experiences, it can be clearly concluded that the products and services offered by rural tourism, especially in the COVID-19 era, are a worthwhile alternative to massive tourism, but also a long-term strategic option throughout the whole year (Tubić 2019). New observed trends in tourist demand take into consideration the local culture and traditions, healthy way of life, authenticity, and new experiences.



(Vrtiprah 2006; Binkhorst and Den Dekker 2009; Aref et al. 2010; Gaztelumendi 2012; Expedia 2017; IPSOS 2017; Tripadvisor 2017). What attracts contemporary tourists to a destination is the desire to learn about a local culture and their way of life, and unforgettable and authentic experiences. During their vacation, tourists want to more or less live like the locals, or like the hosts of the accommodation where they are staying at. (UNWTO 2015). If the changes in tourists' preferences are considered, intangible cultural heritage, the culture of living and work, and the legacy of tradition, which includes agriculture and gastronomy, are becoming a very important factor for attracting tourists to a tourist destination and to tourism-catering facilities in a rural area. (Hjalager and Richards 2002; Richards 2012; UNWTO 2012, UNWTO 2017). It is because of the previously mentioned facts that the Croatian village and rural setting with its specific way of life and work of the local inhabitants, authentic tangible and intangible heritage, and authentic gastronomy represents a hidden gem in the sparse Croatian tourism offer on the continent. Unfortunately, it is important to emphasise that the tourism offer of the rural part, specifically the agritourism offer within family farms, is still very underdeveloped. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons can be found in the indifference, ignorance, and the lack of financial resources of owners of family farms to expand their primary agricultural activity with tourism-catering services, and in the absence of a clear strategy for developing tourism in local rural communities and insufficient support from the local government.

## **2. RURAL TOURISM AND AGRITOURISM – DEFINITION OF THE TERM AND ITS POSITION WITHIN THE CROATIAN TOURISM OFFER**

Considering the subject of the paper, it is necessary to in more detail define the term agritourism. While agritourism is not a new phenomenon, when it comes to a general accepted definition no consensus has been reached, which is confirmed by Hajdaš Dončić et al. (2007), Chesky (2009), Flanigan et al. (2014) and Tubić (2019). Taking into consideration the wide spectrum of different interpretations of foreign and Croatian authors, for this paper agritourism is defined as a visit to an estate (farm) or any other agricultural, horticultural or any other economic asset for the purposes of pleasure, education, or active participation in the activities of the estate. (Lobo 2001.). According to Demonja and Ružić, agritourism is divided into the following forms based on the offered services (2010):

- Forms of agritourism which only offer catering services. These forms are meant for tourists who want to taste or adore homemade, authentic food and drinks. The main characteristic of this form of agritourism is the serving of food and drinks in specialised facilities located on the family farm which are arranged and furnished according to the original architecture;
- forms of agritourism which only offer accommodation services. What is characteristic for this form of agritourism are the multitude of units which offer accommodation services, and some of them are: traditional rural houses, rural rooms, family rural hotels, apartments of traditional and modern architecture;
- forms of agritourism which offer catering and accommodation services. What is special for this form is the possibility of offering a complete package, including accommodation and catering, and an entire accompanying program

with trips, tours of the estate, and other activities in or near the destination. This is the form which represents a complete package of services of a family farm and is considered to be very attractive, and by extension economically viable.

When it comes to the facilities, forms of agritourism are divided into (Ružić 2009, 20.):

- traditional rural house;
- rural family hotel;
- traditional rural rooms and apartments;
- modern rural rooms and apartments;
- agricultural estate with an eco-offer.

Agritourism in the Republic of Croatia is being developed below its potential, both in the academic and institutional, and by extension practical sense. By observing its academic development, it is necessary to say that there is an unjustifiable lack of interest for this form of tourism, despite there being a small group of academic enthusiasts (Kušen 2006; Brščić 2005; Franić and Cunj 2007; Ružić 2009; Demonja and Ružić 2010; Grgić et al. 2011; Tubić 2012, 2015; Tubić 2019) who are continuously researching it. To this day there had been only official study carried out on the entire area of the Republic of Croatia by the Croatian Chamber of Commerce- Tourism Sector (2007) titled *The Current State of Tourism in Croatia's Rural Areas in 2008*. As much as it is known to the authors of this paper, there have been only three doctoral theses (Brščić 2005; Tubić 2015; Kantar 2016) for this subject matter. The existing studies had in most cases encompassed only one county as a territorial unit. It is important to mention that for his thesis *Model razvoja ruralnog turizma Kontinentalne Hrvatske* (2015) (trans. *The Development Model for Continental Croatia's Rural Tourism*) Dejan Tubić had with the empirical study encompassed the area of 13 continental counties and had for the first time involved the creators and co-creators of national tourism policies and owners of agritouristic estates. It should be emphasised that in institutional sense there are no strategic guidelines for the development of rural tourism, i.e., there is no strategy which precisely defines this complicated subject matter, despite its creation being one of the key suggestions that had already been proposed to the creators of tourism policies at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Rural Tourism Congress in 2007. The legal framework, as well as the statistical foundation has not been adapted for rural tourism. For example, in the Republic of Croatia the term continental tourism is not being used in statistical monitoring, which is a large oversight since both urban and rural forms of tourism fall under the term. There is no marketing tradition nor any policy of interest-based mergers, which was confirmed by a 2015 study carried out by the author Tubić. The previously described state is the same in practice. It is also visible that existing studies on rural tourism and the agritouristic offer in Croatia have been indicating at a territorial/regional fragmentation. The studies are primarily focused on agritourism as the fastest growing form of tourism. For example, theoreticians Brščić and Tomčić (2004), Brščić (2005) Rajko, Tomčić and Juraković (2007), Brščić, Franić and Ružić (2010), Krajnović, Čičin-Šain and Predovan (2011) and Trošt, Ilak Peršurić and Oplanić (2011) studied agritourism in the Istria county area, Erstić, Mikuš and Mesić (2011) in the Zadar county area, while Franić and Cunj (2007) and Grgić, Zrakić and Cerjak (2011) analysed the characteristics of agritourism in the Zagreb County. Agritourism in Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Syria counties was studied by Leko-Šimić and Čarapić (2007), Tubić (2012), Tubić, Bosnić and Bedeković (2013) and Tubić (2015). The main goal of the studies

was to determine the particularities of the businesses which was primarily related to the study of their marketing activities. In addition, the studies were by large extent focused on determining the limiting factors and giving guidelines for the development of the agritouristic estates, or in other words incentivising the owners, as well as analysing the cooperation with other stakeholders on the tourism market.

### **3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR STARTING AN AGRITOURISTIC ESTATE IN CROATIA**

A family farm (hereinafter FF) according to the *Law on Family Farms* (Narodne novine RH 29/18, 32/19) is defined as an organisational form of the economic subject the farmer, a physical person who generates income by independently and permanently performing an agricultural activity and with it other associated activities, and as a form is based on the usage of your own and/or hired production resources and on the work, skills and knowledge of your own family members. The Law also adjudicates the term *other associated activities* as catering, tourist, and other services offered on FF which have to be registered in the FF Register if the prescribed conditions for performing them are met.

The tourist services that could be offered by FF is adjudicated by the *Law on Offering Services in Tourism* (Narodne novine RH 130/17, 25/19, 98/19, 42/20, 70/20) according to which family farms can offer the following leisure and recreational activities:

- Participating in agricultural activities, e.g., the harvesting of fruits and vegetables, and of the land in general
- Participating in aquaculture activities,
- Hunting and fishing and in the presentation of the many ways of hunting and fishing
- Horse coach riding, boat riding, cycling, horseback riding, trekking, and other similar activities
- Active and adventure tourism activities
- Providing space, means, tools and equipment for any activity
- Providing space for field trips and picnics
- Performing creative and educational workshop programmes connected with agriculture, aquaculture, traditional crafts and similar
- Presentation of the agricultural estate, hunting grounds, forests and of the natural and cultural value found within them
- Visits to ethno-collections etc.

The abovementioned tourist services can be offered within the registered associated activities in FF Register and do not need to separately registered. The only exception are active and adventure tourism activities for which special conditions need to be met and for which a certificate needs to be obtained from an expert council assembled by the Croatian Chamber of Commerce. Family farms can also offer excursions and transfer services if the guests are using the accommodation service for up to 50 tourists at the same time, *but they also need to meet the conditions prescribed for travel agencies.*

Family farms can also offer certain catering services according to the *Law on the Catering Activity* (Narodne novine RH 85/15, 121/16, 99/18, 25/19, 98/19, 32/20, 42/20, 126/21) and those are:

- Preparing and serving dishes, drinks, and beverages from primarily their own production for up to 80 guests (tourists) at the same time
- Serving (tasting) of brews, wines, fruit wines, other products made from wines and fruit wines, liquor, and homemade meat products in the decorated space of the living and economic facilities, in indoor, covered, or outdoor spaces for up to 80 guests (tourists) at the same time
- Accommodation in a room, apartment, rural vacation house with up to 10 rooms, i.e., for up to 20 guests at the same time (this number does not include spare beds),
- Accommodation services in Robinson accommodation, and/or campsites and/or campsite rest areas with a total of 20 accommodation units, i.e., for up to 60 guests at the same time (this number does not include children aged 12 or less).

In addition to accommodation, guests should also have access to services involving the preparation and serving of primarily homemade food, drinks, and beverages (breakfast or half-board or full board). The accommodation service can be offered in multiple facilities for up to 80 guests at the same time. Catering and tasting services can be offered to more than 80 guests (tourists) in the cases of traditional celebrations and manifestations ten times a year at the most, and the owners are obliged to register those services at the local competent tourist inspection government office responsible for catering three days, at the latest, before they start offering the abovementioned services. To offer the aforementioned services, the FF is obliged to obtain a resolution from the competent governing body where they are approved to offer catering if they have met the following conditions:

- The family farm is registered in the Farmers Register,
- They have the right to use the facilities and/or land,
- The facility where they would offer catering services meets the minimal requirements according to special regulations
- The building where the catering services would be offered meets the conditions set by a special law which regulates construction

According to the *Regulation on Classifying and Categorising Facilities Which Offer Catering Services on Family Farms*, (Narodne novine 54/16, 69/17, 120/19) and depending on what type of catering service they offer, facilities on FF are classified into the following types which meet the requirements set by the Regulation:

- Wine shop / wine tasting – a facility where wines and/or fruit wines and/or products made from and/or fruit wines and/or other alcoholic drinks and/or foods and/or spreads which are paired with those drinks are prepared and served to the guests
- Excursion sites – facilities where warm and cold food, drinks and beverages are prepared and served to the guests
- Room – a facility which offers accommodation
- Apartment – a facility which offers accommodation, and is equipped so that guest can prepare and consume their own food

- Rural vacation house – a facility which offers accommodation and the usage of the surrounding area, and is equipped so that guest can prepare and consume their own food
- campsite – a facility which offers accommodation at outdoor accommodation units- camping services
- campsite rest area – a facility which offers camping services for a shorter vacation for guests with their own portable camping equipment
- facility for a Robinson-like accommodation – a facility which offers accommodation in unusual conditions or circumstances

As it was already emphasised in previous theoretical discussions, the legal framework that encompasses agritourism as a supplementary activity on FF has still not been simplified and adjusted for the actual needs of the market and owners of FF. In addition to other factors, this fact has been frequently pointed out by owners of FF in previous studies as the main factor which has been limiting the agritouristic offer in continental Croatia, which was confirmed by the study carried out by the authors for the needs of this paper.

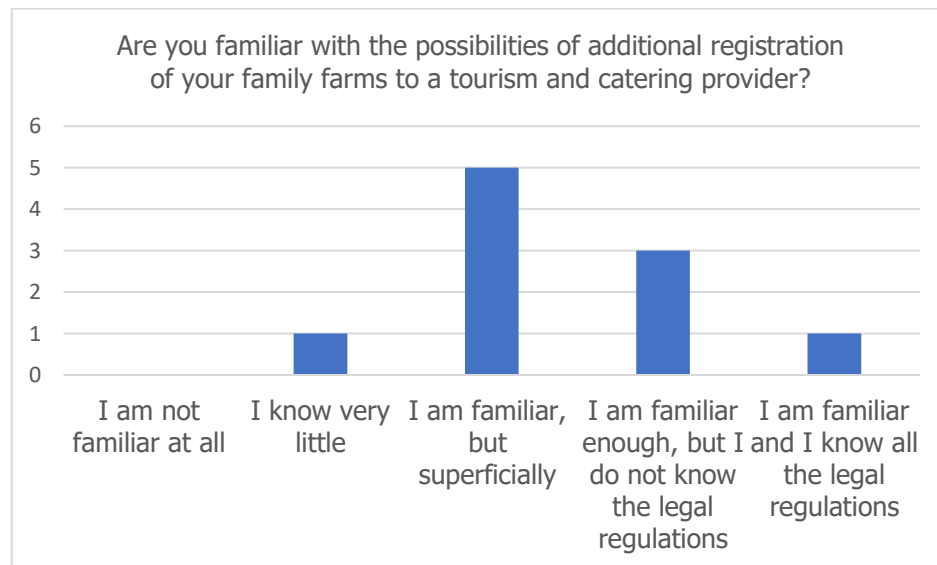
#### **4. METHODOLOGY, GOAL, AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main goal of the study was to determine what challenges do FF owners from the Virovitica-Podravina county face when they consider expanding their offer with tourist services. To answer that question, a survey was created which consisted of 14 closed-type questions separated into four groups. The first group of questions collected information on the age and gender of the owner, the registration form of their family farm, main agricultural activity, and the estate's employees. The goal of the second group of questions was to find out whether the respondents had in the last two to three years asked for any kind of support for enhancing their primary agricultural activity. The third group of questions asked the respondents their opinion on whether they consider if there are resources within their estates and environment for expanding their primary activity with tourist services, how familiar they are with the legal framework they need to adhere to if they want to re-register their estates to offer tourist services, and finally have they asked for support for that purpose. The last group of questions asked the respondents to give their opinion in the form of a Likert scale on the *factors which complicate the expansion of the primary activity of FF with tourism-catering services and what should be improved so that more owners are incentivised to offer tourism-catering services within their estates*. At the end of the survey respondents were asked to give their opinion on how ready they are to re-register their estate to offer tourism-catering services if the conditions improved that would incentivise owners to become more involved in the tourism-catering offer. The study was conducted on a randomly selected sample of registered family farms from the Virovitica-Podravina county in the period from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Fifteen owners were called by telephone for the survey, and ten consented to be a part of the study, which means 67% of the sample consented to the survey.

#### **5. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The demographic indicators of the observed sample have shown that the average FF owner from Virovitica-Podravina county is a male in the 36 to 55 age group. Most of the estates (5 to be exact) harvest vine grapes, and other estates grow vegetables (4 FF). Furthermore, there are 4 FF which harvest crops, 2 which are primarily involved with livestock, and two more which grow fruit. The largest number of FF (8 to be exact) employ exclusively their family members and on average three of them. The owners of two FF stated that they have additional employees (one employs two, while the other one) Eight FF owners stated that they have asked in the last two to three for financial support for enhancing their main agricultural activity. Out of those eight, six had actually received the support. When it comes to their opinion on whether their estate and surrounding environment have resources that would enable them to upgrade their main agricultural activity with tourism-catering services, seven out of ten owners gave an affirmative answer. Related to their level of knowledge of legal regulations connected with tourism-catering services within FF, it can be concluded that it is on a relatively satisfactory level (Graph 1), with the stipulation that most respondents (60%) answered that they are superficially or not very knowledgeable about this subject matter. Therefore, it can be assumed that this was the reason why only three FF owners had asked in the last three years for financial support for the development of their own tourism-catering offer within their FF, and only one owner had actually received it.

Graph 1. **Knowledge of the legal regulations connected with tourism-catering services within FF**



Source: Google forms. Research done by the authors

The opinion of respondents on which factors do or even do not make it difficult for them to expand their main agricultural activity with tourism-catering services within FF was examined with a 5-level Likert scale with statements that the respondents could have rated from one to five, where one represented the statement „does not make it difficult at

all“ while five represented the statement „*makes it extremely difficult*”. (Table 1 on the next page).

**Table 1. Respondents' opinion on the statements regarding the factors that make it difficult or not difficult to expand the main activity of the farm with tourist and catering services**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>1. does not make it difficult at all</i>	<i>2. does not make it difficult</i>	<i>3. neutral</i>	<i>4. makes it difficult</i>	<i>5. makes it extremely difficult</i>	<i>Average grade</i>
Complicated and vaguely defined legal regulations		1	4	3	2	2,50
Lack of financial resources and unfavourable conditions for financing from external sources			3	5	2	3,33
Lack of incentives and initiatives for the establishment of agritourism estates at the county and local self-government unit level (municipalities and cities)	1		2	3	4	3,00
Lack of incentives and initiatives for the establishment of agritourism estates at the state level	1	1	4	2	2	2,25
Lack of clear strategies for the development of rural tourism at the county and local government level	1		3		6	4,50
Lack of information on incentive programs for the development of the tourist offer within family farms	2	1	2	2	3	2,00
Low level of knowledge and competencies necessary for expanding the offer and providing catering and tourism services within family farms	3		1	3	3	2,33
Lack of motivation of owners to expand their main agricultural activity with tourist and catering services	4	1		3	2	2,00

Insufficient investment of the local community in the general tourist infrastructure (e.g., arranging picnic areas, setting up tourist information centres, marking tourist attractions, establishing thematic tourist routes and trails )	3	1	2	1	3	1,75
Insufficient tourist demand for this type of tourist offer	5	2	2	1		1,67

Source: Made by authors according to the research data

As it can be seen from Table 1, the respondents had identified the following factors that have made it difficult for them to develop the tourist offer within their FF the most: “*lack of clear strategies for the development of rural tourism at the county and local government level* (average grade 4,5); “*Lack of financial resources and unfavourable conditions for financing from external sources*” (average grade 3,33) and “*Lack of incentives and initiatives for the establishment of agritourism estate at the county and local self-government unit level* (municipalities and cities) with an average rating of 3,00. It is interesting to mention that regardless of the fact that more than half of the respondents had stated that they are not sufficiently knowledgeable of the legal regulations for offering tourism-catering services within FF, they still consider this factor to have a neutral effect on the expansion of the tourism activity within FF (average rating 2,5). It is also apparent that most respondents consider that there is a demand on the market for this type of tourism offer because they had indicated that this factor is what makes it the least difficult for them to expand the tourist offer within their FF (average rating 1,67), as well as the initiatives and activities of local self-governing units which are investing into the diversification of the county’s tourism offer by arranging picnic areas, setting up tourist information centres, marking tourist attractions, establishing thematic tourist routes and trails (average rating 1,75).

The respondents’ opinion on what should be improved so that more FF owners are incentivised to become more involved with the tourism-catering activity within their estates are shown in Table 2 on the next page. Out of the ten statements, for eight of them most of the respondents answered they agree or completely agree with them. Still, what they indicated as the most important factor the development of the tourist offer not only for their estate but also for the entire Virovitica-Podravina county area was “*improving the tourist signalisation and interpretation of attractions*” (average rating 4,5) and founding a *receptive travel agency which would create and promote complex tourist products of a destination* (average rating 3,5). Similarly, respondents indicated that more investment in local transport infrastructure is necessary (80% had agreed or completely agreed with this statement) and that same percentage of respondents, with a slightly different distribution of ratings four and five, confirmed that the local self-governing unit should have more incentive programmes and co-financing streams for the expansion of tourism-catering services within FF and that regulations for establishing agritouristic estates still need to be simplified (average rating 3,33).

At the end of the survey the FF owners were asked the question *If the conditions improved that would incentivise family farm owners to become more involved in the*



*tourism-catering offer, would you be ready to additionally register your family farm as a tourism-catering provider?* Nine out of ten owners answered affirmatively which is encouraging and can serve to creators of tourism policies in the Virovitica-Podravina county as a good guideline for future consideration on how to improve the agritouristic offer in a destination.

**Table 2. Level of agreement with the statements related to what needs to be improved so that more family farm owners are incentivised to offer tourism-catering services within their estates**

<i>Claim</i>	<i>1. I completely disagree</i>	<i>2. I disagree</i>	<i>3. neutral</i>	<i>4. I agree</i>	<i>5. I completely agree</i>	<i>Average grade</i>
Simplification of regulations related to the registration and opening of agritourism estate			2	4	4	3,33
Opening more favourable loaning streams to finance investments in an agritourism estate	1		1	4	4	3,00
Programs that encourage and co-finance the opening of agritourism estate at the county and local self-government unit level			3	2	5	3,33
Organizing educational workshops for family farm owners aimed at encouraging the establishment of agritourism estate	1	1	2	2	4	2,25
Involving family farm owners in tourism development planning for a destination		3	3	1	3	2,50
Better informing the general public at the level of counties, cities and municipalities about the possibilities and perspectives of the development of the tourist offer and greater initiative of the local community to encourage the development of tourism		1	3	1	5	2,50
The merging of stakeholders with the goal of creating the agritouristic offer		1	5	1	3	2,50
Investing in transport infrastructure (county and local roads, uncategorised roads)			2	2	6	3,33
Brown signs, the marking of attractions, signposts	1			3	6	4,50

Founding of a travel agency which would promote tourist services within agritouristic estates and sell tourist capacities.	3			2	5	3,50
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Source: Made by authors according to the research data

## 6. CONCLUSION

The interest for different specific forms of tourism in rural areas has been experiencing a constant growth, especially for the tourist offer and experiences offered within agritouristic estates. The growth in demand for this form of tourist experiences had significantly increased during and after the pandemic which was confirmed by studies conducted by Roman and Grudzien (2021) who, among others, observed an increase in demand for vacations in rural areas and in the profitability of agritouristic estates in Poland during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the reasons are most certainly the increased interest of individuals for healthy food, healthy living, visiting open, less populated areas, hygiene, and safety, which is precisely why agritouristic estates in many countries are the main tourism providers of rural areas and the main creators of tourist experiences. New circumstances on the tourism market are giving second chance for increasing the competitiveness of this form of tourist offer. On the other hand, the scientific and professional community, and the actual state of the market, have confirmed that the offer of agritouristic estates in Croatia is of smaller scope than the comparative advantages might suggest. As mentioned in the paper, one of the reasons for the current state, which is emphasized primarily in continental Croatia, is the lack of interest and initiatives of FF owners to expand their primary activity with tourist-catering activities owing to the many administrative, financial, and organizational barriers the FF owners must overcome. The results of the study, conducted on ten family farms in the Virovitica-Podravina county, have confirmed that the most significant limiting factors for the development and expansion of the tourism offer are the *lack of clear strategies for the development of rural tourism at the local and regional level, lack of funds, and the lack of viable ways of raising money from external sources*. While the initial assumption of the authors was that one of the primary causes for the low number of agritouristic estates in Virovitica-Podravina county is the complexity and ignorance of the legal regulations necessary for establishing agritouristic estates, the results have shown otherwise. It should be noted that most respondents (90%) emphasized that they would gladly expand their primary activity if the environment became more incentivizing for these types of investments. The study was conducted on a small sample size and in only one county in continental Croatia, so this fact can be considered a limiting factor for arriving at some general conclusions but can be used as the basis for conducting further research on a larger sample and encompassing a larger area of multiple counties. In addition, the obtained results can serve to creators of tourism policies in the Virovitica-Podravina county as a good guideline for future consideration on how to improve the agritouristic offer in a destination.

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## **THE CHALLENGES OF STARTING AGRITOURISTIC ESTATES IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA**

**Edita Tolušić**  
**Rikard Bakan**  
**Dino Dominik Magić**

### **Abstract**

The rural area with all of its unique facets of life and work, which stands in stark contrast to the everyday environment of most of today's travelling population, has tremendous potential and foundation for the development of authentic tourist experiences. This is confirmed by trends observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where there was a noticeable increase of tourists visiting rural areas and tourism-catering facilities that could offer to them a place for relaxation outside of massive tourism streams, peace and relative isolation, and personalised service and food made from locally grown produce. Therefore, the rural space of continental Croatia has great, albeit underutilised potential in the agritourism segment. One of the reasons is undoubtedly the relative low interest of Farm facility (hereinafter FF) owners for expanding their business with tourist services. Some of the previous studies had indicated that owners frequently emphasize problems with their lack of knowledge of legal regulations, and the sheer complexity of the regulations they came across while starting their own agritouristic estates, which has had a disincentivising effect on them. The goal of this paper is to give a theoretical contribution to the understanding of agritourism and its potential for the development of the tourist offer in rural areas and interpret the legal framework necessary for establishing agritouristic estates, and in the empirical part, through a survey carried out on ten FF from the Virovitica-Podravina county area, determine what challenges owners face when they consider or plan to expand the offer of their estate to include tourist services. The results of the survey can serve as useful data for FF owners and as encouragement for them to think about the possibilities, i.e., challenges of participating in the tourist offer.

**Keywords:** Agritourism, rural tourism, entrepreneurship, continental Croatia

**Edita Tolušić**  
Dipl.iur., univ.spec.admin.publ.  
University of Applied Sciences in Virovitica  
E-mail: edita.tolusic@vuv.hr

**Rikard Bakan**  
Mag.oec  
University of Applied Sciences in Virovitica  
E-mail: rikard.bakan@vuv.hr

**Dino Dominik Magić**  
mag.educ.philol.angl.  
University of Applied Sciences in Virovitica  
E-mail: dino.dominik.magic@vuv.hr

## **EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS- BORDER COOPERATION HUNGARY-CROATIA**

**Silvije Jerčinović**  
**Sandra Kantar**

### **Abstract**

Since 2013, Križevci College of Agriculture has been continuously participating in the implementation of cross-border projects within the IPA cross-border cooperation program 2007-2013 and INTERREG cross-border cooperation Hungary Croatia 2014-2020. In the period from 2013 to 2022, Križevci College of Agriculture participated in the implementation of five projects aimed at increasing economic potential and improving the quality of life in the cross-border region Hungary - Croatia through research into the potential of tourism development, primarily in the context of rural tourism development. These projects are: Invest PRO, DM - Destination Management Model for Health and Rural Tourism, ECOTOP, ECOTOP2 and GASTROTOP. These projects are developed through long-term cooperation between Hungarian and Croatian educational institutions, and institutions that provide support to economic entities. Projects support knowledge based on research, working with students and other stakeholders, establishing formal and non-formal education programs and models, participants training project, and creating concrete outputs such as textbooks, research methodologies, databases, and empirical results of applied research in practice. Furthermore, these projects, through the development of education programs and applied research, seek to improve the competitiveness and level of services of entities engaged in some forms of rural tourism in cross-border areas. Also, these projects are improving the availability of educational platforms in a new interdisciplinary domain - food (gastro) tourism, or as one of the subdomains of rural tourism, based on new trends in demand for different categories of food.

**Keywords:** Cross-border projects, formal and non-formal education programs

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia early recognized the potential of programs that finance cross-border cooperation between EU countries, ie its members and candidate countries. Križevci College of Agriculture also recognized very early the potential of cross-border cooperation programs in terms of building its own capacity to enable the development of its core business, namely higher education and scientific research. The importance of these programs in the beginning was the development of cooperation and networking with European and Hungarian partners in order to transfer experience and develop the infrastructure of project cooperation.

Križevci College of Agriculture actively participated in the application and implementation of projects under two programs, IPA cross-border cooperation in the period from 2007 to 2013 and INTERREG cross-border cooperation Hungary Croatia in the period from 2014 to 2020. The latter program is still ongoing and the expected completion of activities is in 2022. In total, there are five projects aimed at economic development of cross-border regions and improving the quality of life. Projects in which the Križevci College of Agriculture continuously participates are focused on the educational component, ie on the development and implementation of formal and

informal forms of education. From the very beginning, the basic subject of project activities has been related to the research of the potential of tourism development, primarily in the context of the development of rural tourism.

Križevci College of Agriculture participated in five such projects, Invest PRO, DM - Destination Management Model for Health and Rural Tourism, ECOTOP, ECOTOP2 and GASTROTOP. The projects are implemented with related higher education institutions in Hungary and Croatia, the University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE) - Kampus in Kaposvar and the Polytechnic of Virovitica, as well as supporting economic development institutions such as chambers of industry and commerce, agencies, development agencies, etc. In addition to conducting research or writing studies, a framework for establishing and implementing formal or non-formal education programs is provided, both for primary target groups, namely undergraduate and graduate students, but also other stakeholders such as small entrepreneurs in agriculture and tourism. In fact, the broader outcomes of these projects can be interpreted as an effort to indirectly create a climate for competitiveness in specific areas of entrepreneurship. In addition to agriculture as a basic activity, through the development of educational platforms and other tools, efforts were made to offer a number of complementary solutions or models of entrepreneurial activity such as rural tourism in cross-border areas. Also, these projects went in the direction of improving the availability of educational platforms in a new interdisciplinary domain - food (gastro) tourism, or as one of the subdomains of rural tourism, based on new trends in demand for different categories of food.

The aim of this paper is to present the activities and outputs of the Križevci College of Agriculture through the participation and implementation of cross-border cooperation projects Croatia Hungary in designing educational support, but also some specific research tools for rural tourism and its complementary subdivisions in cross-border region Croatia and Hungary.

The purpose of this paper is to point out the importance of participation of higher education institutions in the implementation of projects that strengthen their own educational and research capacities by contributing to rural development, building competitiveness of local economies and encouraging young people to engage in agriculture through development of complementary activities.

## **2. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION HUNGARY CROATIA**

### **2.1. Challenges and development dimension of cross-border projects**

Unlike the usual project planning and cooperation, this type of project cooperation is not limited to the location or number of project partners, but it takes on the characteristics of a matrix, so it is possible to talk about a separate project approach (Bond-Barnard et al. 2018). This cooperation involves a whole range of complementary or less complementary activities aimed to achieve a common end result. On the contrary, the implementation of activities sometimes has the character of mirror activities because certain identical activities are realized in a separate context of a particular local entity on

both sides of the border. Namely, it should be understood that with a common goal, the way it is realized is conditioned by different legislative or customary constructs, so they represent a kind of challenge with regard to different partners from different countries who sometimes have different interests. Also, the problem of mutual communication should be taken into account, especially in the case of cooperation between Croatia and Hungary. Therefore, one of the most important goals is to harmonize common benchmark links in the preparation phase, but also throughout the project implementation (Jurilj 2020). Due to this situation, the preparation of these projects requires certain efforts that are not common in classical project management.

Project implementation is a demanding and large process, which requires a specific methodology for the implementation of project management (Maddalena 2012). Cross-border cooperation project management refers to the allocation and use of all necessary resources within the planned time period (Perić and Martić 2013).

The purpose and goal of the implementation of cross-border cooperation programs is reflected in the indirect effort to achieve multiplier effects in regional or rural development of the cross-border area which is on both sides of the border in a relatively large case below average national levels of economic development. Therefore, the ultimate goals of these programs should be balanced economic and social development (Ershadi et al. 2020). This development applies not only to local areas, but also to the overall socio-economic development of the European Union as a single economic and social entity. Also, cross-border cooperation programs seek to directly invest in the development priorities of the Republic of Croatia, which in turn represents a relief for part of the state budget (Kuvačić et al. 2012). The basic premise of the European idea is a single continent without borders, so in this context this program should be understood as an effort to reduce the impact of physical borders or other obstacles such as language, culture or customs through project cooperation in order to form a more homogeneous civilization space (Nelles and Walther 2011).

The benefits of implementing projects from cross-border cooperation programs are multiple and immeasurable. According to Ravlić et al. (2020) institutions participating in the implementation of projects in the cross-border cooperation program have increased workload, which allows additional employment of professional staff. Furthermore, new partnerships are established with institutions from other countries, and new skills, knowledge and abilities of existing employees and project participants are developed. Realizing a project or investing in rural areas is investing in the future because of the variety of processes that can activate them (Ravlić et al. 2020). Although the purpose of the cross-border cooperation program is to establish a foundation for sustainable cooperation in the future, some examples indicate that some of the projects are not sustainable in the long run, so they end after a period of co-financing (Požarnik and Sotlar 2015).

## **2.2. IPA - cross-border cooperation program**

At the time of Croatia's accession to the European Union, the IPA pre-accession program was available (Instrument for Pre-Accession) which was an interesting opportunity to finance cross-border cooperation programs between EU member states and candidate or



potential candidate countries, and between candidate / potential candidate countries. This form of financing cross-border cooperation was intended to support the cooperation of the border regions of the Republic of Croatia with neighboring countries that were already members of the European Union. The nature of these programs is contained in regional integration as well as strengthening the regional development of cross-border areas. The main priorities of the IPA program were to encourage cross-border cooperation, sustainable environmental development, market development - economic development, improving coexistence at the EU's external borders, improving the quality of life in border areas and building the capacity of local / regional / national institutions to implement EU programs ([www.razvoj.gov.hr](http://www.razvoj.gov.hr)). Within this program, the sub-program Hungary Croatia was developed with eligible areas of Croatian border counties such as Međimurje, Koprivnica-Križevci, Virovitica-Podravina and Osijek-Baranja. Also, there were associated areas that could use a maximum of 20% of total funds from the EU IPA fund, and these were the following counties: Varaždin, Bjelovar-Bilogora, Požega-Slavonia and Vukovar-Srijem counties.

The funds available under this program in program-eligible areas were earmarked for environmental projects, projects that strengthen economic and social cohesion, as well as joint research, development and innovation, and projects to promote cross-border labor market mobility. A good part of them was intended for specific development projects such as those in the field of tourism, which included a number of variations aimed at the development of tourist infrastructure or the preservation of cultural heritage. The program consisted of program priorities such as a sustainable environment and tourism and the development of economic cooperation and joint human capacity. In this sense, the participation of the Križevci College of Agriculture was logical..

### **2.3. INTERREG cross-border cooperation program Hungary Croatia**

The Hungary-Croatia Cross-Border Cooperation Program (2014-2020) belongs to the category of European Territorial Cooperation and is actually one of several objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy. The aim of this program is joint supra economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union. Through identifying and overcoming problems and challenges in border regions, this program seeks to create a common identity basis for integration through balanced economic development. This program derives from the IPA cross-border cooperation program and is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). On this basis, the program rules are identical to the program and implementation of Cohesion Policy instruments.

As each cross-border area has its own specifics, this program is aimed at supporting selected activities in certain priority areas such as encouraging economic cooperation and eliminating unfavorable economic environment through the improvement and protection of the environment and natural resources. The program especially encourages the networking of local and regional government structures, as well as improved communication between educational institutions and key stakeholders in local economies.

Thus, the emphasis is on strengthening and expanding existing cooperation networks, i.e., on establishing a solid foundation for dynamic and lasting cross-border cooperation.

The program emphasizes sustainable forms of cooperation at all levels of previous cooperation networks, provided that the previously conceived activities are continuously implemented.

### **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For the purpose of the analysis of the theoretical domain, literature sources in the form of scientific articles dealing with cross-border cooperation, projects funded by the European Union, project management, as well as Internet sources with data on researched cross-border cooperation programs were used. For the needs of the research work, the content, ie goals, purpose and main outputs of five different projects implemented by the Križevci College of Agriculture were analyzed. In order to interpret the content and formulate conclusions, a comparative analysis of the main outputs was performed, which were placed in the context of educational and research patterns for the purpose of development of rural tourism.

### **4. RESULTS**

Within the IPA Hungary-Croatia Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013, the INVEST-PRO project was implemented, the aim of which was to contribute to increasing the economic potential and improving the quality of life in the Hungary-Croatia cross-border region. The project was implemented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Zala County as a leading partner in cooperation with other project partners - Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Somogy County, Varaždin County Development Agency - AZRA and Križevci College of Agriculture. The project wanted to explore the potentials of tourism development related to the possible realization of investments for tourism purposes, and to get acquainted with the untapped potentials in the target area of research. Through the support of existing and development of new forms of tourist offer, the goal was to initiate the creation of a recognizable image of a tourist destination of continental tourism in this area. The target groups that directly benefited from the project were the unemployed, local people and especially women (because it has been proven that it is much easier for women to find a job in tourism than in other sectors), entrepreneurs from the border area. The purpose of the project was to present the advantages and opportunities for tourism development of the analyzed cross-border counties, primarily due to their mutual proximity and connection, through data obtained from respondents who participated in the research. The Investpro project included a number of activities that included data collection, implementation of research activities in the analyzed area, interpretation of data in the form of a study. The main goal of the project was to contribute to increasing the economic potential and improving the quality of life in the cross-border region Hungary - Croatia.

The project DM - Destination Management Model for Health and Rural Tourism implemented within the IPA Cross-border Cooperation Program Hungary-Croatia 2007 - 2013 aimed to contribute to increasing economic potential and improving the quality of life in the cross-border region Hungary - Croatia. The project was implemented by the

Križevci College of Agriculture as a leading partner in cooperation with the project partner Pannon Egyetem. This project explored the possibilities of developing a model for destination management for rural tourism in Croatia (cross-border Koprivnica-Križevci County), and a model for destination management for health tourism in Hungary (cross-border Zala County). Through the support of existing and development of new forms of tourist offer, the goal was to initiate the creation of a recognizable image of a tourist destination of continental tourism of the researched project area.

The specific objectives of the project were: to establish knowledge centers (in Križevci and Keszthely) where research results, documentation, databases and literature related to health and rural tourism will be "stored", to develop teaching modules based on research results, publish research results both through study and through student textbooks. The target groups that directly benefited from the project were: business stakeholders from the economy sector in project cross-border areas involved or intending to be involved in the tourism sector (traders, accommodation providers, farmers and others), rural studies students acquiring new skills for the development of their region as a tourist destination, scientists, teachers, public organizations: all those who can provide technical, infrastructural support as well as support through human resources, researchers and teachers can use the results of the project in their future work.

The purpose of the project is to present the advantages and possibilities of tourism development of the analyzed cross-border counties, primarily due to their proximity and connection, through the creation of a destination management model for rural and health tourism.

The ECOTOP project aimed to establish long-term cooperation between Hungarian and Croatian educational institutions and institutions that provide support to economic entities in order to promote ecotourism and develop an effective training system with a database for this economic sector. The project supports development-based knowledge through the following five activities: research, workshops, study tours, training and establishment of a digital platform. As part of the project, it was first necessary to define the method of management, supervision and control in the adult education system in both countries participating in this project, especially with an emphasis on the tourism sector. To this end, the project partners organize five expert workshops in five relevant areas. During the project, each project partner organized a workshop in their country with the participation of representatives of partner institutions and educational institutions.

The research conducted within the project aimed to explore the possibilities of ecotourism development in Croatia (cross-border Koprivnica-Križevci County and Osijek-Baranja County) and analyze existing forms of already developed ecotourism in Hungary (Zala and Somogy cross-border counties) and disseminate research results in the form of transfer knowledge of current and future stakeholders in ecotourism. The target groups that directly benefited from the project were stakeholders from the business sector (organic producers, tourist farms, hunting societies, mountaineering societies, owners of catering and accommodation facilities and etc.), students of rural studies who acquire new skills for the development of their region as ecotourism destinations, scientists, teachers, public organizations and all those who can provide technical,

infrastructural support and support through human resources, researchers and teachers who can use project results in his future work.

The purpose of the research results was to show the advantages and possibilities of ecotourism development of the analyzed cross-border counties, primarily due to their proximity and connection, but also to establish lasting cooperation to promote ecotourism in a common ecosystem.

Within the INTERREG V-A Program for cross-border cooperation Hungary-Croatia 2014-2020, the project ECOTOP2 was implemented: Life-long learning programs for increased growth capacity in ecotourism. In addition to the Križevci College of Agriculture (project leader), the project involved the Tourist Board of Koprivnica, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Somogy County, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Zala County, and the University of Kaposvar.

The ECOTOP 2 project is a continuation of the successful ECOTOP project, which aimed to improve the competitiveness and level of service of entities engaged in some form of rural tourism and ecotourism in the Koprivnica-Križevci area, Zala and Somogy counties. Therefore, the trainings emphasized the development of an appropriate marketing strategy in ecotourism, and the improvement of business skills and abilities of entrepreneurs to start and maintain successful family farms. The aim of this project was to develop a lifelong learning program and language courses that strengthen the competencies of providers in ecotourism. The project encouraged the competitiveness of the cross-border area by exploring the border area and creating knowledge-based opportunities. The project generated a system of knowledge transfer through joint educational programs developed by partner institutions.

Target groups that directly benefit from the project were members of existing and future family farms, organic producers, owners of catering and accommodation facilities and all others who have prerequisites for ecotourism, the Roma minority who can be involved in economic activities in the cross-border area through ecotourism and thereby improving their social position, students of rural studies who acquire new knowledge for the development of their region as ecotourism destinations. Secondary target groups were also scientists, teachers, public organizations and all those who can provide technical, infrastructural support for ecotourism development and support through the function of human resources.

The implementation of the GASTROTOP project, which is being implemented within the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Co-operation Program 2014-2020, is underway in the period 2021-2022. The area of activity of this project is higher education cooperation in the field of education of representatives of agri-food (small) companies, food service providers, students / students of vocational schools as potential future entrepreneurs in the agri-food sector. For this purpose, higher education institutions are involved as active initiators of the promotion of education related to innovative food production in the function of creating an offer for special food restrictions of the consumer market.

The overall goal of the project is to improve the availability of educational platforms in a new interdisciplinary domain - food (gastro) tourism based on new trends in demand for different categories of food. The main goals of the project are the development and implementation of informal educational programs for food (gastro) tourism.

The purpose of the project is to develop comprehensive educational support for food producers and food storage service providers that will facilitate the demand for new special nutritional needs of the market. So, how to respond to the new needs of the market and adapt to it through the offer of new forms of food (functional food, healthy food, trendy food, food of special nutritional value. Also, the purpose of the project is to encourage and develop a commitment to the development of entrepreneurship in the field of food production among agricultural students in the cross-border area (HU-HR).

Such educational support in the form of education of entrepreneurs in the gastro-tourism sector and students of vocational schools and agricultural students will provide education and training to adapt gastronomic offers, as the ultimate goal of the project, in cross-border counties, in accordance with current requirements and trends in food consumption in the tourism sector, and thus have a positive impact on the situation of self-employment of young people and in general on employment in the tourism sector.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cross-border cooperation projects represent the possibility of financing various initiatives from non-budgetary sources, and represent the basis for independent development not only of institutions participating in the implementation of projects, but also of local communities. The importance of the implementation of such funded project initiatives often represents a certain democracy in terms of implementing innovative ideas that enable local development, but also the financing of institutional needs that may not be possible through conventional funding. It can be said that such projects are drivers of cross-border cooperation and networking of institutions and individuals, as a mobilization of innovative and original ideas that move institutions forward.

Within the IPA cross-border cooperation program 2007-2013 and INTERREG cross-border cooperation Hungary Croatia 2014-2020 in the period from 2013 to 2022, Križevci College of Agriculture participated in the implementation of five projects.

These projects explored the potentials of tourism development related to the possible realization of investments for tourism purposes as well as the possibilities of developing a model for destination management for rural tourism in Croatia, and a model of destination management for health tourism in Hungary. Through the support of existing and development of new forms of tourist offer, the goal was to initiate the creation of a recognizable image of a tourist destination of continental tourism of the researched project area.

Furthermore, the purpose of the project was to establish long-term cooperation between Hungarian and Croatian educational institutions, and institutions that provide support to economic entities through projects that support knowledge based on development.

Also, these projects encouraged the development of educational programs and targeted research related to the inclusion of marginalized groups in the ecotourism offer, ie the development of lifelong learning programs and language courses that strengthen the competencies of providers in ecotourism.

The last project aims to design and implement training for representatives of agri-food (small) companies, food service providers, students / students of vocational schools as potential future entrepreneurs in a new interdisciplinary domain - food (gastro) tourism. Finally it can be concluded that the main contributions of the Križevci College of Agriculture in the development of rural tourism through the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects Hungary-Croatia primarily are preparation, development and implementation of formal and informal innovative educational programs related to the promotion and development of rural tourism as well as significant scientific research work on new topics that directly or less directly deal with resource allocation and stakeholder involvement in development processes directly related to rural tourism.

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**EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
RURAL TOURISM THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS-BORDER  
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**Abstract**

Since 2013, Križevci College of Agriculture has been continuously participating in the implementation of cross-border projects within the IPA cross-border cooperation program 2007-2013 and INTERREG cross-border cooperation Hungary Croatia 2014-2020. In the period from 2013 to 2022, Križevci College of Agriculture participated in the implementation of five projects aimed at increasing economic potential and improving the quality of life in the cross-border region Hungary - Croatia through research into the potential of tourism development, primarily in the context of rural tourism development. These projects are: Invest PRO, DM - Destination Management Model for Health and Rural Tourism, ECOTOP, ECOTOP2 and GASTROTOP. These projects are developed through long-term cooperation between Hungarian and Croatian educational institutions, and institutions that provide support to economic entities. Projects support knowledge based on research, working with students and other stakeholders, establishing formal and non-formal education programs and models, participants training project, and creating concrete outputs such as textbooks, research methodologies, databases, and empirical results of applied research in practice. Furthermore, these projects, through the development of education programs and applied research, seek to improve the competitiveness and level of services of entities engaged in some forms of rural tourism in cross-border areas. Also, these projects are improving the availability of educational platforms in a new interdisciplinary domain - food (gastro) tourism, or as one of the subdomains of rural tourism, based on new trends in demand for different categories of food.

**Keywords:** Cross-border projects, formal and non-formal education programs

**Silvije Jerčinović**

Visoko gospodarsko učilište u Križevcima

**Sandra Kantar**

Visoko gospodarsko učilište u Križevcima

**Kristina Svržnjak**

Visoko gospodarsko učilište u Križevcima

**Timon Fabijanec**

Visoko gospodarsko učilište u Križevcima

## **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATURE PARK HUTOVO BLATO**

**Valentina Bevanda**  
**Ana Buljubašić**  
**Anita Dedić**  
**Dragan Škobić**

### **Abstract**

Hutovo Blato Nature Park is located in the downstream of the Neretva River, where it is located in a unique karst area called Dinaric Karst. It is the final branch of the entire Neretva mud, which covers the area from the river Krupa to the Neretva mouth into the Adriatic Sea. Hutovo Blato Nature Park is a unique sub-Mediterranean wetland in Europe, significant from the ornithological, ichthyological, scientific, ecological and tourist aspect. It is considered as one of the largest bird wintering grounds in Europe. The expression of natural resources within economic categories is increasingly present in protected area management and tourism development. Hutovo Blato Nature Park can contribute to the effective establishment of sustainable tourism development of the protected area with the aim of increasing the economic benefits on the one hand and the interests of nature protection on the other, without conflict between the goals. Hutovo Blato Nature Park area has not been adequately developed, valorized or accessible to visitors for now. Considering the fact that it is a protected area, it is necessary, in accordance with the established restrictions, to plan visiting scheme that would allow appropriate use or that would not jeopardize the values of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park and jeopardize its survival and protection. The aim of this paper will be to investigate and analyze the attitudes of visitors of the protected area of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park.

**Keywords:** Nature park, Protected area, Tourism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Protected areas are the most valuable parts of nature in terms of their existential, cultural, aesthetic, economic, functional, scientific and educational value (Gray 2004). Appropriate and responsible management of the protected area can achieve numerous competitive advantages regarding production organization, rational planning, including cost savings, rational reduction of environmental risks, improving relations with state and academic institutions responsible for nature protection, biodiversity and sustainable development. An indispensable component is the necessary involvement and education of the local population regarding nature protection issue. As market opportunities increase, due to consumer interest in buying more environmentally friendly products, there is growing enthusiasm among employees to enhance company's reputation and to create better and healthier work environment. (Črnjar and Črnjar 2009). The concept of tourism development in a protected area is presented as a specific tourist product which is a combination of different contents, including geomorphological, climatological and landscape characteristics of the area, special attractions or biological resources locations, but also means of transport, types of accommodation, special tourist infrastructure and special activities (Martinić 2010). Belkayali and Kesimoğlu (2015) state that preserving natural ecosystems in protected areas, on the one hand, and allowing the use of these areas for recreational/tourist purposes, on the other hand, is a very complex pattern. Within this complexity, determining the damage caused by visitors in natural places and taking the necessary precautions is of great importance for the sustainability of protected



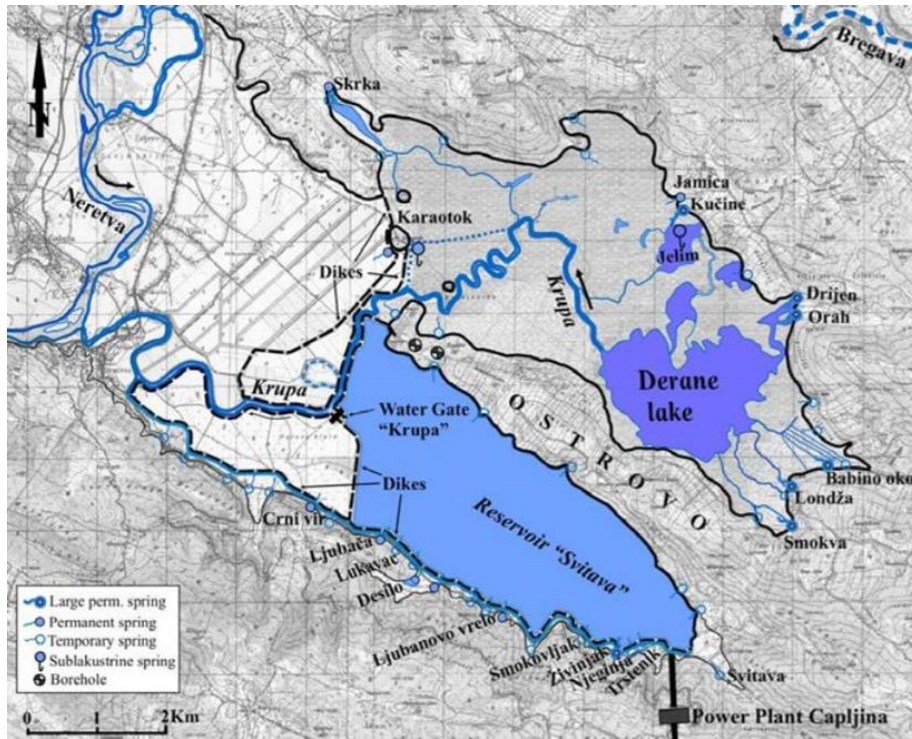
areas. The aim of the paper was to research and analyze the attitudes of students of the University of Mostar, to analyze their satisfaction, quality of service, expectations and perception. Perceptions of service quality are extremely important in the development of ecotourism because of their impact on satisfaction and direct and indirect impact on loyalty (Lee et al. 2004; TianCole and Crompton 2003; Tian-Cole et al. 2002; Zabkar et al. 2010). Product and service quality are two very close, sometimes indivisible categories. It is necessary to abstract the quality of service as a specific and special category because for each user it represents something different, since personal experience is an extremely subjective category. The aim of the survey was to analyze the attitudes of students, their requirements, motivation to visit and satisfaction with the quality of services and tourist offer in the area of Hutovo Blato Nature Park.

### **1.1. Research area**

Hutovo Blato Nature Park (Figure 1) is the last Mediterranean wetland oasis in the south of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was and remains, a safe haven for many bird, fish, plant and animal species in the wider Neretva Delta area. It is located in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Herzegovina-Neretva County, in the municipalities of Čapljina and Stolac.

The most abundant springs are as follows: Londža, Drijen, Orah, Jelim and Škrka and a number of nameless springs that allow plenty of water to form Lake Deran, and from which the river Krupa with 14 km length drains Hutovo Blato water into the river Neretva. Changes in the structure of the Hutovo Blato area have changed significantly before and after the construction of the Čapljina hydroelectric power plant (PHEČ), so today, Hutovo Blato Nature Park has the following areas: permanent water areas (1,402 ha), wetlands - occasionally under water (2 150 ha), reclaimed lowland areas (800 ha), hilly area (3 0659 ha), which totals 7 411 ha. Most of these lakes are shallow (1 -5 depth) with muddy lake bottom, except Jelima (max. depth is 17 meters). The water temperature is stable throughout the year (13° - 15°C in the winter season; max. 22°C in the summer season), with the exception of Lake Svitava where the surface temperature during summer season reaches up to 28 °C (Glamuzina et al. 2001; Goluža 2002).

**Figure 1. Main sources of the Hutovo Blato ecosystem, Čapljina power plant facilities and Buština**



Source: Miloanović 2006

## 1.2. Law Legislation and Regulations

The area of Hutovo Blato Nature Park has attracted the attention of researchers and nature lovers for a long time, but little attention has been paid to anthropogenic factors. Obratil was the first one to point this out through his works where he focused on nesting birds and bird species that reside in this area during migration and wintering season. In his later works, he highlighted the fact that Hutovo Blato Nature Park area is exposed to diverse anthropogenic activities - from livestock, mowing, burning reeds, deforestation, fishing and hunting from the late XIX and early XX century, through land reclamation, construction of embankments, canals, industrial and infrastructural facilities in the surrounding area, to build dams and create water reservoirs Svitavsko Lake for the needs of the Pump Hydroelectric Power Plant "Čapljina", which directly or indirectly affected the bird fauna of Hutovo Blato. The area has been protected exclusively as an elite hunting ground in earlier years. In 1971, Hutovo Blato Nature Park was included in the *List of Wetlands of International Importance*, and in 1980 in the *International Project for the Protection of Mediterranean Wetlands*. By the decision of the Government of the Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna on March 30, 1995, Hutovo Blato was declared a Nature Park and entered in the register of the High Court in Mostar. Since then, it has been managed by the Hutovo Blato Nature Park Public Company. In 1998, the International Council for the Protection of Birds included Hutovo Blato on the *List of Internationally Important Bird Habitats*, and in 2001 this area was included on the *List of Wetlands of International Importance* according to the Ramsar Convention

methodology and registered with the UNESCO Directorate in Paris. Hutovo Blato Nature Park was inscribed on the *Provisional List of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina* in 2002, and enjoys a high protection regime in the Federation of BiH since then. However, due to great difficulties with funding of ranger services, fires and poaching are common in the Park area. The occurrence of fires is a huge problem because it destroys the plant cover, which was a shelter and source of food for the park's fauna, disrupting the entire food chain.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey on the satisfaction of visitors to the protected areas of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park was conducted in 2021 on 135 respondents (students) from the University of Mostar.

The survey consisted of 17 questions primarily related to the Hutovo Blato Nature Park - 12 closed-ended questions, three open-ended questions and two combined questions. For closed-ended questions, respondents could choose one or more of the answers offered. When it came to open questions, they had to write their observations, suggestions, remarks.

Statistical analysis of the collected data was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25.0. (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp. USA). Descriptive statistics procedures were used, and the results were expressed as number and percentage, as well as means and standard deviation. The results are presented in tables and graphs and described in textually.

## 3. RESULTS

The empirical research included 135 students from the University of Mostar. The sample consisted of 70 girls and 62 boys while 3 students did not answer the gender question. All surveyed students are from Bosnia and Herzegovina and are between 18 and 25 years old.

Half of the students stated that they had visited Hutovo Blato Nature Park several times before (53.3% of them), 35.6% pointed out that they had visited only once, while 14 of them (10.4%) stated they had never visited Hutovo Blato Nature Park. Among the respondents who have visited Hutovo Blato Nature Park several times ( $n = 72$ ), 50 of them stated that they had visited 2 or 3 times, while the other 22 stated that they had been to the Nature Park more than 3 times.

Most students state that they learned about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park from family members, colleagues and friends. The second most common source of information is from school or university. Only 2 students pointed out that the information about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park came from the website of the Public Institution. The representation of individual answers to the question "How did you find out about this protected area?" is shown in Table 1.

The most common answer to the question about the motives for visiting Hutovo Blato Nature Park is to spend time in nature, followed by the answers of landscape attractiveness and curiosity. Respondents who gave the second answer pointed out that these are the following motives: school visit, school excursion, family visit, visit with friends and bird watching. The representation of individual answers to the question "What is the motive for your visit to the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?" is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Representation of respondents according to the source of information about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park and motives for visit**

	No. of students	% (n=121)
I have found out about Nature Park Hutovo Blato from		
Family members, colleagues, friends	66	55.0
School or University	47	39.2
Press Media	3	2.5
Media	14	11.7
Public Institution web	2	1.7
Other web pages	2	1.7
Television	2	1.7
Others	1	0.8
Motive of visit		
Spending time in nature	43	35.8
Field trip	18	15.0
Curiosity	24	20.0
Attractive landscape	29	24.2
I live nearby and/or it was on my way to other location	21	17.5
Others	5	4.2

Source: Preparation of the author based on the results of empirical research

Students who visited the Hutovo Blato Nature Park were asked to give an overview of the offer, availability of information and the quality of service in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park. One student did not evaluate the offer of the Hutovo Nature Park and the availability of information, while the quality of the service was not evaluated by two students.

In total, 76 (63.3%) students rated the service with high marks, while 11 students gave a low grade and thus expressed dissatisfaction with the service received in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park.

On the second place, according to students, is the offer of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park. The results show that 75 (62.5%) respondents gave high marks to the contents offered by the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, while bad marks were recorded in 8 students.

In the last place, according to students, is the availability of information about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park. Half of the surveyed students (60 of them) gave a good assessment of the availability of information, while 21 students and 17.5% of them expressed dissatisfaction.

The average ratings of these characteristics range between 3 and 4, the quality of service is best rated, and the representation of individual ratings is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Respondents satisfaction with the offer, availability of information and quality of service in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park - representation of individual grades and means**

	No. of students	%	M (SD)
Offer (n=120)			3.78 (0.89)
I am not satisfied at all (1)	1	0.8	
More dissatisfied than satisfied (2)	7	5.8	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	37	30.8	
More satisfied than dissatisfied (4)	48	40.0	
Completely satisfied (5)	27	22.5	
Availability of information (n=120)			3.50 (1.05)
I am not satisfied at all (1)	3	2.5	
More dissatisfied than satisfied (2)	18	15.0	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	39	32.5	
More satisfied than dissatisfied (4)	36	30.0	
Completely satisfied (5)	24	20.0	
Quality of service (n=119)			3.81 (0.99)
I am not satisfied at all (1)	2	1.7	
More dissatisfied than satisfied (2)	9	7.5	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied(3)	32	26.7	
More satisfied than dissatisfied (4)	43	35.8	
Completely satisfied (5)	33	27.5	

M – mean; SD – standard deviation

Source: Preparation of the author based on the results of empirical research

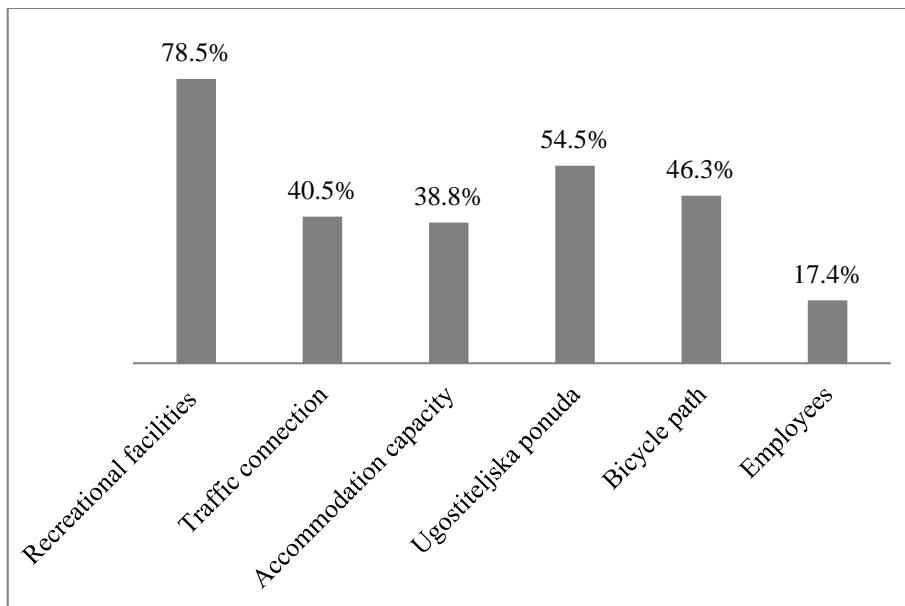
The question "What did you like in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?" was an open-ended question and some students pointed out what impressed them. Some of the most common answers are: nature beauty, boating, diverse flora and fauna, clean air, forest, landscape, bird watching, water.

Another open question was "What did you not like about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?". The most common answers to this question are: pollution, clutter, access roads, lack of attractions, insufficient amount of tourist facilities, organization, lack of recreational facilities.

According to students, a significant improvement in the tourist offer of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park would be mostly due to an increase in recreational facilities (95 of 121 students voted this), while the smallest contribution to improving the park's offer would

be made by employees (80 of 121 students). In second place in terms of contribution, students place a catering offer, followed by a bike path. How many respondents chose which item is shown in Graph 1.

**Graph 1. Representation of factors for improving the tourist offer of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park**



Source: Preparation of the author based on the results of empirical research

When asked "What would you change in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?", Students most often pointed out the following: They would introduce more recreational facilities for all ages, marketing, cleaning and maintenance of the Park, introduce bike and motorcycle trails, add some activities with animals, improve accommodation services, improve parking, repair access roads, add more outdoor facilities, renovate existing facilities, improve information, built promenades.

Two students did not answer the question "Do you visit other protected areas in BiH?", And of those who answered (n = 133) 93 (69.9%) gave an affirmative answer, while 40 (30.1%) students gave a negative answer.

One student did not answer the questions about the ticket price for the Hutovo Blato Nature Park and the question about the price of the annual ticket for protected areas in BiH. Most students pointed out that they would be willing to pay up to 10 KM for a ticket to the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, a total of 129 (96.3%), with the distribution of answers contained as follows: 2 KM - 32 students, 5 KM 63 students and 10 KM - 34 students. Others pointed out that they would be willing to pay even more. For the annual ticket for protected areas in BiH, students would most often allocate from 20 to 50 KM (86.64.2%)

of them), while 32 students (23.7%) would allocate 100 KM. Only 5 KM would be allocated by 12 (8.9%) students, and 4 of them would allocate more than 100.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Based on the obtained data, we can conclude that Hutovo Blato Nature Park is visited. Half of the students, 53.3%, stated that they had visited the protected area several times before, 35.6% of the students pointed out that they had visited there only once, while 10.4% had never visited the Nature Park in question. Based on the data from Table 1, we can conclude that most students learned about Hutovo Blato Nature Park from family members, colleagues and friends, where only 2 students pointed out that information about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park came through the website of the Public Institution. Therefore, we can conclude is that there is a lot of unused media space to promote the area itself. The most common motive for visiting Hutovo Blato Nature Park is spending time in nature (35.8%), the landscape attractiveness (24.2%), curiosity (20.0%), living nearby (17.2%), field work 15.0%), others (4.2%). Table 2 shows quite good assessments of respondents satisfaction with the offer, availability of information and quality of service in Hutovo Blato Nature Park. The results show that 75 (62.5%) respondents gave high marks to the contents offered by Hutovo Blato Nature Park, while bad marks were recorded in 8 students. Average ratings of these characteristics range between 3 and 4, where the quality of service is best rated. To the open question "What did you like about the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?" The most common answers were: the beauty of nature, boating, diverse flora and fauna, clean air, forest, landscape, bird watching, water. And to the question "What did you not like in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?". The most common answers to this question were: pollution, clutter, access roads, lack of attractions, insufficient amount of tourist facilities, organizations, lack of recreational facilities. To the questions "What would you change in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park?" Students most often answered: to introduce more recreational facilities for all ages, marketing, cleaning, and maintenance of the park, to introduce bicycle and motorcycle trails, add some activities with animals, improve accommodation services, improve parking, repair access roads, add more outdoor facilities, renovate existing facilities, improve information, build promenades. Based on all this, we can conclude, improving the offer in the protected area in the future would increase the number of visitors, not only nationally but also internationally. Based on the conducted statistical analysis of data, it can be concluded that students rated the service between 3 and 4, but are not satisfied with the tourist offer, i.e. recreational content (95 of 121 students voted), while the smallest contribution to improving the park offer would be accomplished by employees (choose 80 of 121 students voted) shown in Graph 1.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Hutovo Blato is considered to be one of the largest wintering grounds for birds in Europe. With its rich biodiversity, natural heritage, it shows the true natural values and beauties of one of the richest wetlands in this part of Europe. The satisfaction of Hutovo Blato Nature Park visitors can be related to the quality of the entire tourist offer in the Hutovo Blato Nature Park. The entire tourist offer, i.e. services, should meet the needs of tourists and ultimately meet their expectations. Today's expectations of tourists and potential visitors to protected areas are higher than in previous periods. The conducted research

hinted at the shortcomings and problems of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, which are perceived by its visitors. The research was conducted on the young population, so in the future the sample should be expanded to include respondents of all ages, especially families with minor children. By looking at their answers related to the current situation and satisfaction with the Hutovo Blato Nature Park and analyzing remarks and suggestions, one can gain a better insight into the necessary activities to take in order to achieve a higher level of tourist offer, therefore ensuring greater satisfaction of its visitors.

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**Keywords:** Nature park, Protected area, Tourism

**Valentina Bevanda**  
Senior Assistant  
Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Education  
University of Mostar  
E-mail: valentina.bevanda@fpmoz.sum.ba

**Ana Buljubašić**  
Senior Assistant  
Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Education  
University of Mostar  
E-mail: ana.buljubasic@fpmoz.sum.ba

**Anita Dedić**  
Associate Professor, Ph.D.  
Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Education  
University of Mostar  
E-mail: anita.dedic@fpmoz.sum.ba

**Dragan Škobić**  
Associate Professor, Ph.D.  
Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Education  
University of Mostar  
E-mail: dragan.skobic@fpmoz.sum.ba

## DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN MEDVEDNICA NATURE PARK

**Marina Popijač**  
**Martina Jurjević Varga**  
**Sanja Tišma**

### **Abstract**

Medvednica Nature Park is situated in the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje County and Zagreb County, surrounded by almost a quarter of the population of the Republic of Croatia. While Prigorje is an urban environment, Zagorje is a rural area where population lives with and from nature. The boundaries of the Park were reduced in 2009 due to excessive urbanization in the southern area.

During last ten years, the development of ecotourism in the Park has been improved by local crafts and rural farms as well as a growing number of local producers, using associated facilities such as spas, museums, ski resorts and protected areas.

More tourists and visitors, for whom nature protection is an important issue, come to the Park to learn about traditional and cultural values.

The Public Institution Nature Park Medvednica offers many educational and interpretive contents to visitors, thus enhancing their stay in nature. By continuously renewing its capacities and sustainable management, it supports the development of the local community to use the Park's specific values as a destination coexisting with nature.

The growing demand for organic products has been recognized, especially among the urban population and tourists.

A significant precondition for the development of ecotourism in this environment is the provision of all necessary resources and strengthening the capacity of the local community in order to preserve Medvednica Nature Park and raise awareness about natural and cultural values.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, capacity building, local community, sustainable management, Medvednica Nature Park

## **1. MEDVEDNICA NATURE PARK AND STAKEHOLDERS**

### **1.1. Medvednica Nature Park**

Medvednica was protected for the first time in 1963 by declaring 8 special reserves of forest vegetation and was established in 1981 as a nature park on an area of 22.826 ha (JU PPM and IRMO, 2017). In February 2009, the area was reduced to 17.938 ha. The area of the Park stretches from 120 to 1.035 m asl, which includes lowland, hilly and mountainous areas. The highest peak of Medvednica is Sljeme. The territory of the City of Zagreb covers 8.439 ha (13.1% of the City area) and 9.499 ha are part of Zagreb and Krapina-Zagorje Counties. Within the Park, there are 28 settlements (Table 1.), of which 4 settlements in the City of Zagreb, 7 in Zagreb County and 17 in Krapina-Zagorje County (JU PPM, 2011). In order to protect Medvednica due to its exceptional natural beauty and fundamental phenomenon (forest), and at the same time enable development and encourage stakeholders to operate in this area through various functions with mandatory nature protection conditions, it was necessary to legally protect it and gradually implement numerous plans, procedures and actions to make this possible. There are no national parks in the Pannonian-Peripannonian part of Croatia, and the main natural sights of this macroregion are within the nature parks: Kopački rit and Lonjsko

polje characterized by a wetland area, and nature parks: Medvednica, Papuk and Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje with preserved native forest vegetation.

Table 1. **Division of Medvednica Nature Park area according to settlements**

Area	Area (ha), % of total Park area (ha)	Settlements	Population characteristics
City of Zagreb County	7.287 ha (40,6 %)	-City of Zagreb:	Rarely inhabited. Most of the inhabitants are in Gornja Dubrava (Jakopovići).
Stubica area	5.461 ha (30,5 %)	-Municipality of Stubičke Topice: Stubičke Toplice, Strmec Stubički, Pila, Sljeme - Municipality of Donja Stubica: Pustodol, Donja Podgora, Gornja Podgora, Donja Stubice, Milekovo Selo, Hižakovec - Municipality of Gornja Stubica: Brezje, Slani Potok, Gornja Stubica, Volavec, Jakšinec, Karivaroš, Sveti Matej	Since this is the steep side of Medvednica, at higher altitudes the natural conditions for the development of the settlement are difficult. The population is concentrated in the lowland part, in the Municipality of Donja Stubica and the Municipality of Stubičke Toplice. The settlements of the Municipality of Gornja Stubica have largely retained their traditional rural character.
Bistra area	4.037 ha (22,5 %)	-City of Zaprešić: Jablanovec, Ivanec Bistranski - Municipality of Bistra: Gornja Bistra, Novaki Bistranski, Poljanica Bistranska, Oborovo Bistransko - Municipality of Jakovlje: Kraljev Vrh	It is an agricultural area with arable land, and the population is increasingly focused on Zagreb, dynamic increase in population is expected.
Sesvete area	1.151 ha (6,4 %)	-City of Zagreb: Planina Gornja,	Mostly rural, less urbanized area.

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	Kašina, Donja	Planina
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Source: Strategija upravljanja posjetiteljima, JU PPM, 2020

The southern part of the park stands out with a forest complex with a very small share of meadows, while on the northern side there is an access area with settlements and surrounding open spaces. Medvednica Nature Park has preserved nature and stands out for its great biodiversity, landscape diversity and geological values with karst forms of steep rocks, cliffs, sinkholes, valleys, caves and pits. The access area of Zagorje is a landscape of urban and rural settlements intertwined with agricultural areas that include orchards, vineyards, meadows and arable land, but also forests, and retained traditional appearance (Ptić 2016). Rural settlements that have retained their traditional appearance remain only on the northern slopes, mostly in the Stubica area.

For the purpose of tourism development, in accordance with the regulations of the protected area, a Stakeholder Forum was established to the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST). Public Institution received the ECST for the first time for the period from 2014 to 2019, which was renewed for the period from 2020 to 2024 as a result of good cooperation with local stakeholders and visitors. Public Institution faces a large number of activities and challenges, although it is often not within its jurisdiction, it helps solve them as a mediator and initiator. A common management model creates benefits and greater social values for all stakeholders with constant concern for possible pressures on the protected area.

In the Park there are visitor and tourist infrastructure. Elements of visitor and tourist infrastructure are located within all zones of the Park - zones of strict protection, zones of directed protection and zones of use (JU PPM 2020).

Visitor infrastructure includes:

- important sites,
- areas and locations for rest and recreation,
- natural and cultural heritage,
- information centres,
- observation posts,
- entrance zones: main and secondary entrances,
- bicycle and hiking trails,
- public roads, forest roads and other approaches to buildings.

## 1.2. Medvednica Nature Park stakeholders

Throughout history, Medvednica has provided to settlements in the foothills raw materials for life: wood, coal, salt, stone, silver, water, but also food (wild animals) and agricultural and grassland for the production of cereals and grazing for livestock. Today, the area of the Park is used by stakeholders of different interests, and in order to operate effectively in a relatively small area, partnership and understanding are key, as well as joint action to protect the environment and natural and cultural heritage. Medvednica Nature Park Visitor Management Study (JU PPM 2020) and the Visitor Center Marketing Plan (JU PPM 2020) define the stakeholders/users/target groups:

- tourists, recreationists and athletes, families with,
- professional, scientific and educational public,
- persons with disabilities,
- pupils and students (educational programs related to the school curriculum - recommendation of the Education Agency),
- collaborating institutions (researchers and others),
- Medvednica Nature Park Stakeholder Forum (ECST, Europarc),
- travel agencies,
- the tourist boards of the City of Zagreb and the Zagreb and Krapina-Zagorje Counties,
- caterers, accommodation providers, food producers from the area of the three counties,
- mall entrepreneurs and craftsmen/residents of the area who are potential carriers of entrepreneurial initiatives and resources.

## **2. THE REASON FOR VISITING MEDVEDNICA NATURE PARK**

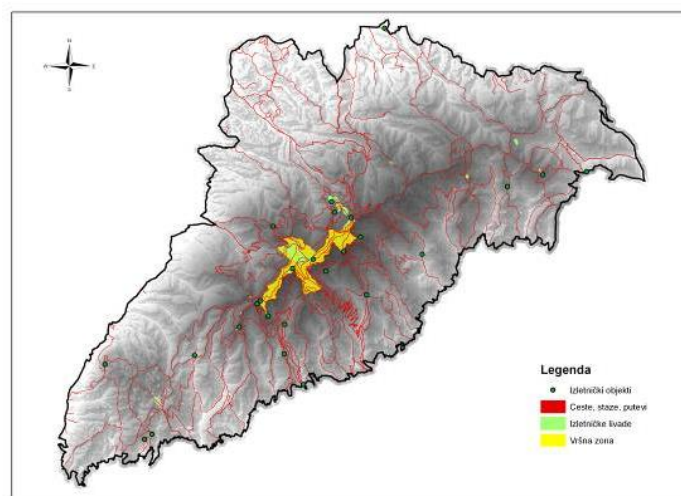
Medvednica Nature Park is a popular area for recreational activities of the surrounding population where particularly attractive destinations such as the top of the mountain - Sljeme and ski resort can be singled out. There is a whole network of different trails in the Park, including several thematic educational trails (Miroslavec, Bistra, Sopot Waterfall, Kameni svati, Gorsko zrcalo, Horvatove stube), 150 km of bicycle paths (8 circulars and one ridge) and one enduro trail, pilgrimage route 50 km long (Marian pilgrimage route), 72 hiking trails, and an educational trail adapted for people with disabilities (Forest Trail Bliznec).

### **2.1. Tourism and visitor infrastructure in Medvednica Nature Park**

In the Park, tourism began to develop in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a change in lifestyle (the expansion of Zagreb and industrialization). The infrastructure for visitors has been continuously developed. The annual number of visitors is estimated, because the exact number cannot be determined due to a large number of available entrances to the Park and no entrance fee. However, the estimate is based on the number of tickets sold for tourist attractions, the number of visitors to events, programs sold and traffic counters (road and pedestrian), which is about 1 mil visitors per year. The opening of the first cable car in 1954, which led to the Panjevina trail, began the development of skiing, trail system and lifts on the northern slopes of Sljeme and the opening of a new cable car in 2022 creates an alternative to more efficient arrival in the Park. The recreational route of Medvednica consists of hiking and walking trails, which lead from the bottom to the top of Medvednica, and connect in the peak zone where the largest number of facilities for visitors are. In addition to skiing, Nordic running trail is regulated during heavy snow. An issue that has been present for years is the lack of suitable space for sledding. The traditional places, located on the meadows of the peak zone, are completely occupied so that there is no possibility for an alternative space for sledding. Today, the Park has 26 mountain lodges and houses, 9 facilities for food and beverages, 6 hunting lodges and 2

accommodation facilities (hotel Tomislavov dom and TA Snow Queen) with an estimated capacity of 500 beds, and some of the mountain lodges have the possibility of accommodation (Figure 1.). Almost all catering facilities are located in the peak zone, which is easily accessible by cable car. Although facilities are being renovated, many are neglected and dysfunctional. Some of the traditional sites, according to the Report on Visitor Facilities in the Park (Studija upravljanja posjetiteljima, JU PPM, 2020), are out of order, 9 of them. The devastated buildings include mountain shelters, 28 of them.

Figure 1. Visitors' infrastructure in Medvednica Nature Park



Source: Oikon & JU PPM, 2020

### 2.1.1 Sites of special importance in Medvednica Nature Park

Today, Public Institution manages three sites of special importance: Veternica cave, Zrinski mine and Medvedgrad.

Veternica cave is located in the southwestern part of Medvednica, only 9 km from the center of Zagreb. It was protected in 1979 as a geomorphologic natural monument and is the sixth largest cave in the Republic of Croatia whose channels are 7.1 km long, and the main canal is 2.6 km long, while the first 380 m is arranged for a tourist tour. Veternica represents a significant paleontological and archaeological site. It is one of the richest finds of the cave bear (*Ursus spelaeus*) and other Pleistocene fauna (Kirhbert rhinoceros, huge deer, leopard, cave lion, etc.). 18 bat species were registered in the cave, and 12 of them hibernate in Veternica. This is why during the winter the cave is closed for visits so that no one disturbs the bats during a sensitive period of hibernation.

In 2006 Zrinski mine was proclaimed as a cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia and visitors can visit it in organized groups. It is located near Grafičar mountain lodge at 830 m asl. Zrinski mine (Mining Garden) belonged to Count Petar Zrinski according to the royal mining privilege from 1463, which enabled him and his descendants to open

gold, silver and other metals mines on all their properties. His son Nikola signed a contract with Zagreb residents in 1527, which gives them the right to mine. Medvedgrad was built on the southern slopes of Medvednica, on the hill Mali Plazur, at 593 m asl in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1249-1254) after the Tatar invasion in 1242. In the period between 2018 and 2021, Public Institution carried out the EU project “Improvement of visitor capacity for the purpose of sustainable management of Medvednica Nature Park”, K.06.1.2.01.0012. The total value of the project was almost 38 mil HRK. The project has been co-financed by EU with 81.57% of the amount for eligible project costs from the European Regional Development Fund, Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund with 18% of the eligible costs, while the rest of the costs have been co-financed by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and partly from own revenues. With reconstruction and interior design, Medvedgrad has become a unique example of the transformation of the medieval “burg” into a modern visitor center. The highest level of excellence has been established and Medvedgrad Visitor Center has become a central place for the interpretation of cultural and natural heritage, management of Park visitors, tourist attraction and educational site (Figure 2. and 3.).

Figure 2. **Medvedgrad**



Source: Edge 2021

Figure 3. **South tower**



Source: Edge 2021

## 2.2. Importance of small business in Medvednica Nature Park

Entrepreneurship as the development and driving force of the economy is the foundation of the success of a particular area. For the past ten years, small businesses (small companies, crafts) and family farms have been developing in the Park area, providing catering and tourism services and producing local products. They are especially important where there are smaller settlements. Table 2. shows the representation of small entrepreneurs in local self-government units in the Park. The largest representation of small farms is in Zagreb County (14.497), in Krapina-Zagorje County 8.973, and in the City of Zagreb 6.363. Demand for staying in protected areas is constantly growing, but tourist consumption is still relatively low, primarily due to the lack of adequate offers (opgovi.hr 2020).

By joining the EU, Croatia has an opportunity for various sources of funding available through public calls for projects for grants in the tourism, small and medium enterprises and agriculture, in order to improve the competitiveness of tourism entrepreneurs whose beneficiaries are small businesses (companies outside the public sector, crafts) and family farms that provide catering and/or tourism services or produce their own products. In the new program period, a more active approach to the use of grants is expected, which would include projects with green and digital aspects, e.g. those that will raise the quality of the tourist offer, while reducing the negative impact on the environment. Such projects should focus on the development of tourism products or services supporting the circular economy, sustainable mobility and digital solutions, and at least 50% of the investment will need to focus on climate change mitigation or adaptation. At the same time, it will be necessary to develop a plan and method of waste management and to analyse the negative effects of production or consumption. All investments will have to comply with the 'Do no significant harm' (DNSH) principle in accordance with EU Regulation 2021/241 establishing a Recovery and Resilience Mechanism.

Table 2. Categories of SME in Medvednica Nature Park

County	Legal entities			Family agricultural farm			Craft			Self-sufficient agricultural farm			Trade company			Manufacturer's association			Overall
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
City of Zagreb	1	12	13	2.027	3.155	5.182	5	30	35	259	454	713	108	300	408	2	10	12	6.363
Zagrebačka County	4	7	11	4.609	8.846	13.455	25	115	140	229	436	665	65	150	215	1	10	11	14.497
Krapinsko zagorska County	2		2	2.521	5.369	7.890	17	69	86	252	662	914	18	56	74	2	5	7	8.973
Total	7	19	26	9.157	17.370	26.527	47	214	261	740	1.552	2.292	191	506	697	5	25	30	29.833

Source: Upisnik poljoprivrednika, available at [https://www.opgovi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Upisnik-poljoprivrednika\\_broj-PG-a-2020\\_31.12.2020.pdf](https://www.opgovi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Upisnik-poljoprivrednika_broj-PG-a-2020_31.12.2020.pdf) (01.03.2022.)

### 2.3. Tourist offer in the vicinity of Medvednica Nature Park

Within the area of the Park and its immediate surroundings, a tourist offer has been developed with accommodation facilities, restaurants, entertainment and recreation facilities and health services. In the vicinity of the Park there are cheaper types of accommodation - camps, resorts, private households. In Krapina-Zagorje County, you can enjoy the benefits of thermal baths and accompanying services in Krapinske Toplice, Stubičke Toplice, Tuheljske Toplice and Donja Stubica, and swimming pools in Marija Bistrica and Zabok. Krapina-Zagorje County has included tourism in its priority activities and as part of that, it has created a visual identity and logo that connects several elements as a whole. The success of such activities is reflected in the recognizability of the region with its beautiful landscape, warmth and hospitality of the people and a magical, fairytale impression. At the same time, they came up with the slogan "Fairy tale on the palm", and as a result of great efforts, the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays has been growing for many years.

Zagreb County surrounds the area of the City of Zagreb, which is why it is often called the Zagreb Ring, and due to the preserved and attractive environment, the "Green Ring". It covers a very diverse area, which makes it attractive from a tourist point of view. Its main natural determinants are the Sava River, which passes through the central part in a west-east direction, and two mountains - The Žumberak Mountains in the west and



Medvednica in the north. According to the data of Zagreb County (2022), in 2021 there were 87.5% more tourist arrivals and 49% more overnight stays compared to 2020, and interest in holiday homes that offer security, top service and authentic experience has increased.

The City of Zagreb is the administrative and political center of the Republic of Croatia, which for many years has profiled itself as a desirable destination, primarily business, but in recent years as a tourist and cultural destination. According to the sources of Zagreb Tourist Board (2020), the City of Zagreb has improved and increased the offer of accommodation capacities in recent years. In 2019, it had 8.735 beds in 68 hotels, 2.401 beds in 54 hostels, 9.507 beds in 2.493 private renters and 5.421 beds in various accommodation facilities. In September 2020, although affected by the pandemic, there were 69 hotels (8.603 beds), then 44 hostels (2.088), 2.272 private renters (8.763), 3 rural households and 11 other accommodation facilities.

### **3. SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF MEDVEDNICA NATURE PARK**

Taking into account the positive and negative impacts of tourism, Public Institution builds a vision of tourism in the Park and its surroundings that will strive for sustainable development through the orientation towards economic prosperity, environmental protection and quality of life of the local population.

#### **3.1. Advantages of Medvednica Nature Park and surrounding area**

The Park and its surroundings are a potentially large market for the consumption of business, excursion, recreational, spa and health tourism with good transport connections. Significant values of the Park and its immediate surroundings include rich natural and cultural heritage and preserved rural areas. In the Park and its surroundings, many rural households, wineries and picnic areas have been revitalized, providing services of stationary or excursion tourism in a rural environment, and additional value are numerous educational trails, bicycle routes and wine roads.

#### **3.2. Challenges in the development of tourism**

An integrated and responsible approach towards natural and cultural heritage would equalize possibilities for the development of sustainable tourism. Continuous improvement of the level of tourist equipment of internationally relevant tourist resources, development of local recognition and design of tourist products would provide conditions for creating a tourist brand of Medvednica area while respecting the criteria of nature protection and cultural values. In order to suppress the negative impacts of development, it is necessary to increase the capacity of professional staff in rural and other selective forms of tourism, especially when it comes to developing accommodation and congress offer, development of rural, eco, ethnic and family tourism (Institut za turizam, 2016).

#### **3.3. The role of promotion, interpretation and education in the protected area**

The promotion of tourism in the protected area encourages new opportunities but also reveals great challenges today, given that modern trends in world tourism point to the growing interest in protected areas. Sustainable development of tourism, especially ecotourism, is directly dependent on the preservation of the area since its existence is a precondition for its further development. Promotion of the protected area is focused on the natural phenomenon and the laws of protection in order to educate visitors about the natural features of the specific area. Activities to promote the values of the Park are 'sustainable' for all stakeholders if they are put in the function of ecology, sustainability and protection, which creates the conditions for the development of rural areas and generates positive economic benefits. Successful contribution to management as a modern and sophisticated tool has an interpretation of the protected area in order to permanently preserve all natural and cultural values and establish positive communication processes. Such an approach contributes to the emotional and intellectual connection of visitors and the area but also connects with the idea of global preservation of natural and cultural values of the protected area with positive tourism development.

#### **3.4. Sustainable tourism development in Medvednica Nature Park**

Sustainable tourism is conditioned by a positive approach to development with the aim of long-term maintenance of resource capacity and environmental quality and reducing tensions and issues arising from the complex interaction of stakeholders of the tourist destination and environment (Butler 1999, Klarin 2018). The Park and its surroundings are encouraged to respect the principles of such a concept harmonized between ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. In order to avoid imbalance in further development, all activities in the environment need to be designed and implemented in accordance with the goals that reduce the negative impact of tourism on society and the environment while preserving and protecting them and increasing local community well-being and tourist satisfaction (Klarin 2018). A precondition for the implementation of sustainable tourism, but also sustainable development in the Park is the zoning of the protected area, and also the only way to protect the area in the long term. Thus, according to the Ordinance on the Protection and Preservation of Medvednica Nature Park (Pravilnik o zaštiti i očuvanju Parka prirode Medvednica, NN 17/2021), measures for the protection, preservation, improvement, use and management zone are prescribed. The Park is divided into several zones determined according to natural values and management needs and based on the principles of protection and preservation of natural values, spatial plan and plans for tourism development are created.

#### **3.5. Recognizability of Medvednica Nature Park and its surroundings**

The Public Institution has included the activity of developing a recognizable logo for products and services from the Park area and surrounding areas in order to promote local products and services, emphasizing that such an offer is local, environmental and traditional in the new Management Plan (2021-2030). The development and the implementation of the proposed activity would contribute to improving promotion of the area, sustainable and environment friendly management and protection of public interest in order to ensure the protection and preservation of nature in the geographical area and

local sustainable and environmental practices. The slogan and logo (Figure 4) that Public Institution plans to offer to the stakeholders, and which will meet the required selection criteria, is called 'Medvednica Green Touch' with the purpose of focusing on sustainable tourism. The planned activity aims to strengthen the trust of stakeholders, confirm the quality of products and services, interpret and promote geographical origin, present sustainable and environment friendly management, educate on the needs of nature and tradition with positive economic, social and environmental effects. Under the same slogan, the first scientific conference was held in 2021 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the proclamation of the Park, which is planned to be held every other year, with the aim of promoting, interpreting and educating about the protection of natural and cultural heritage and about threats caused by climate change and human impacts on nature.

Figure 4. **Medvednica Green Touch** logo



Source: JU PPM, 2021

### **3.6. 'Medvednica Green Touch' is a new slogan to encourage the production and development of local producers**

Medvednica Nature Park and its surroundings are the ecological core of central Croatia. In addition to natural beauty, it also has unique traditional products, dishes, customs, cultural heritage and recognizable historical identity. Public Institution wants to combine offer and give the stakeholders a logo 'Medvednica Green Touch' so that every visitor who visits this area has the opportunity to fully experience and taste local specialties and enjoy the historical and cultural heritage.

### **3.7. Acquisition of usage rights**

Public Institution wants to encourage stakeholders to use the logo and the slogan to increase promotion and visibility of quality local products and services of the protected area. The offered products will have to meet the predetermined criteria that will be set by Public Institution acts, and among other things will need to be produced or processed in the Park or surrounding areas and in accordance with the logo and the slogan. For the products, the basic raw material should be from the geographical area of the Park or the surrounding areas, unless the product can be considered a traditional product that was not related to the raw material from that area in the past, or is a work of art. It will be

recommended to produce basic raw materials in the traditional way in the specified geographical area if possible. Service providers will have to meet the criteria of sustainable and environment friendly management with the least possible impact on the environment. It will be of great importance to educate producers and service providers about the natural and cultural sights of the Park and its surroundings for more successful promotion to visitors and tourists.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The activity of Public Institution is 'protection, maintenance and promotion of the nature park in order to protect and preserve the originality of nature, ensure the smooth running of natural processes and sustainable use of natural resources, monitor the implementation of nature protection conditions and measures in the area and participation in the collection of data for the purpose of monitoring the state of nature conservation (JU PPM 2014). The strategic document in making, Medvednica Nature Park and Associated Protected Areas and Ecological Network Management Plan for the period 2021-2030, perceives activity of developing recognizable products and services, and use of the logo and the slogan 'Medvednica Green Touch'. It is expected that the proposed slogan and logo for the purpose of interpreting and promoting the natural and cultural heritage of the Park and its surroundings will contribute to sustainable development in order to raise awareness of nature conservation, but also to achieve economic benefits and create a common "green" identity. In the management of the Park as a recognizable destination, the participation of all stakeholders is important, especially local authorities, local inhabitants and tourist boards. There are sufficient capacities of accommodation units and services in the mentioned geographical area and surroundings, and the future development should not include quantitative, but only qualitative growth in accordance with the tradition of the region. All infrastructure should be restored with the aim of minimizing footprints in the space, and it is necessary to solve traffic issues, lack of parking, congestion and noise, and waste disposal.

The Stakeholder Forum is planned to expand to contribute to the creation of an effective development network and facilitate the flow of information among all. For the implementation of sustainable tourism development, the cooperation of all stakeholders in the Park will be strengthened. The role of the Public Institution is to protect the natural and cultural heritage and direct development outside the forest area of the Park to the peripheral parts that have conditions for sustainable development, while local residents expect more efficient use of benefits provided by the protected area.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN MEDVEDNICA NATURE PARK

**Marina Popijač**  
**Martina Jurjević Varga**  
**Sanja Tišma**

### Abstract

Medvednica Nature Park is situated in the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje County and Zagreb County, surrounded by almost a quarter of the population of the Republic of Croatia. While Prigorje is an urban environment, Zagorje is a rural area where population lives with and from nature. The boundaries of the Park were reduced in 2009 due to excessive urbanization in the southern area.

During last ten years, the development of ecotourism in the Park has been improved by local crafts and rural farms as well as a growing number of local producers, using associated facilities such as spas, museums, ski resorts and protected areas.

More tourists and visitors, for whom nature protection is an important issue, come to the Park to learn about traditional and cultural values.

The Public Institution Nature Park Medvednica offers many educational and interpretive contents to visitors, thus enhancing their stay in nature. By continuously renewing its capacities and sustainable management, it supports the development of the local community to use the Park's specific values as a destination coexisting with nature.

The growing demand for organic products has been recognized, especially among the urban population and tourists.

A significant precondition for the development of ecotourism in this environment is the provision of all necessary resources and strengthening the capacity of the local community in order to preserve Medvednica Nature Park and raise awareness about natural and cultural values.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, capacity building, local community, sustainable management, Medvednica Nature Park

**Marina Popijač**  
Ph.D.  
Public Institution Nature Park Medvednica (JU PPM)  
E-mail: marina.popijac@pp-medvednica.hr

**Martina Jurjević Varga**  
mag. ing. silv.  
Public Institution Nature Park Medvednica (JU PPM)  
E-mail: martina.j.varga@pp-medvednica.hr

**Sanja Tišma**  
Ph.D., Senior scientific adviser  
Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO)  
E-mail: sanja.tisma@irmo.hr

## URBAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND NATURA 2000 AREAS IN OSIJEK-BARANJA COUNTY

**Siniša Ozimec**  
**Tihomir Florijančić**  
**Dragan Prlić**

**Abstract:**

Natura 2000 is the ecological network of the European Union, established for conservation of threatened wild fauna and flora species and habitats. In the Republic of Croatia covers 36.7% of land area and consists of 783 areas; 42 important for birds (SPAs) and 741 for species and habitat types (SCIs). Osijek-Baranja County is the regional self-government unit in eastern Croatia, consisting of 7 cities, 35 municipalities and 263 settlements, at the total land area of 4,155 km<sup>2</sup>. Ecological network Natura 2000 covers 23.7% of the total surface and comprises 16 areas; 3 SPAs and 13 SCIs. Management and protection of wild animal species that constantly inhabit or occasionally appear in urban and rural settlements is regulated by the Wild Animal Protection Programme. The completed procedure of the ecological network impact assessment is among the requirements for the approval of this 10-year valid document. Wild Animal Protection Programmes of 37 self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County had been analysed. Percentage of built-up and urbanised areas in the settlements ranged from 2.4% to 45.8%. Practice, measures and activities set up in the Programs will not have adverse or negative effects on continuity and conservation targets in Natura 2000 areas located within, bordering to, or at the significant distance from the cities and municipalities.

**Keywords:** nature conservation, wild fauna, urbanisation, settlement, Osijek-Baranja County

### 1. INTRODUCTION

At the European Union level, two directives (Anonymous 1992, 2009) regulates standards for wildlife, habitat and nature conservation. First, the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (The Habitats Directive), and second, the Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (The Birds Directive). The aim of Natura 2000 network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species of wild fauna and flora, and natural habitats. Natura 2000 is composed of sites designated by the Member States under the Habitats Directive (Sites of Special Importance, SCIs) and under the Birds Directive (Special Protection Areas, SPAs). The choice of sites is based on scientific criteria. Member States must ensure that the sites are managed in a sustainable manner, both ecologically and economically.

Natura 2000 network stretches across all 27 EU countries, both on land and at sea. Currently it includes 26,935 sites at the total surface of about 1,214,974 km<sup>2</sup> both on land and marine areas. The total land area covered by Natura 2000 represents 764,222 km<sup>2</sup> or 17.5% of the total land EU surface. The national land coverage of Natura 2000 sites varies, from highest in Slovenia (38%), Croatia (37%) and Bulgaria (35%) up to lowest in Denmark (8%), Latvia and Sweden (12% each).

The specific position of the Republic of Croatia across three different biogeographical regions: Continental, Alpine and Mediterranean, explain the diverse spectrum of habitat types and rich wildlife biodiversity (Duplić et al., 2015). Ecological network in Croatia has been established under the Regulation on ecological network and responsibilities of public institutions for managing ecological network areas (Anonymous, 2019). Natura 2000 network in Croatia comprises 20,755 km<sup>2</sup> or 37% of the land territory, and includes 783 Natura 2000 sites: 38 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and 745 Sites of Community Importance (SCIs).

Wildlife is an important renewable natural resource, with significance for areas such as rural development, land-use planning, food supply, tourism, scientific research and cultural heritage. With rates of urbanisation increasing globally, there is a pressing need to understand the type and nature of human-wildlife interactions within urban environments. Wildlife habitat is any land that can be used as a shelter, breeding ground, or a food source for wildlife (Jeswiet and Hermsen, 2015). Wild animals that reach urban and sub-urban areas will interact with humans to some degree, causing various problems and conflicts. There will always be a need to control wildlife populations in certain urban situations to reduce human-wildlife conflict (Soulsbury and White, 2015). Particularly, urbanized large mammals and some bird species pose risks such as human injury, traffic accidents, and property damage (Šprem et al., 2013). In addition, the risk of bringing infectious diseases into urban areas, requires attention (Alirol et al., 2011).

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **2.1. Study area**

Osijek-Baranja County is located in the northeastern part of the Republic of Croatia, and lies on the southwest edge of the Pannonian Plain. It borders with Hungary on the north and Serbia on the east. Total land surface amounts to 4,155 km<sup>2</sup> or 7.3% of the total land territory of Croatia (Anonymous, 2011). According to 2021 Census, there were 259,481 inhabitants (6.7% of total population of Croatia). As the regional self-government unit, it consists of local self-government units, divided into 7 cities, 35 municipalities and 263 settlements (Image 1).

The most of the area is flatland, consisting of the riverine floodplains, elevated loess plateaus and hills. In the southwestern part, the slopes of Dilj and Krndija mountains are composed of alternating canyons and ridges. The altitude range is from 78 m at lowest point up to 606 m a.s.l. at highest point.

Two large watercourses flows throughout the area, the Danube River (length 86 km), and the Drava River (length 104 km). In the angular area around the confluence of the Danube and the Drava Rivers, a large fluvial-marshy floodplain of Kopački Rit has been formed. Due to its great biological and ecological values, this wetland area was firstly protected in 1967. Actual protection status in category of Nature Park was established in 1999, at total surface of 23,126 ha (Ozimec and Rožac, 2021). In 1993, the Kopački Rit



was designated on the List of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (inscription number: 583). From September 2021, it is an integral part of the world's first UNESCO Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia).



Image 1. Administrative division of Osijek-Baranja County (Anonymous, 2011).

The climate is moderately continental, with cold and long winters and dry and hot summers. According to climate statistical records for the meteorological station Osijek (1899-2020), mean annual air temperature is 11.1 °C, minimum in January (-0.6 °C), maximum in July (21.7 °C). Annual precipitation is 694 mm, maximum (83 mm) in June and minimum (43 mm) in March. Mean air humidity is 74%. Mean number of days with rain is 121, with frost 38, and with snow 22 days.

Osijek-Baranja Country is region with a long tradition of using the natural resources for different purposes. About 64% of total land surface is agricultural land under intensive crop production, such as oilseed rape, wheat, barley, corn, sugar beet, sunflower and soybean (Kovačić et al. 2016). The forests and forest land make about 27% of total land surface. Built-up and urbanised areas in the settlements cover 8.8% of total land surface. Small settlements with up to 2,000 inhabitants, represented by 240 settlements (91% of the total 263 settlements) are dominant (Anonymous, 2011). The largest settlement is City of Osijek, with population of 96,848 according to 2021 Census.

Tradition of breeding and hunting game animals, such as red deer, roe deer, wild boar, European hare, pheasant and waterfowl dates back more than 300 years. Nowadays,

game management, protection, sustainable use and hunting activities are implemented according to relevant national legislation in the fields of hunting (Anonymous 2018), and nature protection (Anonymous, 2013).

Ecological network Natura 2000 in Osijek-Baranja County covers 98,508 ha or 23.7% of the total land surface (Table 1). It includes entirely or partially the total of 16 areas; 3 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and 13 Sites of Community Importance (SCIs). Natura 2000 areas entirely located in Osijek-Baranja County are indicated with \*.

Table 1. **Natura 2000 areas in Osijek-Baranja County**

Area code	Area name	Surface (ha)
<b>Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Birds Directive</b>		
HR1000011	Ribnjaci Grudnjak i Našice	16988
HR1000015	Srednji tok Drave	2458
HR1000016	Podunavlje i donje Podravlje*	66335
<b>Total SPAs</b>		<b>85781</b>
<b>Site of Community Importance (SCI) under the Habitats Directive</b>		
HR2000372	Dunav-Vukovar	7070
HR2000394	Kopački rit*	23127
HR2000573	Petrijevci*	125
HR2000623	Šume na Dilj gori	1712
HR2000728	Biljsko groblje*	3
HR2000730	Bistrinci*	27
HR2001085	Ribnjak Grudnjak s okolnim šumskim kompleksom	10930
HR2001086	Breznički ribnjak (ribnjak Našice)*	1409
HR2001308	Donji tok Drave*	21108
HR2001309	Dunav S od Kopačkog rita*	13793
HR2001328	Lonđa, Glogovica i Breznica	40
HR2001354	Područje oko jezera Borovik*	7233
HR5000015	Srednji tok Drave	2458
<b>Total SCIs</b>		<b>89035</b>
<b>Total Natura 2000 areas</b>		<b>98508</b>
<b>Percentage of the area of Osijek-Baranja County</b>		<b>23.7 %</b>

## 2.2. Data collection and analyses

The Hunting Act (Anonymous, 2018) exclude and restrict the hunting activities within the settlement boundaries. In order to establish a mechanism for wildlife management within the built-up and urbanised areas in and around the settlements, each city and municipality is obliged to adopt Wild Animal Protection Programme.

Wild Animal Protection Programme, valid for 10-year period, regulates protection and treatment of those animal species which are designated as game animals, as well as other wild animal species that have a dwelling place or are occasionally present inside the urban or rural settlements, with an aim to prevent damages and potential risk for possession and human health. Programme contains the guidelines, recommendations and measures for monitoring and control of the urban wildlife.

Implementation area under the Programme is situated within the boundaries of the administrative territory of the particular city and municipality, and covers only built-up and urbanised surfaces in the settlements.

During the preparation of the Wild Animal Protection Programme, one of the compulsory requirement is the completed procedure of the ecological network impact assessment of the Programme. Nature Protection Act (Anonymous, 2013) set up the assessment procedure for any plan or project that by itself or in combination with other plans or projects may have the potential or significant negative impact on the achievement of conservation targets (SPA-target bird species, SCI-target wild fauna and flora species and habitat types), and integrity of Natura 2000 SPAs and SCIs areas. This mechanism was introduced as late as year 2008 (Runko Luttenberger et al., 2019). The competent authority is Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Nature Protection Directorate. The bulk of applications for the ecological network impact assessment is resolved in the first stage, known as preliminary assessment procedure.

Wild Animal Protection Programmes of 37 local self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County (6 cities and 31 municipalities), completed in the period 2018-2022, had been checked, and relevant data had been collected for analyses.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Total administrative area of the surveyed 6 cities and 31 municipalities cover 357,962 ha or 86.2% of the total land territory of Osijek-Baranja County (Table 2).

With regard to surface area, the largest local self-government units are: Municipalities of Bilje (25,985 ha), and Kneževi Vinogradi (24,865 ha), and City of Osijek (17,473 ha), while the smallest are: Municipalities of Vuka (2,456 ha), Vladislavci (3,215 ha), and Ernestinovo (3,226 ha).

Table 2. List of surveyed local self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County with data on the total administrative area and Programme implementation area

Local self-government unit	Total area (ha)	Programme implementation area (ha)	Percentage of total area (%)
<b>Cities</b>			
Beli Manastir	6276	1081	17.2
Belišće	7044	864	12.3
Donji Miholjac	13461	1162	8.6

Local self-government unit	Total area (ha)	Programme implementation area (ha)	Percentage of total area (%)
Đakovo	16918	2224	13.1
Osijek	17473	7996	45.8
Valpovo	14266	1571	11,0
<b>Municipalities</b>			
Antunovac	5730	430	7.5
Bilje	25985	877	3.4
Čepin	12070	1057	8.8
Darda	9412	652	6.9
Donja Motičina	5205	158	3.0
Draž	14936	566	3.8
Drenje	10561	489	4.6
Đurđenovac	11680	1289	11.0
Erdut	15893	991	6.2
Ernestinovo	3226	408	12.6
Feričanci	4607	241	5.2
Gorjani	5062	378	7.5
Jagodnjak	10205	361	3.5
Kneževi Vinogradi	24865	857	3.4
Koška	12233	538	4.4
Levanjska Varoš	12366	385	3.1
Magadenovac	11234	274	2.4
Marijanci	6553	250	3.8
Petlovac	9320	674	7.2
Petrijevci	5550	348	6.3
Podravska Moslavina	4440	163	3.7
Popovac	6233	985	15.8
Punitovci	4231	193	4.6
Satnica Đakovačka	7899	265	3.4
Semeljci	10123	582	5.7
Strizivojna	3616	418	11.6
Trnava	8138	327	4.0
Viljevo	11148	338	3.0
Viškovci	4332	224	5.2
Vladislavci	3215	435	13.5
Vuka	2456	402	16.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>357962</b>	<b>30453</b>	

The highest percentage of built-up and urbanised areas in settlements, that belongs to implementation area of the Wild Animal Protection Programmes, is defined in the Cities of Osijek (45.8%), and Beli Manastir (17.2%), and Municipalities of Vuka (16.4%), and Popovac (15.8%). The lowest values are defined in Municipalities of Magadenovac (2.4%), Donja Motičina (3.0%), Levanjska Varoš (3.1%), Bilje, Kneževi Vinogradi, Stanica Đakovačka (3.4% each).

Wildlife habitats are areas distributed horizontally and vertically across the landscape that fulfil some or all of the needs of a specific wildlife species for requirements of food, water, reproduction, nesting, and protection against predators. Favourable habitat conditions in the settlements, surrounded with agricultural land, forests, hedgerows, grasslands, ponds, rivers and marshes, supports a variety of wildlife that constantly or temporarily occupy, or move around the settlements (Jeswiet and Hermsen, 2015). In the analysed Wild Animal Protection Programmes, a total of 28 wild animal species (15 mammal species and 13 bird species) are listed, for which the management and control measures are prescribed (Table 3). These species are the regular occupants, or occasionally, and sometimes unexpectedly, occur in and around the settlements.

Table 3. List of wild animal species in Wild Animal Protection Programmes

Scientific name	Croatian name
<b>Mammals</b>	
<i>Cervus elaphus</i> L.	Jelen obični
<i>Dama dama</i> L.	Jelen lopatar
<i>Capreolus capreolus</i> L.	Srna obična
<i>Ovis aries musimon</i> Pall.	Muflon
<i>Sus scrofa</i> L.	Svinja divlja
<i>Meles meles</i> L.	Jazavac
<i>Felis silvestris</i> Schr.	Mačka divlja
<i>Martes foina</i> Erx.	Kuna bjelica
<i>Martes martes</i> L.	Kuna zlatica
<i>Mustela nivalis</i> L.	Lasica mala
<i>Castor fiber</i> L.	Dabar
<i>Lepus europaeus</i> Pall.	Zec obični
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i> L.	Lisica
<i>Canis aureus</i> L.	Čagalj
<i>Mustela putorius</i> L.	Tvor
<b>Birds</b>	
<i>Phasianus</i> sp. L.	Fazan – gnjetlovi
<i>Perdix perdix</i> L.	Trčka skvržulja
<i>Coturnix coturnix</i> L.	Prepelica pućpura
<i>Columba palumbus</i> L.	Golub divlji grivnjaš
<i>Columba livia</i> Gmelin	Golub divlji pećinar
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> L.	Patka divlja gluhara
<i>Anas crecca</i> L.	Patka divlja kržulja
<i>Fulica atra</i> L.	Liska crna
<i>Corvus corone cornix</i> L.	Vrana siva
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i> L.	Vrana gaćac
<i>Coloeus monedula</i> L.	Čavka zlogodnjača

Scientific name	Croatian name
<i>Pica pica</i> L.	Svraka
<i>Garulus glandarius</i> L.	Šojka kreštalica

Interventions and activities planned in the Wild Animal Protection Programme includes a variety of methods and tools used to reduce wildlife conflicts to tolerable levels:

- observation and counting the wild animals, and estimation of population size;
- implementation of preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic measures for the health protection of wild animals;
- supply of chemical, biological and biotechnical protective agents, such are repellents or barriers, and their distribution to the local users;
- education of the local users in selection and application of the protective agents;
- protection of crops and plantations by chasing wild animals, using protective agents, repellents, and visual and audible frightening devices, with a purpose to alienate or suppress entrance of wild animals in the settlements;
- crop harvesting within the optimal agrotechnical season;
- removal of nests of the problematic bird species;
- capturing the selected individuals of wild animal species by cage or box trapping;
- use of falconry as bird-hazing technique;
- removal or elimination of selected individuals of wild animals by shooting when they make a serious threat to local inhabitants and properties, as well as health security in the settlements.

Implementation of Wild Animal Protection Programmes in the settlements in Osijek-Baranja County provides an effective tool for undertaking various measures, aiming to prevent or reduce damages caused by wild animals, like incidence of wildlife-vehicle collisions (Šprem i sur., 2013). Also, it enable planning the measures and activities aiming to protect wild animals, as well as treatment of wounded or diseased individuals.

For implementation of all interventions, methods and activities it is obligatory to strictly follow all relevant national legislation in the field of hunting and nature protection.

Practices and activities set up by Wild Animals Protection Programs will not have adverse or negative effects on continuity and conservation targets in the areas of the ecological network (SPAs and SCIs), located within, bordering or at significant distance from the settlements in the administrative area of cities and municipalities. The negative impact of disturbance has been recognized on selected wild animals (some of which are SPAs-target species or SCI-s target species), but at local scale, with temporary and short-term intensity. Main cause of disturbance is human motion in the implementation area by walk, or by using motor vehicles or boats, which can provoke some animal species, like *Castor fiber* and *Lutra lutra*, to left their habitats and migrate in less disturbed areas.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Wild animals in the urban environment interact with humans, causing various problems, damages or conflicts. Wild Animal Protection Programme is a tool for wildlife management in the settlements within cities and municipalities boundaries. Prescribed activities and measures enable damage prevention, as well as protection and welfare of wild animals. Implementation area of the Programme may include entirely or partially areas of ecological network Natura 2000, which are important for conservation of wild fauna, flora and habitats at national and European Union level. Wildlife management should not have the negative impact on continuity and conservation status of target fauna and flora species, and habitat types in the areas of ecological network Natura 2000.

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**URBAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND  
NATURA 2000 AREAS IN OSIJEK-BARANJA COUNTY**

**Siniša Ozimec**  
**Tihomir Florijančić**  
**Dragan Prlić**

**Abstract:**

Natura 2000 is the ecological network of the European Union, established for conservation of threatened wild fauna and flora species and habitats. In the Republic of Croatia covers 36.7% of land area and consists of 783 areas; 42 important for birds (SPAs) and 741 for species and habitat types (SCIs). Osijek-Baranja County is the regional self-government unit in eastern Croatia, consisting of 7 cities, 35 municipalities and 263 settlements, at the total land area of 4,155 km<sup>2</sup>. Ecological network Natura 2000 covers 23.7% of the total surface and comprises 16 areas; 3 SPAs and 13 SCIs. Management and protection of wild animal species that constantly inhabit or occasionally appear in urban and rural settlements is regulated by the Wild Animal Protection Programme. The completed procedure of the ecological network impact assessment is among the requirements for the approval of this 10-year valid document. Wild Animal Protection Programmes of 37 self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County had been analysed. Percentage of built-up and urbanised areas in the settlements ranged from 2.4% to 45.8%. Practice, measures and activities set up in the Programs will not have adverse or negative effects on continuity and conservation targets in Natura 2000 areas located within, bordering to, or at the significant distance from the cities and municipalities.

Keywords: nature conservation, wild fauna, urbanisation, settlement, Osijek-Baranja County

**Siniša Ozimec**, Prof. dr.

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Vladimira Preloga 1, HR-31000 Osijek, Croatia  
sozimec@fazos.hr

**Tihomir Florijančić**, Prof. dr.

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Vladimira Preloga 1, HR-31000 Osijek, Croatia  
tflorijanc@fazos.hr

**Dragan Prlić**, Mag. biol.

Donji Meljani 92c, HR-33520 Slatina, Croatia  
prlicdragan@gmail.com



## IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM

**Adamov Tabita Cornelia**  
**Iancu tiberiu**  
**Sălășan cosmin**  
**Ciolac Mariana Ramona**  
**Feher Andrea Ana**

**Abstract:**

Tourism is among the sectors severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A major player in the European economy, the restrictions imposed on travel restrictions have led to the decimation of the tourism sector, with significant losses both in terms of accommodation units and operators of travel agencies. The European tourism market accounts for almost half of the global tourism market, and the difficult situation generated by this pandemic is very visible in the economies of European countries such as Spain, Italy, Croatia, France and Greece.

At the level of each state, attempts are being made to identify solutions that will revitalize the tourism sector, trying to save millions of jobs and ensure safe conditions for those who want to practice a tourism activity.

Romania, a country with a high tourist potential, started on this road, being elaborated a series of strategies for relaunching the Romanian tourism. In this regard, the main actions will target the not very crowded tourist destinations, the green, sustainable destinations, thus developing a lot of forms of rural tourism (agritourism, ecotourism, green tourism).

In choosing a holiday destination, priority will be given, first of all, to the following aspects: health safety, non-crowded areas, quality, sustainability, ecotourism, being preferred the holiday houses and apartments, pensions and smaller hotels. In this context are the Romanian rural areas, with a high agritourism and ecotourism potential such as the Danube Delta, Transylvania, Bucovina and Maramures etc.

**Keywords:**

Covid-19 pandemic, Romanian rural areas, rural tourism, strategies.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

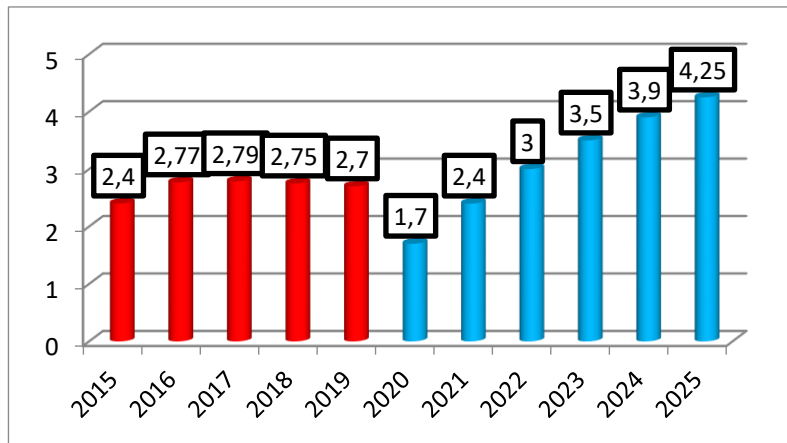
The COVID-19 pandemic directly affected the tourism industry both globally and locally, by imposing travel restrictions associated with a major decline in tourism demand. The need to limit the spread of the virus and the introduction of travel constraints has led to the cessation of the activity of an important economic sector, tourism. (BBC, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Gössling, Scott and Hall, 2020).

The World Tourism Organization's forecast for declining tourist arrivals, which has dropped by a third in the world in 2020, as well as information provided by the BBC, have revealed that organized excursions have taken place in several parts of the world decreased by 90% (BBC, 2020) leads us to say that in the future we will witness a "rediscovery" of tourism (Brouder, 2018, Brouder, 2020; Niewiadomski, 2020). Starting from this idea, in this article we will try to show how the Covid 19 pandemic has caused changes in the field of rural tourism, especially agritourism, given the orientation of tourist demand towards less crowded and safe areas in terms of view of human security. Tourism represents the economic sector with the widest expansion, constituting itself as a catalyst for economic progress. (Adamov, 2020). Tourism represents an inclusive economic sector, offering many jobs, over half of them (54%) being occupied by women, but also by young people. It also determines the achievement of investments with direct implications in local development.

Tourism is under the direct influence of economic, social and political factors (economic, health or military crises). Thus, the Covid - 19 pandemic induced a series of dramatic effects in the tourism industry, and Romania also found itself in this unfavorable situation. In 2020, the business of travel agencies decreased by 80-90% compared to previous years.

The Alliance for Tourism, an NGO from Romanian tourism industry, concerned with identifying new solutions for organizing and supporting Romanian tourism, said that this crisis, caused by Covid-19 can be overcome, in 2025, the direct contribution of tourism to GDP increasing from 2.70% the value registered in 2019, to 4.25% in 2025 (figure 1). (Incoming Romania, 2020).

Figure 1. **The contribution of tourism to the creation of GDP**



Source: Incoming Romania, 2020

The measures proposed by the Alliance for Tourism as solutions for relaunching Romanian tourism are: supporting and prioritizing the tourism sector in the national economy, digitalization and the impact of new technologies in tourism, sustainability and development of sustainable tourism, highlighting Romania's competitive advantages through an intelligent promotion, tourism development by encouraging public and private investment, supporting participatory tourism through the use of public-private partnerships, reducing tax evasion in tourism and administrative efficiency. (Incoming Romania, 2020).

At the national level, agritourism represents an important element of tourism with a wide range of anthropogenic resources: traditions and customs (folk music and traditional dances, rituals occasioned by certain moments in the life of local communities or religious holidays, traditional products) and crafts (decorative fabrics, egg painting, wickerwork, folk costumes, wood and stone sculptures, painting on glass or wood). (Adamov et. all. 2020, Ghereș 2003)

In recent years, there has been an increase in tourists' interest in the natural environment, rural areas, active forms of contact with nature and local culinary traditions. (Muresan et. all. 2016). Thus, today Romania continues to welcome its guests with its villages where the landscape, faith and traditions imprint an archaic atmosphere.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research undertaken in this paper has followed two main directions: analysis of the current situation of agritourism activity, during the Covid-19 pandemic and the identification of measures regarding the further development of this sector, the measures that can be taken in the Romanian tourism industry to mitigate the harsh effects of the Covid-19 pandemic situation. The analysis of the current stage was made with the help of economic indicators used in tourism, based on statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics.

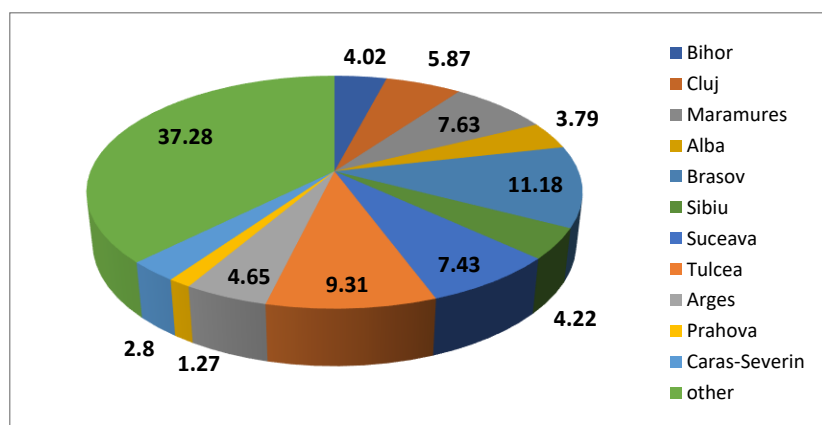
## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Agritourism is not a form of mass tourism, tourists opt to spend their free time in nature, in small accommodation, being therefore considered a relatively safe place for protection against SARS-CoV2 virus.

During the pandemic caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, the tourist destinations preferred by tourists were mountainous areas with picturesque landscapes, uncrowded rural areas with specific traditions, ecotourism areas, in general areas that provided health security. Rural tourism has become one of the most commonly used forms of tourism during the pandemic. Rural tourist boarding houses have quickly adapted to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic. The services offered by the agritourism guesthouses operated in the agritourism regions, at maximum capacity. The owners of the agritourism boarding houses have made available to tourists, in addition to accommodation and meals, a series of leisure services (adventure, history, culture, etc.). (Ciolac et. all. 2017).

At the national level there are rural tourist areas, established as agritourism destinations. The counties that stand out by the intensity of the agritourism activity are: Alba, Arges, Bihor, Brasov, Caras-Severin, Cluj, Maramures, Prahova, Sibiu, Suceava and Tulcea, these concentrating 62.17% from the total number of agritourism guesthouses registered at national level, in year 2021.

Figuri 2. Distribution of agritourism guesthouses by counties, 2021, %



Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

Table 1 shows the situation of existing agritourism guesthouses in these counties, in the period 2000-2021.

From the analysis of the data presented in the table, it can be observed an increase in the number of agritourism guest houses in the analysed period, as a result of the intensification of the demand for this form of tourism. (Ciolac et. all. 2019). The national increase is over 8 times (8.65 times).

**Table 1. Number of agritourism guesthouses, 2000-2021**

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Bihor</b>	:	5	31	77	78	90	130	127	144	139
<b>Cluj</b>	8	62	113	59	66	121	146	164	166	203
<b>Maramures</b>	22	66	104	79	104	147	144	147	185	264
<b>Alba</b>	8	11	36	81	84	108	119	113	126	131
<b>Brasov</b>	148	155	177	347	352	411	402	383	379	387
<b>Sibiu</b>	47	41	73	118	110	138	113	96	126	146
<b>Suceava</b>	26	70	107	129	151	225	232	235	249	257
<b>Tulcea</b>	8	20	12	16	15	13	133	118	113	322
<b>Arges</b>	9	60	56	136	136	162	153	161	157	161
<b>Prahova</b>	12	27	28	36	36	42	44	45	42	44
<b>Caras-Severin</b>	4	16	36	71	79	82	90	86	93	97
<b>TOTAL</b>	400	956	1354	1918	2028	2556	2821	2800	3022	3460

Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

The period 2020-2021, affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, indicates an increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses, due to multiple requests from the population regarding the development of tourism activities in rural areas and the limitations imposed by social distancing. During this period, there was an increase of 7.9% in 2020 and 23.51% in 2021, compared to 2019. At the level of the counties studied, the largest increases in the number of agritourism guesthouses in 2019- 2021, were registered in the counties: Tulcea - 172.88%, Sibiu - 52.03%, Cluj - 23.78% and Maramures - 11.5%.

The increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses is the result of the intensification of tourist demand. Below we present the evolution of the number of tourists arriving in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2015-2021.

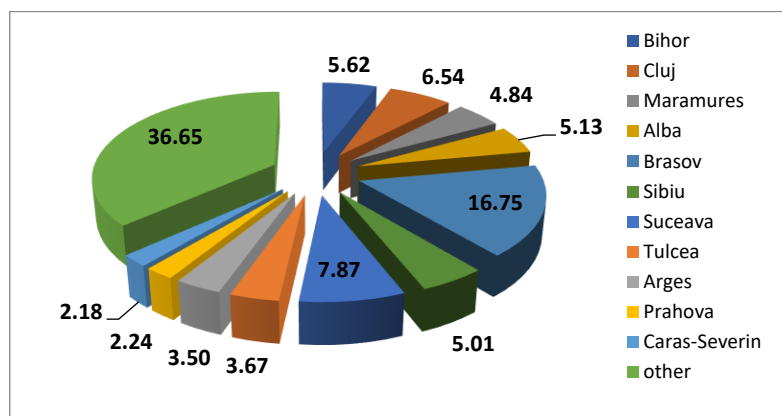
**Table 2. The evolution of the number of tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses, 2015-2021**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Bihor</b>	36866	44985	64466	88411	77130	47092	57319
<b>Cluj</b>	34488	44668	72102	79774	79150	42323	66802
<b>Maramures</b>	17961	32683	44403	51918	58516	27813	49391
<b>Alba</b>	31643	36202	43350	50901	57334	42408	52383
<b>Brasov</b>	110417	133626	164353	184565	198292	119681	171003
<b>Sibiu</b>	36506	54448	69395	61007	60819	32115	51101
<b>Suceava</b>	51595	63339	77029	94794	103232	61096	80366
<b>Tulcea</b>	4686	4358	821	40046	40510	35583	37443
<b>Arges</b>	36601	37471	36893	40729	49377	17828	35684
<b>Prahova</b>	14028	14709	16625	18258	22452	14882	22836
<b>Caras-Severin</b>	20394	24457	26615	28874	28269	20391	22277
<b>TOTAL</b>	672756	813454	1004400	1173455	1272878	755436	1020681

Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

The period 2015-2021 is marked by two contradictory situations regarding the arrivals of tourists in the agritourism guesthouses in Romania. In the period 2015-2019, there is an increase, at national level the increase being 74.42%, and in the period 2019-2021 there is a decrease in 2020 (-35.62%), followed by an increase of 31.63%, in 2021, compared to 2020. It is observed that the increase in the number of agritourism guesthouses is not accompanied by a corresponding increase in tourist arrivals, due to the restrictions imposed on social distancing and thus the reduction of accommodation capacity.

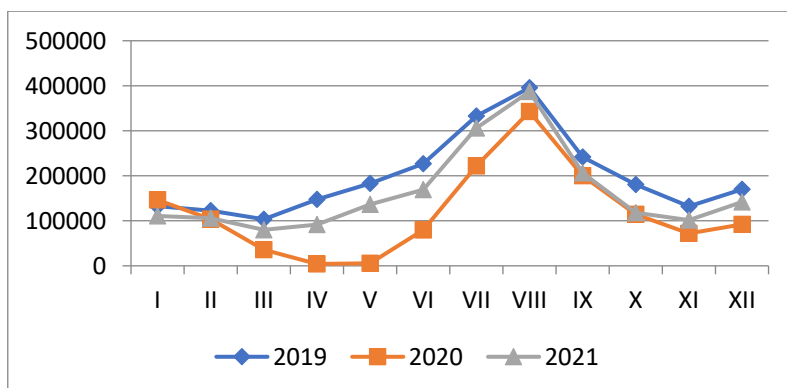
Figure 3. **Distribution of tourist arrivals from agritourism guesthouses, by counties, 2021, %**



Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

In 2021, the county with the highest number of tourist arrivals, accommodated in agritourism guesthouses, is Brasov County, which concentrates 16.75% of the total number of tourist arrivals, nationally. In second place is Suceava County, Bucovina area, a remarkable agritourism destination, with a percentage of 7.87%, followed by Cluj County - 6.54% and Bihor - 5.62%.

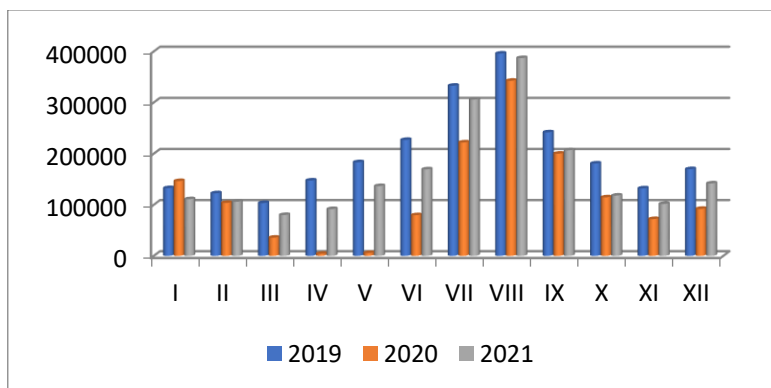
Figure 4. **Tourist arrivals in agritourism guesthouses, on Monday, 2019-2021**



Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

The requests of the tourists targeted guesthouses built in traditional style, located in a special natural setting and which ensured conditions of security and safety. The arrivals of tourists, in the agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2019-2021, follow the same distribution during the year, with lower intensity, in the years of the pandemic. In 2020, immediately after the installation of the Covid 19 pandemic, in April-May, there is a considerable reduction in the number of tourists, compared to the same period of the previous year: -97.38% in April and -96.54% in May.

Figure 5. **Overnight stays of tourists, in agritourism guesthouses, by months, 2019-2021**

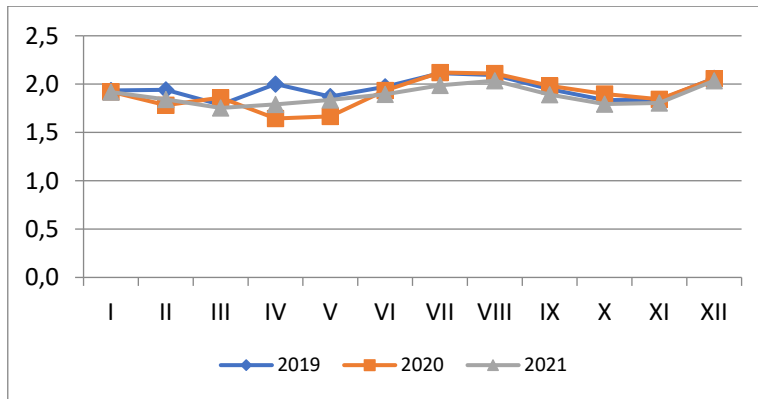


Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

Overnight stays of tourists in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2019-2020, indicate an evolution similar to the arrivals of tourists. In the period 2020-2021, there is a decrease in the number of overnight stays, with -40.15% in 2020 and -17.46% in 2021, compared to 2019.

The decreases registered both in the case of tourist arrivals and overnight stays are due to the reduction of the number of foreign tourists, as a result of the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 6. **The average length of stay, in the agritourism guesthouses, on months, 2019-2021**

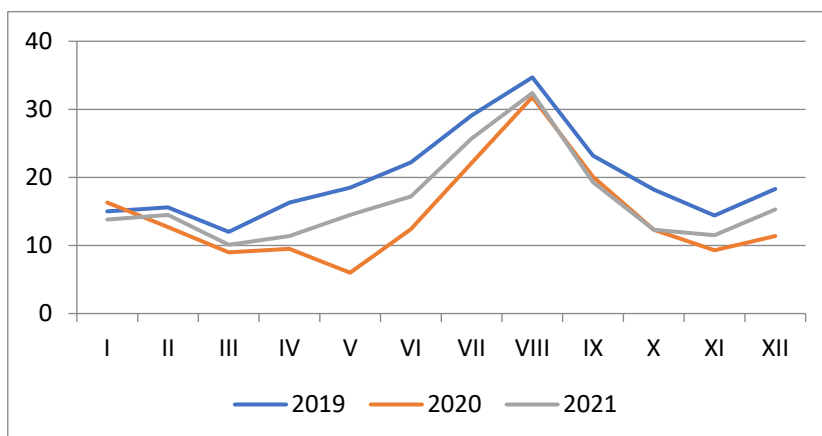


Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

The average length of stay (figure 6) indicates similar values in the three years studied. In 2020, except for the period April-June, when the value of the indicator of the average length of stay was lower than that recorded in the same period of 2019, the values are higher (September-October) or identical in other periods. In contrast, in 2020, the average length of stay is shorter compared to 2019.

Currently, a large part of the tourists do not only spend the weekend in the agritourism guesthouses, but choose to spend complete stays of 6-7 nights. However, the average value still indicates a low value of the average length of stay in agritourism guesthouses.

Figure 7. **The index of net use of the accommodation capacity in operation, in the agritourism guesthouses, on months, 2019-2021**



Source: Institutul National de Statistica, 2022

The decrease in the number of tourists, in the period 2019-2021, has determined a reduction in the degree of accommodation capacity in operation utilization. In 2020, the

restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the fear of tourists becoming infected with the new virus led to a low capacity utilization. In 2021, with the reduction of restrictions and the resumption in a certain proportion of economic activities, the utilization degree of accommodation capacity in operation increased, remaining lower than that recorded in 2019, before the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an extremely severe and immediate impact on the tourism industry. Thus, in a very short time, there was a decrease in tourist demand, a decrease accompanied by the cancellation of existing reservations. The reasons behind this situation are the global uncertainty and the conditions imposed by ensuring health security, in limiting the spread of the virus.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

In present, we are witnessing a revival of the rural area as a result of the importance given to the economic, social and ecological function of this particular area, resulting from the responsible capitalization of the natural heritage. After a period in which rural area was considered only an area for food production, a creator of social boundaries and a reservoir of labour force for industrial and urban development, it is now taking on another dimension due to the multiplication of its functions. Thus, the conservation of the natural environment, the practice of recreational activities, the conservation of the cultural-historical heritage and the authenticity of the Romanian village and their capitalization through tourist activities, are today assets of the regional countryside.

The pandemic period was a good opportunity for tourists to rediscover the authenticity of Romanian villages and to understand that the tourist value of a destination can be given by the natural environment, the local community, the traditions and customs of the area, gastronomy, etc. Also, another advantage of this period is an intensification of the online promotion of the rural tourist area, the tourists actively contributing to the development of these areas.

In order to ensure a further development of the rural tourism activity, a series of measures are required, among which we mention: the development of leisure services; personalization of thematic rural tourism products; active involvement of loyal communities and good collaboration with tourism service providers; promoting and marketing rural tourism products through travel agencies and involving the state and local authorities in promoting events, festivals, organized in these areas.

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## IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM

**Adamov Tabita Cornelia**  
**Iancu Tiberiu**  
**Sălășan Cosmin**  
**Ciolac Mariana Ramona**  
**Feher Andrea Ana**

### **Abstract:**

Tourism is among the sectors severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A major player in the European economy, the restrictions imposed on travel restrictions have led to the decimation of the tourism sector, with significant losses both in terms of accommodation units and operators of travel agencies. The European tourism market accounts for almost half of the global tourism market, and the difficult situation generated by this pandemic is very visible in the economies of European countries such as Spain, Italy, Croatia, France and Greece.

At the level of each state, attempts are being made to identify solutions that will revitalize the tourism sector, trying to save millions of jobs and ensure safe conditions for those who want to practice a tourism activity.

Romania, a country with a high tourist potential, started on this road, being elaborated a series of strategies for relaunching the Romanian tourism. In this regard, the main actions will target the not very crowded tourist destinations, the green, sustainable destinations, thus developing a lot of forms of rural tourism (agritourism, ecotourism, green tourism).

In choosing a holiday destination, priority will be given, first of all, to the following aspects: health safety, non-crowded areas, quality, sustainability, ecotourism, being preferred the holiday houses and apartments, pensions and smaller hotels. In this context are the Romanian rural areas, with a high agritourism and ecotourism potential such as the Danube Delta, Transylvania, Bucovina and Maramures etc.

Keywords:

Covid-19 pandemic, Romanian rural areas, rural tourism, strategies.

**Adamov Tabita Cornelia**, Associate Professor PhD

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism

[tabitaadamov@usab-tm.ro](mailto:tabitaadamov@usab-tm.ro)

**Iancu Tiberiu**, Professor PhD

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism

[tiberiuiancu@usab-tm.ro](mailto:tiberiuiancu@usab-tm.ro)

**Sălășan Cosmin**, Associate Professor PhD

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism

[cosminsalasan@usab-tm.ro](mailto:cosminsalasan@usab-tm.ro)

**Ciolac Mariana Ramona**, Lecturer PhD

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism

[ramonamarianaciolac@usab-tm.ro](mailto:ramonamarianaciolac@usab-tm.ro)

**Feher Andrea Ana**, Lecturer PhD

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism  
[andreafeher@usab-tm.ro](mailto:andreafeher@usab-tm.ro)

## POSSIBILITY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN AREA OF ROMANIA THROUGH ECOTOURISM

**Ciolac Mariana Ramona**  
**Pirvulescu Luminița Cornelia**  
**Adamov Tabita Cornelia**  
**Feher Andrea Ana**

### Abstract

In the last period, we become increasingly aware of the complexity, fragility, and priceless value of our planet. Sustainable tourism develops the idea of meeting the needs of current tourists and the tourism industry and, at the same time, protecting the environment and opportunities for the future. It is taken in consideration the satisfaction of all needs of the "actors" from tourism activity. The place of tourism in sustainable development is logically given by its role as an industry that sells the physical and human environment as its product. Tourism is one of the industries that must be involved in sustainable development, as a resource industry, dependent on the endowment of nature and the cultural heritage of each society. The development of the western area has been influenced and continues to be supported by the important natural resources existing in this region with diverse relief, which includes the particularly fertile plains from the west of Timis and Arad counties, hilly areas with important mineral resources, and an important segment of the Southern and Western Carpathians, which includes one of the most important natural parks from Europe, the Retezat National Park. So therefore, ecotourism can be an alternative to traditional, classic tourism, as well as to the standard tourist offer.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, development, Romania, Western area

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the notion of ecotourism can be allied to the declaration of the first national park "Yellowstone" from USA, in 1872. Ecotourism is defined (see table 1) as a "defensive" tourism, "green" tourism, "tourism oriented towards nature", "gentle tourism", is a source of conservation of both biodiversity and cultural heritage so as to ensure the socio-economic development of the ecotourism destination, meaning a form of sustainable activity (Adamowicz et al 2020, Adamowicz et al 2018) for rural area. (Ciolac et al 2019)

Table 1. Drawing the ecotourism concept according to specialists from the field

Author	Definition
Weaver D.	"form of tourism based on studying and appreciating natural environment, or other components of it, all included in the social context of the area"
Miron V., Guțuțui V.	"trips made in natural environment to know local communities, and their economic opportunities to sustain the actions of nature protection"

Stănciulescu Gabriela	"tourism activity having as main purpose nature conservation starting from the education of tourists regarding environment protection and conservation"
Australian Ecotourism Association	"form of tourism based on involving natural environment capitalization through tourism activities, with accent on sustainable management in protected areas"
Quebec Adventure Ecotourism Association	"tourism activity involving natural environment but with the condition of protection of its integrity and a respectful attitude towards the environment"
Ecotourism Organization of New Zealand	"tourist activities oriented through observation of living organisms in natural environment, without its degradation, maintaining it for future generations "

Source: processing after different sources (Weaver 2002, Miron et all 2005, Stănciulescu 2004)

Its development is ensured by the management of all resources, to the extent that economic, social, and aesthetic needs are managed in order to ensure and maintain cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity and life support systems.

Originally conceived as an alternative to mass tourism, ecotourism is materializing as a solution in combating negative effects and minimizing impacts on natural ecosystems. As a form of tourism, specific to sustainable development, (Farrell et all 2005; Lekić et all 2018,) it has some totally different features (see table 2) from the forms of mass tourism (Popescu et all 2016).

**Table 2. Specific features of ecotourism compared to mass tourism**

<b>The characteristic s of ecotourism</b>	Small groups of visitors
	Natural environment
	Tourist ecomarketing activities
	High prices for the purpose of "filtering" tourists
	Minimal impact on the natural environment
	Limited control possibilities (libertine character)
	Management based on the principles of the local community's economy
	Familiarly relationships between tourists and local community
	Local development goals
	Special education for acquiring a particular behaviour oriented through natural environment
	Reduced development of tourist facilities

Source: processing after Epler Wood Megan 2002

Our research is spatially placed in the western area, therefore a brief presentation of this area is required. The western region is located on the border with Hungary and Serbia, and groups the counties of Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis. The total area occupied by the protected natural areas in the Western Region is 2672.62 km<sup>2</sup>. There are

5 national parks in the Western Region: Retezat National Park-Hunedoara County; Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park-Caras-Severin County;- Semenic National Park-Carasului Gorges-Caras-Severin County; Cheile Nerei-Beusnița National Park-Caras-Severin County; Jiu Gorge National Park - Hunedoara and Gorj counties. There are 4 natural parks on the territory of the West Region: Gradistea Muncelului-Ciclovina Natural Park-Hunedoara County; Iron Gates Natural Park - Caras-Severin and Mehedinti counties; Dinosaurs Geopark-Hateg Country-Hunedoara County;- Lunca Muresului Natural Park-Arad and Timis counties.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The aim of this paper was to identify and highlight the existence of numerous specific ecotourism resources from the area under study, namely the western area. But only a simple inventory of them we do not consider to be sufficient, so as to ensure a future capitalization through tourism. Thus, we came up with some actions for capitalizing on ecological products through ecotourism and finally with the proposal of possible action plan, having as purposes the capitalization of ecological resources through tourism activities. The second part of the paper focuses on the projection of an ecotourism product "Western Area" brand and identifying consumer segments for it, so as to ensure sustainable development of the western area of Romania through ecotourism.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Ecotourism is perhaps the most appropriate way, the closest form of tourism, to the notion of "ecologic". In order to be able to capitalize on local resources and products from the communities of the western area, taken by us in the study, we believe that the starting point should be the knowledge of resources and food and not only, from this area. Thus, there is the following structure of nature reserves in the region:

- 3 scientific reservations (two on the territory of Caras-Severin County and Macea Botanical Garden in Arad County);
- 9 geological reservations (3 in Hunedoara County, 6 in Caraș-Severin County);
- 14 speleological reservations (6 in Hunedoara County, 6 in Caraș-Severin County, 2 in Arad County);
- 17 paleontological reservations (4 in Hunedoara County, 9 in Caras-Severin County, 2 in Arad county, 2 in Timis County);
- 16 forest reservations (3 in Hunedoara County, 6 in Caras-Severin County, 3 in Arad county, 4 in Timis County);
- 19 botanical reservations (10 in Hunedoara County, 1 in Caras-Severin County, 4 in Arad County, 4 in Timis County);
- 45 mixed reservations (14 in Hunedoara County, 19 in Caras-Severin County, 7 in Arad County, 5 in Timis County);
- 6 zoological reservations (1 in Caras-Severin County, 2 in Timis County, 3 in Arad County);
- 2 landscape reservations (Simeria Arboretum in Hunedoara County and Bazos Arboretum in Timis County);
- 3 ornithological reservations (3 in Timis County);

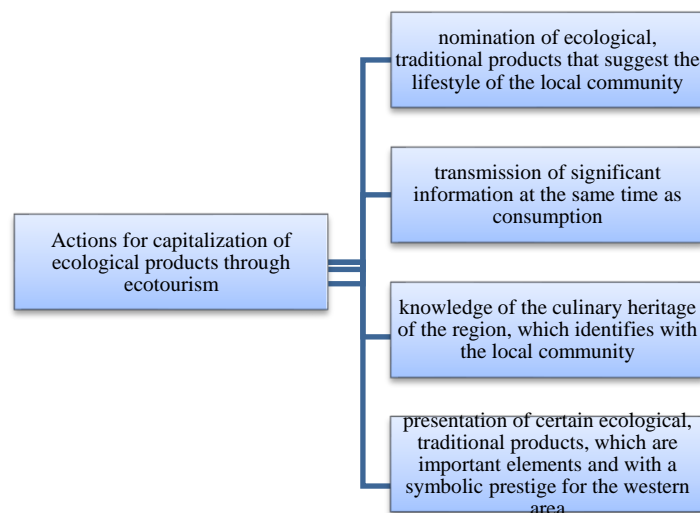
- 4 special avifauna conservation areas (Ostrov-Moldova Veche Wetland, Divici-Pojejena Wetland, Calinovat Island Wetland, Balta Nera-Danube Wetland) in Caras-Severin County.

Within the region they are declared and recognized as such, by Law no. 5/2000, 138 nature reserves of national interest, distributed as follows: 53 in Caras-Severin County, 42 in Hunedoara County, 20 in Arad County, 23 in Timis County.

Obviously, in order to sell, it is necessary an adequate commercial presentation, regarding the content of tourist offer itself. The way in which the tourist offer is made is determined later by the phase of the tourist motivations the appearance in order to know the tourist product and obviously to purchase it. To capitalize on the ecological tourism products, and why not with a traditional character, from the western area, are necessary a series of actions, which in our vision would be focused on (see figure 1):

- Identifying the resources/products with ecological character, traditional why not, which embodies the image of the local community;
- Launching the right information to generate the desire to consume;
- Making tourist products with an emphasis on original elements, specific to local communities, (for example, wine from a certain wine region, hunting from a traditional area, etc.)

Figure 1. Actions for capitalizing on ecological products through ecotourism



Source: authors

Even if the western area has a special ecotourism heritage, the ecotourism activity represents a small niche of the tourist market, characterized by various problems, such as: reduced cooperation at local level, a reduced promotion activity, a little diversified offer, non-existence of a specialized ecotourism infrastructure, the lack of specialized training of people in the field.

In the case of any activity carried out, which involves a larger area, such as the western area, taken by us into study, we believe that it should start from the existence of a future development plan. The plan proposed by us (see table 3), has a longer time horizon to be implemented, and is focused, through the directions and measures proposed, on the sustainable development of ecotourism, rural tourism and agritourism in the area studied by us. (Wilson et al. 2001, Adamov et al 2020, Călina et al 2017)

The purpose of the proposed plan is to develop tourism activities, while preserving the natural heritage, starting from the premise that the sustainable development of an area must be done starting from various resources, which support different activities, without exhausting the existing resources.

Therefore, although there are representative ecotourism resources in the area under study, there is a great need for a wide presentation and inclusion in tourism products, attracting interest first from local investors and then from tourists, and why not from the local authorities and the community. But once stimulated the interest for the capitalization through ecotourism of the local resources, we consider that the benefits can be present for all the categories involved in the activity:

- Increasing the credibility of the location on the tourist market and obviously increasing the number of tourists;
- Identifying the destinations where future ecotourism products can be set up, specific to the area;
- Reducing the negative effect on local resources;
- Increasing and diversifying the possible activities to be carried out in rural areas;
- The emergence of economic and social advantages for the inhabitants of the tourist areas, which should determine the participation in making decisions related to the type of future activities carried out;
- Distinct and beneficial connections between various fields, people from different categories, with possible long-term opportunity.

**Table 3. Ecotourism development plan in the western area – proposal**

<b>The goal pursued</b>	<b>Proposed specific directions</b>	<b>Future measures needed to be implemented</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Possible sources of funding</b>
<i>Highlighting the role of ecotourism in</i>	<i>Proper arrangement of the territory</i>	Modernization of local and visiting infrastructure	Installation of information panels	POS Environment, NRDP POR INTEREG IV
			Installation of tourist signs	
			Arranging themed routes	
			Construction/arrangement of rest areas	
		Construction of a center with for information and promotion	Construction of an visitor center	
			Arranging information points	



<i>supporting economic development and the prosperity of the local population</i>	<i>Human resources support</i>	Design of training programs adapted to specific requirements and realities	- Identification/creation of some appropriate training programs	POS DRU, Private sources, ERDF
		Establishment of structures suitable for rapid training and related to the field of ecotourism	- Awareness of the need and preparation of short courses in agritourism	
	<i>Supporting small businesses</i>	Consultancy for small business applicants in the field of tourism, ecotourism, agritourism	- Emphasis on creating traditional-local accommodation structures	NRDP Axis 3, POR Axis 5
			- Use of authentic, local products for food and leisure services	
		Creating an "all inclusive" ecotourism product	- Focus on specific traditional customs - Capitalization of handicraft products and other specific products made within the local community	
	<i>The inclusion of nature in the tourist product</i>	Inclusion in the tourist product of ecotourism attractions but with an emphasis on the element of sustainability and protection	- Attracting local operators to participate with resources in conservation actions	Private investors, Contributions of tourists.
			- Involvement of tourists in the action of biodiversity conservation	
	<i>Intensification of promotion actions</i>	Market research actions	- Create a specific database	Ministry of Tourism
			- Database management	
		Intense promotion of ecotourism product offers	- Intensive promotion of the ecotourism offer destinations	
- Creating a destination-specific ecotourism slogan				
Improving the distribution process of ecotourism products	- Improving the collaboration relationship with tour operators			
	- Emphasis on public-private partnership to ensure the distribution of the ecotourism product			

Source: author's proposals

But for the capitalization of the area's resources through ecotourism activities, the existence/creation of an ecotourism product that reflects the characteristics of the area, or simply the brand "western area" is a first step and also "a must" in the future.

In the following, we made such a projection quite succinctly, obviously starting from the resources of the area, from the needs of the moment and from the market prices.

Following this proposal has result a total cost of the proposed product of 71750 EUR, which includes (see table 4):

- accommodation services,
- food services
- and the agreement ones, meaning a certain "all inclusive" product type.

**Table 4. Ecotourism product brand "western area"-projection and proposal**

<b>Component of tourism product</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Facility/equipment/endorsements, units of measurement</b>	<b>No. units</b>	<b>Cost per unit euro</b>	<b>Total cost euro</b>
Spaces for ecotourism recreation	Nature Observation, photo, safari	Facilities for observing the floristic and faunal life	10	50	500
	Organized fishing	Arranged place for fishing	10	5	50
	Practicing natural medicine	Naturist therapeutic point			500
		Sauna with herbs			5000
Accessibility to green objectives visited	Access to the park	Road to the park, meters	500	30	15000
		Road signs	4	50	200
		Car parking, m <sup>2</sup>	100	10	1000
	Internal alleys arranged	Network of paths, sidewalks, m <sup>2</sup>	100	5	500
		Night lighting, lanterns	10	20	200
	Visited objectives accessible	Arrangements around objectives	30	100	3000
Captivating ecotourism trails	Themed ecotourism routes	Marked paths	5	100	500
	Guidance, route assistance	Creating a Nature Museum			5000
Comfortable accommodation	Accommodation	Wooden cottages for 2 people	10	2000	20000
		Beds, furniture, accessories, set	20	300	6000
		Bathroom (shower, washbasin), set	5	300	3000
		Bio WC	5	200	1000

	Connection to clean urban networks	Electricity			500
		Public phone			300
		Aqueduct, fountain			2000
		Own sewerage network			3000
Natural gourmet specialties	Preparation of natural dishes	Equipped kitchen (furniture, refrigerator, utensils, etc.)			2000
	Feast in a natural setting	Terrace (30 m <sup>2</sup> , furniture for 16 people)			2000
	Phyto-bar	Properly equipped bar			500
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>71750</b>

Source: author's proposals

But it is not enough only the proposal part, or design part, must work on the marketing side. The marketing of the "western area" ecotourism product must be aimed at a specific segment of consumers, or simply to be based on consumer market segmentation with an increased interest in the values of nature. We have identified five possible "consumption segments", (Frochot I. 2005) (see table 5) based on the reasons for the trip, to which the ecotourism product proposed by us can be addressed.

**Table 5. Consumer segments identified for the marketing of the "western area" ecotourism product brand**

Target segments	Range of specific services	Distribution channels	Potential market
Students	Excursions on different routes to deepen knowledge in various disciplines	- teachers - directors - leaders	The students
Students of faculties with specific profile	- themed trips - specialized practice - specific events (end of year of studies, graduation ball)	- deans of the year - administrators - heads of tourism disciplines	Students specializing in biology, ecology, forestry, pedology, geography, tourism
environmentalists	- specific trips - study of some elements of nature with a special character	- specialty magazines - Specific NGOs	
Foreign tourists	- complex "all-inclusive" ecotourism products for a longer duration	- corporations	

	- 1 day trip		
People with treatment requirements	- various treatments focused on climatic and natural elements - prophylactic treatments	- family doctors - sanatorium administration	People with health problems

Source: author's proposals

Once are identified the possible segments of consumers, it is necessary to promote the product intensively, the long-term goal being its marketing and obviously the non-polluting capitalization of the ecotourism potential and ensuring the diversification of the local economy.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The natural areas from western area are endowed with some special characteristics, which can support recreational activities, activities that can bring benefits and obviously income to the people involved in carrying out this activity within the local community. Although the organization of the business is not easy to achieve, and the results and benefits do not appear immediately but are on long-term, ecotourism can be one of the most sustainable activities for each local entrepreneur and for the community as a whole. Also for tourists the benefits are guaranteed. The purpose of the proposed plan, but also of the work as a whole is to draw attention to the possibility that ecotourism activity plays in the economic and social support of the rural environment.

According to those stated above, the proposal to design an ecotourism development plan in the western area is necessary and beneficial from various points of view:

- Increasing the credibility of the location on the tourist market and obviously increasing the number of tourists;
- Identifying the destinations where future ecotourism products specific to the area can be set up;
- Reducing the negative effect on local resources;
- Increasing and diversifying the possible activities to be carried out in rural areas;
- The emergence of economic and social advantages for the inhabitants of the tourist areas, which should determine the participation in making decisions related to the type of future activities carried out;
- Distinct and beneficial connections between various fields, people from different categories, with possible long-term opportunity.

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**POSSIBILITY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN AREA OF ROMANIA THROUGH ECOTOURISM**

**Ciolac Mariana Ramona**  
**Pirvulescu Luminița Cornelia**  
**Adamov Tabita Cornelia**  
**Feher Andrea Ana**

**Abstract**

In the last period, we become increasingly aware of the complexity, fragility, and priceless value of our planet. Sustainable tourism develops the idea of meeting the needs of current tourists and the tourism industry and, at the same time, protecting the environment and opportunities for the future. It is taken in consideration the satisfaction of all needs of the "actors" from tourism activity. The place of tourism in sustainable development is logically given by its role as an industry that sells the physical and human environment as its product. Tourism is one of the industries that must be involved in sustainable development, as a resource industry, dependent on the endowment of nature and the cultural heritage of each society. The development of the western area has been influenced and continues to be supported by the important natural resources existing in this region with diverse relief, which includes the particularly fertile plains from the west of Timis and Arad counties, hilly areas with important mineral resources, and an important segment of the Southern and Western Carpathians, which includes one of the most important natural parks from Europe, the Retezat National Park. So therefore, ecotourism can be an alternative to traditional, classic tourism, as well as to the standard tourist offer.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, development, Romania, Western area

**CIOLAC MARIANA RAMONA, Lektorer, PhD**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania  
E-mail: ramonamarianaciolac@usab-tm.ro

**PIRVULESCU LUMINIȚA CORNELIA, Professor, PhD**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania  
E-mail: luminita\_pirvulescu@usab-tm.ro

**ADAMOV TABITA CORNELIA, Associate professor, PhD**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania  
E-mail: tabitaadamov@usab-tm.ro

**FEHER ANDREA ANA, Lektorer, PhD**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Romania  
E-mail: andreafeher@usab-tm.ro

## RURAL TOURISM PERSPECTIVES: CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY

**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**  
**Romina Agbaba**

### **Abstract**

Crisis situations, especially the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, point out the vulnerability of tourism as a global economic and social phenomenon. Although crises usually have negative effects on the economic and social system, in the pandemic crisis rural areas have been given the opportunity for stronger development, including the development of rural tourism. The expansion of rural tourism is a trend that is common to most countries in Europe and in the last couple of years this trend has been affecting Croatian rural areas as well. Rural areas are attractive to tourists because of its specific intrinsic rural characteristics where they can run away from rapid urban lifestyle and find authenticity and peace. In the new pandemic conditions, rural areas are particularly attractive to tourists, as destinations that are not overcrowded are preferred.

The aim of this paper is to point out the characteristics and development perspectives of rural tourism despite crisis situations. The analysis includes European policies and concepts that directly support the development of rural tourism and create a stimulating environment for its new development phases. Literature, documents, and secondary data will be analyzed, based on which recommendations for further development in the context of sustainability and quality will be summarized; focus on strengthening and engaging local communities, inclusion, and preservation of local natural and cultural resources.

**Keywords:** crisis, rural tourism, sustainability, tourism development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Destinations are defined by their natural and man-made resources, as well as the degree of their robustness or fragility. Moreover, destinations can also be defined by the natural attractions found in them that are crucial for drawing the attention of potential guests, as well as the degree of their social development. The development of tourism can, among other things, be viewed from a social standpoint: tourism enhances social welfare and heightens the sense of pride among the people (Coros et. al. 2021). A type of tourism that aims to integrate all those characteristics in order to achieve sustainability is rural tourism. Rural tourism has been on the rise since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, owing to the constant improvement of the standard of living and the rise of a leisure-oriented society, as well as the development and restoration of rural areas (Silva 2021). What was once viewed as a less enticing type of tourism, has now become an equal competitor to other forms of tourism. According to Cuesta-Valiño et. al. (2021, 1), this type of tourism facilitates the sustainable development of the host communities and their surrounding areas, becoming an extra source

of income in some cases, and the principal business in others. In order for rural communities and areas to achieve economic growth, the development of rural tourism plays an important role. However, economic growth alone does not equate to a successful development of rural areas. It is also important to promote inclusive and sustainable development, which is why rural tourism is primarily trying to achieve economic, sociocultural, and environmental sustainability (Cuesta-Valiño et. al. 2021). According to Coros et. al. (2021, 2), rural areas are currently undergoing significant economic and social changes, largely driven by the liberalization of international trade, the development of communication technologies and the strengthening of rural development policies. This also applies to countries in the European Union. Rural areas are in need of diversifying and developing their economies and quality of life in order to improve their competitiveness (Coros et. al. 2021). The tourism model thus needs to be adjusted to the demands of tourists and local communities. Promoting rural tourism is of great importance for its economic prosperity and diversification. This, however, depends on extensive education and staff training as well as great marketing skills which will ensure the visibility of the area and heighten the interest of tourists. This process is, of course, long-lasting and there are many things that need to be taken into consideration along the way. As reported by Rytönen and Tunón (2020, 2), the general public, such as tourists, local inhabitants, nature lovers and people who care for the preservation of different types of cultural heritage, as well as authorities at EU, national, regional and local level have changed and various policies have pushed summer farmers towards new environmental and economic goals. The European Union (2021) has therefore launched a Rural Pact that would bring together all relevant stakeholders and policies in this endeavour. Over the years, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), swine flu (H1N1), and the COVID-19 crisis provided to be examples where an immediate action and reaction was crucial (Cui et. al. 2021). During a pandemic, every country imposes their own rules and safety measures. The most prominent precautions are, among other things, closing off the borders, strict quarantine and isolation, travel controls and bans, closures of school facilities and shortening the service times or complete closure of hospitality facilities. In order to survive under these conditions, the tourism sector heavily relies on government support measures (Agalakova et. al. 2021). Sustainable development is becoming more and more important when tackling the problem of local tourism systems development and the COVID-19 crisis made it challenging to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism. Conversely, it offered an opportunity to rethink the concept of the three pillars of sustainability and adapt them based on the crisis and post-crisis situation (Agalakova et. al. 2021). The aim of this article is to explore how rural tourism is one of the most important driving forces for the development of rural destinations as well as to examine the impacts of tourism crisis management on the development of rural tourism. Moreover, it stives to analyse the direct impacts rural tourism has on the overall wellbeing of the community and how it can create new workplaces. The purpose is to shed light on how the emergence of crisis situations impacts rural tourism and how it could be managed in order to achieve sustainability. This paper is based on studies and articles relevant for the topic of rural tourism and crisis management, secondary data regarding government documents, as well as other documents that address the topics of sustainable tourism and crisis management. The value of this article lies in fact that it combines relevant studies on rural tourism with



crisis management and offers a broader perspective on the sustainable development of rural tourism in crisis situations.

## **2. THE CONCEPT OF RURAL TOURISM**

Rural settlements are characterized as areas with a small number of inhabitants, with the dominant use of land and forests for the life of the population, appropriate social structure, customs and rural identity (OECD 1994). Rural areas are therefore usually scarcely populated, and the emigration rate is high. Since agriculture is the primary source of income for the inhabitants, a lot of locals have to move to bigger towns or cities in order to survive. What makes rural areas so special are, however, the special customs and rural identities which are distinct for each area. Because of their natural and cultural heritage, rural areas have in recent years experienced a rise in rural tourism. Agriculture, natural resources, rural lifestyle, activities, and special customs are all key elements of rural areas which attract tourists and stimulate economic growth as well as rural development. Some of the motivations behind tourists' decisions to visit rural areas are as follows: they want to learn about the countryside; they are visiting friends or relatives; they want to take part in rural activities; they wish to relax in a quiet environment; they want to explore the cultural heritage of the countryside, etc. (Smolčić Jurdana 2015). Rural areas have a lot of characteristics that make them unique on the market; ranging from different natural resources that may include forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, fields, etc., different agricultural products and crops, to distinctive rural activities such as fishing, cycling, skiing, sightseeing, organized workshops and so on. Moreover, tourists have nowadays shown increased interest in urban activities which include jeep tours, golfing, tennis, and shopping (Đedović, Smolčić Jurdana and Soldić Frleta 2018). Rural areas are therefore marketed as dynamic areas that can offer tourists an abundance of unique activities whilst still preserving that peace and tranquillity which are an important criterion for a lot of guests post COVID-19. The accommodation provided in rural areas is usually organized by locals in their family households and apartments – another perk which helps getting tourists closer to the customs and cultures of respective rural areas. As reported by Đorđević, Janjić and Šušić (2019, 221), the key characteristics of rural tourism are as follows: it is located in rural areas; it is based on small businesses, direct contact with nature, cultural heritage and natural values; it is traditional in character, develops slower; it is closely related to the local population and has long-term benefits for the rural area; a high percentage of income is used in the rural community; it represents a complex pattern of rural environments, economy, history and location. Silva (2021, 1) describes rural tourism as a range of tourism activities which take place in the countryside. Rural tourism thus revolves primarily around rural destinations and the countryside, away from urban areas. Rural areas offer an escape from the busy city lifestyle and offer tourists an abundance of activities, attractions, and products. Most common products made in the countryside are various crafts and agricultural products. Since a lot of rural areas have been neglected during the years due to government investing in more mainstream tourist locations, rural tourism contributes to the revitalization of those areas and communities. It creates new workplaces and improves the quality of life of locals and ensures that natural attractions stay intact. In order to ensure long-term economic and social growth of local communities, rural tourism must be

developed in line with the concept of sustainable development which promotes controlled growth and advancement (Milohnić and Smolčić Jurdana 2018). Tourism trends have changed considerably as of lately, and the popularity of rural tourism is constantly on the rise. Priorities of modern tourists have changed; instead of booking more luxurious resorts that attract a lot of people, tourists look for peace and serenity of the countryside where they can personalize their stay and enjoy the non-material aspect of the place they are visiting. Consequently, rural tourism has been introduced as a special type of tourism activity that would meet those needs. More and more tourists are interested in the kind of tourism where they can stay in touch with nature, learn about the past of rural areas, explore exciting locations, meet locals and be part of the community and culture. Rural tourism offers a wide range of activities that can be beneficial to one's health and mind.

According to Cuesta-Valiño et. al. (2021, 2), tourists visiting rural areas are interested in the following: contact with nature; rest and tranquillity; purity of air and water; open spaces and a healthy environment; gastronomy; agricultural activities; discovering another culture; the kindness and hospitality of the local population; contact with architectural, ethnographic, and material heritage and the opportunity to "travel to the past" while enjoying the comforts of the present. Rural tourism integrates the basic elements and services that are part of every type of tourism and ensure a comfortable stay with specific elements akin to the rural area a touristic location is based in. Moreover, rural tourism helps revitalize and further develop rural areas on a social and economic level. It can reduce emigration rates and may help repopulate the area by providing new workplaces, upgrading the existing infrastructure, and building new hospitality facilities. On the other hand, it provides economic growth and development that aims at economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability. Rural tourism should be a balance between the interests of tourism, the environment, and the local community. Because of this balance, Cuesta-Valiño et. al. (2021, 2) have noted that rural tourism may well represent the best model for the sustainable development of the tourism sector. Rural tourism should work hand in hand with locals, their culture, traditions, and agriculture, as well as other traditional industries which should be encouraged since they provide a unique experience and create a specific tourism product that attracts new tourists. In this context, rural tourism can become a solution to the economic and social problems of the most depopulated rural areas by generating sustainable development in these areas (Cuesta-Valiño et. al. 2021). As reported by Coros et. al. (2021, 3), rural tourism is considered a small-scale form, controlled by local people who run small family-owned businesses and strong connected by cooperation and integration in order to gain benefits for the stakeholders involved, having traditional character and determining a low impact on both nature and rural society. Thus, rural tourism stands in stark contrast to mass tourism and mainstream tourist locations where large hotel corporations and investors' interests prevail. Rural areas are controlled by the local people who are in charge of managing the development of rural areas. Since popular tourist destinations attract a lot of guests, the negative impact on local communities, pollution, and environmental destruction is unfortunately inevitable. However, the aim of rural tourism is to find that perfect balance between the local community, tourists, and the environment in order to achieve sustainable development. Coros et. al. (2021, 4) have discovered that important links exist between developing sustainable

food experiences for tourists and policies for agriculture, food production, tourism, cultural and creative industries, especially country branding. There is a strong relationship between agricultural products, culinary heritage and tourism which allows the visitors to participate in the local food and drink supply chains, enhancing their involvement in the “rural experience” and their contribution to local development. Tourists are directly contributing to the local development of rural areas and are helping locals to promote their products. They take part in many different activities connected to food and handmade products such as harvesting, cultivation and production workshops. Especially local food is of great importance for the economic growth of local communities and repopulation. Agritourism represents a sustainable on-farm connected, complementary and diversified activity for family conducted working farms with predominating agricultural activities, which are producing for the market to generate additional agricultural income (Coros et. al. 2021, 4). It creates new workplaces and actively contributes to maintaining the sustainability of local communities.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, rural areas proved to offer much more advantages than urban areas. Because of the anti-pandemic government measures such as social distancing and quarantine, people who are living in a city have no opportunity to go outside, take a walk or do any other outdoor activity. In the countryside, there are numerous opportunities to be in nature and do all sorts of activities during quarantine without coming into contact with other people. When it comes to rural tourism, it showed more resilience towards the pandemic than other types of tourism, such as mass tourism. On the other hand, the pandemic has also pointed out many weaknesses and risk factors. According to the European Network for Rural Development (2021, 23), rural communities often represent the most socially and economically vulnerable populations, who are less resilient to the medium or long-term effects of such a large-scale exogenous shock. Major crisis situations, such as natural disasters, can thus alter their way of living drastically and hinder their economic and social prosperity when the situation is not properly managed. The present COVID-19 emergency might represent a window of opportunity for rural places, which become attractive destinations for relocation, either temporarily or even permanently (European Network for Rural Development 2021, 23). From this perspective, the pandemic represents a fruitful opportunity for rural areas to take advantage of their low population density and natural resources.

### **3. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON RURAL TOURISM**

The tourism sector has suffered severely in 2020 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As reported by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO 2021), at a global level, international arrivals have declined by 74% in 2020, whereas Europe recorded a 70% decrease in tourist arrivals. Research shows that tourism has sustained more drastic losses than any other sector during the pandemic. However, there are reports which show that some regions had higher rates of resilience than others. According to a report by the European Commission (2021, 11), the regions potentially most affected, i.e. those with high sensitivity

and high exposure, are major urban destinations, including the capital regions of Athens, Berlin, Madrid and Paris, and destinations in Southern Europe and the Alps, in particular on the Iberian peninsula and in Italy as well as Central Macedonia in Greece and Cyprus. This means that popular destinations which suffer from overtourism experienced the biggest decline in bookings and economic turnover. On the other hand, regions that are not as exposed as the aforementioned areas could potentially benefit from the crisis situation. This includes most regions in Bulgaria, Finland and Sweden, as well as Burgenland and Styria in Austria, Limburg in Belgium, Adriatic Croatia, the two Eastern regions of Slovakia (Stredné Slovensko and Východné Slovensko), Eastern regions in Poland (Świętokrzyskie, Lubelskie, Podkarpackie and Podlaskie), Sud-Vest Oltenia in Romania, and Northern Hungary (Észak-Magyarország) and the Southern Great Plain (Dél-Alföld) in Hungary (European Commission 2021, 12). Due to public health measures, tourists are more likely to opt for destinations that are lightly populated and offer many outdoor activities. According to the European Commission (2022, 21), rural areas can provide unique nature and cultural experiences for visitors, but at the same time may experience problems of limited connectivity in terms of transport or digital connectivity. The most remote parts of the EU have suffered during the lockdown due to the limited transportation connectivity, since the outermost regions are highly dependent on tourism as it accounts for a particularly high share of their economy (up to 35% of GDP) (European Commission 2022, 21). They depend on flight connections which are even under non-pandemic circumstances scarce, and since during the pandemic a lot of flights have to be cancelled, this had taken a toll on the tourist season of remote areas. According to a recent study on the COVID-19 pandemic on the outermost regions, the number of tourists decreased by approximately 70% in 2020 in these regions and tourism activity fell by up to 90% (European Commission 2022, 21). Due to confinement measures, schools and workplaces shut down, and students and employees had to resort to studying i.e., working from home. Digital connectivity proved to be crucial during the pandemic and even as pandemic measures are starting to abate, a lot of employers have continued to support working from home and introduced desk sharing policies. In rural areas, the increased connectivity of services can further unlock opportunities for work, synergies and regional integration between rural areas and their surroundings (OECD 2020, 4). Better digital connectivity might promote the attractiveness of certain rural areas and attract not only tourists but digital nomads as well. Therefore, the COVID-19 outbreak may incentivize the growth of new firms and jobs that offer digital solutions and connect cities and rural areas in a more integrated way (OECD 2020, 4). The government and private operators need to realize the potential advantages good internet and mobile connectivity has and invest in improving the digital connectivity of rural areas. Due to the measures imposed by the governments because of COVID-19, it is crucial to keep supporting the sustainable development of rural tourism. If another lockdown occurs and borders close, only domestic tourism would be possible. Therefore, promoting rural areas to the local population should not be overlooked. The country should prepare to receive domestic tourists in accordance with the new rules for receiving tourists (Beketova et. al. 2020, 2020).

#### 4. TOWARDS RURAL RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the unique value of rural places to the wellbeing of the whole of society and that their distinctive contribution is likely to become more important as we come to grips with the climate crisis and the green and digital transitions.” (European network for Rural Development 2021, 2). The crisis created an opportunity to rethink the structures of rural tourism and to pave the way for a greener and more sustainable development. It has become apparent that rural areas are especially affected by the lockdown since a large part of their economy depends on tourism. By understanding the drawbacks crisis situations have on the development of rural tourism, it is possible to detect potential faults in the way those destinations are managed. Published in 2020, the One Planet Vision for the Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector, based on the UNWTO Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism, aims to become stronger and more resilient after the COVID-19 crisis (Agalakova et. al. 2021). The aim of sustainable development is to gradually build resilience in order to achieve speedy recovery. The EU can boost the long-term resilience of remote regions by comprehensive smart and sustainable tourism strategies, based on the unique strengths of the region, well-planned market segmentation, diversification of tourism services to different customer bases and by integrating the wellbeing of local residents with the services provided for tourists (European Commission 2022, 21). By devising clear strategies that would aim at a smart and sustainable tourism development, it is possible to build long-term resilience that would lessen the consequences of future crisis situations. There should be awareness raising and learning opportunities on sustainability, digitalisation and strategic collaborative governance of tourism ecosystems for national and regional authorities and all levels of destination management organisations (European Commission 2022, 24). The collaboration between rural areas, the government, as well as stakeholders plays an important role for rural tourism and is necessary for ensuring stability and further development. Rural Vision Week 2021 has drawn attention to the need to empower rural communities to take ownership of the green agenda to deliver solutions that are tailored to each locality and the need for policy frameworks to set the direction of travel, build confidence and encourage green investment, embrace inclusiveness in stakeholder engagement, and foster responsible governance that integrates local views and the needs of rural ecosystems (European network for Rural Development 2021). In order for rural areas and communities to thrive, it is important to take the opinions of locals into consideration and to promote environmental and cultural protection. Sustainable rural tourism aims to increase destination sustainability, concerning the long-term improvement of living standards, by maintaining the balance between environmental protection, the promotion of economic benefits, the establishment of social justice, and the maintenance of cultural integrity (Coros et. al. 2021, 5). Sustainability can only be achieved by finding a balance between the interests of the local community, the environment, tourists, and stakeholders. It is supposed to positively impact the local and economic development without harming natural resources or the cultural heritage of rural destinations. Rural tourism must achieve the conservation of the resources on which it is based and improve the quality of life of local residents (Cuesta-Valiño et. al. 2021, 4). Since the natural environment is one of the key

attractions of rural tourism, it should be protected. One of the reasons why tourists search for rural destinations is their natural heritage and the possibility to take part in outdoor activities which may contribute to one's health. Preserved destinations are therefore more likely to attract tourists and boost the economic development of rural destinations. The main goal of the sustainable development policy is to transform the image of the traditional village from the place where people only deal with agriculture and where the poor quality of services abides, into the economically strong area that offers a quality product (Đorđević, Janjić and Šušić 2019, 222). There are several rural development strategies which can be implemented for the well-being of rural tourism. One of the most popular rural development strategies has, of course, been to develop rural tourism and to capitalize on its associated entrepreneurial opportunities aiming at generating money, creating jobs, and supporting the growth of retail trade (Coros et. al. 2021, 2). Rural areas can capitalise on agriculture, their main industry, by promoting and selling home-made local delicacies, freshly harvested crops, hand-made products, souvenirs, etc. This creates new workplaces and preserves the traditions of local communities. Some small rural villages have developed place branding strategies aimed at grasping the opportunities coming from a more or less voluntary change in consumer preferences in the tourism and working fields (European network for Rural Development, 2021, 25). The emergence of digital nomads has boosted the interest for quiet rural areas because they offer a lot of advantages for people who work from home.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism trends are constantly changing, and it can sometimes be difficult to keep track of them. However, in recent years, rural tourism has started to show an increase in popularity due to the COVID-19 crisis. Rural areas attract more and more tourists who wish to spend time in quiet destinations that are not flooded with tourists. Mass tourism has taken a toll on mainstream tourist destinations, and especially in times of pandemic health measures a lot of tourists decide to avoid crowded areas. Moreover, they want to surround themselves with authentic cultures and take part in traditional customs. Rural areas offer an opportunity for exploration and knowledge, as well as leisure. By making rural areas available to rural tourism, local communities can prosper and commence further development in a greener and more sustainable direction. This type of tourism increases the well-being of the local population as it provides long-term sustainable business by creating socio-cultural benefits, stable employment, and contributing to poverty reduction while giving high levels of satisfaction (Cuesta-Valiño et. al. 2021, 4). Rural tourism is an important part of the economy of rural areas since it accounts for up to 35% of their GDP. On the other hand, lockdown measures have brought tourist activities to a halt and rural areas have not been immune to the crisis situation. It is therefore important to promote domestic tourism and support the economies of rural destinations and improve the quality of life of their community. By introducing new workplaces and entrepreneur opportunities, locals would receive stable income which may lessen the poverty levels and encourage younger people to stay, rather than to move to a bigger town or city in pursuit of a better life. Tourism has a direct positive

impact on the communities and its further development should be encouraged by the management as well as the government. Rural tourism potential must also be reflected in the preservation of natural resources, since they must be maintained over the years, to achieve long-term sustainable social development (European Commission, 2022). Natural heritage is one of the most important aspects of rural tourism and more often than not the reason why some tourists choose a particular destination over another. It is also of great importance to take the tourists' interest into consideration and monitor the inevitable shifts in their behaviour, especially when it comes to the COVID-19 crisis and the emergence of government safety measures. Therefore, rural areas should be able to adjust to those shifts and keep up with the constant changes in the world in order to benefit from tourism. Investing in rural destinations should be an important priority that would enable them to improve their tourist offer and faster adapt to change. The COVID-19 pandemic has also showed that to adapt to change and resist the present crisis and possible future crises, rural areas need to address old, long-standing challenges once and for all.

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## **RURAL TOURISM PERSPECTIVES: CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY**

**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**  
**Romina Agbaba**

### **Abstract**

Crisis situations, especially the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, point out the vulnerability of tourism as a global economic and social phenomenon. Although crises usually have negative effects on the economic and social system, in the pandemic crisis rural areas have been given the opportunity for stronger development, including the development of rural tourism. The expansion of rural tourism is a trend that is common to most countries in Europe and in the last couple of years this trend has been affecting Croatian rural areas as well. Rural areas are attractive to tourists because of its specific intrinsic rural characteristics where they can run away from rapid urban lifestyle and find authenticity and peace. In the new pandemic conditions, rural areas are particularly attractive to tourists, as destinations that are not overcrowded are preferred.

The aim of this paper is to point out the characteristics and development perspectives of rural tourism despite crisis situations. The analysis includes European policies and concepts that directly support the development of rural tourism and create a stimulating environment for its new development phases. Literature, documents, and secondary data will be analyzed, based on which recommendations for further development in the context of sustainability and quality will be summarized; focus on strengthening and engaging local communities, inclusion, and preservation of local natural and cultural resources.

**Keywords:** crisis, rural tourism, sustainability, tourism development

**Dora Smolčić Jurdana**

PhD tenured professor

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka, Croatia  
doras@fthm.hr

**Romina Agbaba**

PhD student, assistant

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka, Croatia  
romina.agbaba@fthm.hr

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES IN KARLOVAC COUNTY AS GUIDELINES IN THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

**Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić**

**Ivo Turk**

**Nenad Pokos**

### **Abstract**

The result of the 2021 census shows that Karlovac County records a significant decline in population compared to the 2011 census. We know from practice that rural tourism offers specific tourist products that are created in a certain area, and in order for the area to be constantly developed for tourism, for long-term and sustainable development of rural tourism with quality infrastructure, people are needed.

As a key lever for further development with the population and quality infrastructure is raising the environmental value of rural areas, ensuring easier access to rural areas of Karolva County and raising the quality of all stakeholders in rural tourism in the form of accommodation, gastronomic offer and all other additional activities.

The paper discusses the imbalance in the population of Karlovac County, which simultaneously includes the emigration of young people and the natural decline of the population, which has been neglected for years, and which will affect the quality and further development of rural tourism in Karlovac County.

**Keywords:** demography, Karlovac County, rural tourism, population

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Due to a number of circumstances, Karlovac County has an uneven development of space. These circumstances include long-term unfavorable demographic characteristics and processes, and a particularly strong obstacle to development is the unfavorable educational structure of the population. Although the educational structure of the population has been partially raised, there are large differences in spatial diversity due to dispersed population and poor economic development as the dominant feature of the majority of Karlovac County. Due to such geographical and economic conditions, young people are moving to the centers of work and education, which causes further deepening of spatial and development inequalities and ultimately the overall depopulation of the Karlovac County.

The economic backwardness of Karlovac County has a long historical period. The first wave of emigration was during the 19th and at the turn of the 20th century when the population emigrated to overseas countries (Turk and Jukić 2008). The second wave of emigration was after the Second World War and from then until today the emigration from this area has not been interrupted. The war events of the 1990s accelerated unfavorable economic and demographic processes, and the emigration of the population led to a new depopulation of already depopulated rural areas (Turk and Jukić 2008).

Karlovac as a center has never become a focus of development of this area because the development of the non-agricultural sector has not created conditions that would stop the emigration of the population. Therefore, neither Karlovac nor small towns have developed economic and social infrastructure that would transmit development impulses to rural areas. The proximity of Zagreb to this area attracted the population of Karlovac County. The strong total depopulation of the population of Karlovac County is also caused by negative natural movements, intensive emigration and the extinction of the elderly population.

In the predominantly rural part of the county, the level of education is low and the share of the elderly population is high, so a slower development of this area is to be expected (Turk and Jukić 2008).

From all this arises the necessity of research and reflection on the future and demographic processes as important guidelines for the further development of existing rural tourism in Karlovac County.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES**

The statistical and demographic framework of this survey consists of official data from the 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2001, 2011 and 2021 censuses of the Central Bureau of Statistics. It should be noted that there are differences in the methodology of the last three censuses compared to previous censuses. The censuses between 2001 and 2021 were conducted on a de facto basis (present population), while earlier censuses were conducted on a de jure (permanent population) basis. At the time of writing, only the first results of the 2021 census were available, so it should be borne in mind that this paper does not present the final results of the said census. The spatial analytical form of the research consists of the municipalities of Karlovac County (Rakovica municipality, Ribnik municipality, Saborsko municipality, Tounj municipality, Vojnić municipality and Žakanje municipality). In considering demographic indicators in this study, we will monitor the general population movement, which will show the process of depopulation of this area and a strong depopulation process will play a key role and be an important factor in further development of rural activities in Karlovac County.

## **3. BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS IN KARLOVAC COUNTY**

Karlovac County is one of the Croatian counties with the most unfavorable demographic indicators. This is best evidenced by the fact that this county recorded its maximum population back in 1931, when it had a population of 231,633. Since then, there has been a declining trend in the county, with shorter periods of growth. After the Second World War, the maximum population was recorded in 1961 (202,431 inhabitants) and since then there has been a continuous decrease in the number of inhabitants (total depopulation).

**Table 1. Census trends in the number of inhabitants in Karlovac County by cities and municipalities (1961 - 2021 <sup>1</sup>.)**

Town/Municipality	1961.	1971.	1981.	1991.	2001.	2011.	2021.	Indeks promjene 2021./1961.	Indeks promjene 2022./2011.
Town Duga Resa	10.330	11.709	13.102	14.088	12.114	11.180	10.207	98,8	91,3
Town Karlovac	58.013	63.887	69.622	73.426	59.395	55.705	49.594	85,5	89,0
Town Ogulin	18.315	17.737	17.012	16.732	15.054	13.915	12.251	66,9	88,0
Town Ozalj	13.125	11.634	9.744	9.988	7.932	6.817	5.836	44,5	85,6
Town Slunj	15.798	13.629	11.799	10.096	6.096	5.076	4.192	26,5	82,6
Municipality Barilović	7.310	6.157	5.232	4.529	3.095	2.990	2.691	36,8	90,0
Municipality Bosiljevo	3.761	3.007	2.322	2.598	1.486	1.284	1.053	28,0	82,0
Municipality Cetingrad	7.494	6.628	5.151	4.758	2.746	2.027	1.511	20,2	74,5
Municipality Draganić	4.100	3.991	3.556	3.561	2.950	2.741	2.560	62,4	93,4
Municipality Generalski Stol	5.982	4.976	4.329	3.833	3.199	2.642	2.166	36,2	82,0
Municipality Josipdol	6.631	5.823	5.172	4.850	3.987	3.773	3.410	51,4	90,4
Municipality Kamanje	1.278	1.223	1.102	1.179	1.008	891	825	64,6	92,6
Municipality Krnjak	4.775	4.217	3.748	3.204	2.164	1.985	1.361	28,5	68,6
Municipality Lasinja	3.928	3.666	3.227	2.821	1.938	1.624	1.344	34,2	82,8
Municipality Netretić	7.576	6.244	5.153	5.437	3.333	2.862	2.444	32,3	85,4
Municipality Plaški	5.045	5.137	4.590	4.317	2.292	2.090	1.653	32,8	79,1
Municipality Rakovica	6.893	5.578	4.782	4.108	2.623	2.387	2.225	32,3	93,2
Municipality Ribnik	1.780	1.537	965	878	583	475	361	20,3	76,0

<sup>1</sup> The first, not the final results of the 2021 census are presented.

Town/Municipality	1961.	1971.	1981.	1991.	2001.	2011.	2021.	Indeks promjene 2021./1961.	Indeks promjene 2022./2011.
Municipality Saborsko	3.246	2.753	2.105	1.501	860	632	474	14,6	75,0
Municipality Tounj	3.478	2.760	2.197	1.695	1.252	1.150	1.000	28,8	87,0
Municipality Vojnić	10.490	9.590	8.908	8.236	5.495	4.764	3.704	35,3	77,7
Municipality Žakanje	3.083	3.213	2.351	2.742	2.185	1.889	1.734	56,2	91,8
<i>Karlovac County</i>	<i>202.431</i>	<i>195.096</i>	<i>186.169</i>	<i>184.577</i>	<i>141.787</i>	<i>128.899</i>	<i>112.596</i>	<i>55,6</i>	<i>87,4</i>

Source: <https://www.dzs.hr/> (accessed 1.3.2022.); <https://popis2021.hr/> (accessed 4.3.2022)

The previous table shows that all cities and municipalities in the period between 1961 and 2021 recorded a decline in population. The population of the county has almost halved in this period (index of change 55.6). The rural-urban polarization within the county is particularly pronounced in this regard, with the most populous (administrative) cities of Karlovac, Ogulin and Duga Resa recording less unfavorable indicators than other local self-government units. The most unfavorable values of the population change index are recorded in rural traffic isolated areas of the observed county, such as the municipalities of Saborsko (change index 14.6), Cetingrad (20.2) and Ribnik (20.3). The reasons for this situation are numerous, the most important being the systematic neglect of rural areas and urban-based industrialization during the communist regime, the lack of adequate implementation of development plans for rural areas in recent times, adverse effects of the Homeland War and traffic isolation of peripheral counties.

The latest inter-census (2011-2021) also shows a continuation of all the previously present unfavorable demographic indicators. Thus, the Karlovac County as a whole recorded a population change index of 87.4. and here it can be said that, in general, the situation is less unfavorable in the three most populous administrative cities (Karlovac, Ogulin and Duga Resa). The most unfavorable situation was recorded in the municipalities of Cetingrad (change index 74.5), Saborsko (change index 75.0) and Ribnik (change index 76.0), with the latter two threatened with demographic extinction. Namely, the municipalities of Ribnik and Saborsko have the smallest population of all cities and municipalities in Karlovac County. In addition, they record extremely unfavorable features of the natural movement of the population, and they also have an extremely high degree of population aging.

Characteristics of natural population movement in Karlovac County are extremely unfavorable. Croatia as a whole records a natural decline in population, ie natural depopulation (excess of deaths over live births) during each year from 1991 onwards. Karlovac County has been recording natural depopulation continuously every year since 1983, which is almost a decade longer than Croatia as a whole. This fact alone indicates a very unfavorable state of this extremely important determinant of demographic

dynamics. The situation is even more worrying if we analyze the number of years with the presence of natural depopulation from 1964 (when vital statistics in Croatia began to be kept at the settlement level) to 2020 (the most recent year for which vital statistics were available at the time of writing<sup>2</sup>). In the 57 years considered, natural depopulation in Karlovac County as a whole was present for as many as 38 years. The situation is even more worrying if the duration of natural depopulation is analyzed by cities / municipalities of the observed county. Here, too, the most populous administrative cities have the least unfavorable features. Thus, natural depopulation in the observed period was present in the towns of Duga Resa in Ogulin for 32 years, and in Karlovac for 34 years. In contrast, the municipality of Draganić recorded natural depopulation during 56 of the observed 57 years. This situation may be surprising given that this municipality is located near Karlovac, with which it is well connected. The reason for this situation is certainly the aging of the population, but also migration. It can be assumed that the younger population emigrated from the municipality in the most favorable demoreproductive age, while the elderly immigrated to it, which adversely affected demoreproduction. The administrative town of Ozalj, whose territory is mostly rural and whose eponymous central settlement has the smallest population of all urban settlements in Karlovac County, has been experiencing natural depopulation for as long as 51 years. Municipalities that have recorded the presence of natural depopulation for more than 50 years (in addition to the previously mentioned Municipality of Draganić) are also: Bosiljevo (51 years), Lasinja (52 years), Netretić (52 years) and Ribnik (53 years). It is clear that such unfavorable indicators of natural population movement are a serious disruptive factor in demographic and economic development, which of course adversely affects the development of rural tourism.

Table 2. **Duration of natural depopulation in towns and municipalities of Karlovac County (1964 – 2020).**

Town/Municipality	Number of years with natural depopulation
<b>TOWN DUGA RESA</b>	32
<b>TOWN OGULIN</b>	32
<b>TOWN KARLOVAC</b>	34
<b>MUNICIPALITY RAKOVICA</b>	34
<b>TOWN SLUNJ</b>	36
<b>MUNICIPALITY CETINGRAD</b>	37
<b>MUNICIPALITY KAMANJE</b>	38
<b>KARLOVAC COUNTY</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>MUNICIPALITY PLAŠKI</b>	41
<b>MUNICIPALITY JOSIPDOL</b>	44

<sup>2</sup> Since the current territorial organization has been in force since 1993, data on settlements were necessary for the reconstruction of the situation in the earlier period. By grouping data by settlements, taking into account changes in settlement boundaries (where possible), data from the period before 1993 have been reduced to the current territorial structure.

<b>MUNICIPALITY SABORSKO</b>	44
<b>MUNICIPALITY VOJNIĆ</b>	44
<b>MUNICIPALITY ŽAKANJE</b>	45
<b>MUNICIPALITY GENERALSKI STOL</b>	46
<b>MUNICIPALITY TOUNJ</b>	46
<b>MUNICIPALITY KRNJAK</b>	47
<b>MUNICIPALITY BARILOVIĆ</b>	48
<b>TOWN OZALJ</b>	51
<b>MUNICIPALITY BOSILJEVO</b>	51
<b>MUNICIPALITY LASINJA</b>	52
<b>MUNICIPALITY NETRETIĆ</b>	52
<b>MUNICIPALITY RIBNIK</b>	53
<b>MUNICIPALITY DRAGANIĆ</b>	56

Source: Tables of vital statistics of the DZS-a (1964. - 2020.)

Population aging is an extremely unfavorable factor in the demographic development of Karlovac County. Since at the time of writing the data on the composition of the population by age and sex for the latest census from 2021 at the level of cities / municipalities and settlements are not yet available, the latest available data were used for analysis, ie those from the 2011 census . For Croatia as a whole and counties, the first results of the census after 2021 are available. According to them, the aging index<sup>3</sup> for Croatia was 155.7, while for Karlovac County it was as high as 188.5. For orientation, it should be noted that most demographers believe that the aging process begins when the aging index exceeds 40. Thus, in the case of Croatia, and especially Karlovac County, it is a very advanced aging process.

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<sup>3</sup> The aging index represents the ratio of old ( $\geq 60$  years) and young ( $\leq 19$  years) population.

Table 3. Aging index in Karlovac County in the year 2011

<b>Town/Municipality</b>	<b>Aging index in 2011</b>
Town Duga Resa	146,1
Town Karlovac	146,6
Town Ogulin	122,9
Town Ozalj	146,6
Town Slunj	171,7
Municipality Barilović	164,9
Municipality Bosiljevo	188,1
Municipality Cetingrad	135,7
Municipality Draganić	160,4
Municipality Generalski Stol	207,7
Municipality Josipdol	124,2
Municipality Kamanje	138,1
Municipality Krnjak	254,6
Municipality Lasinja	181,6
Municipality Netretić	193,7
Municipality Plaški	196,8
Municipality Rakovica	89,3
Municipality Ribnik	223,5
Municipality Saborsko	272,7
Municipality Tounj	157,7
Municipality Vojnić	163,1



<b>Town/Municipality</b>	<b>Aging index in 2011</b>
Municipality Žakanje	121,1
<i>Karlovac County</i>	<i>149,0</i>

Source: <https://www.dzs.hr/> (accessed 1.3.2022.)

The previous table shows that the aging process of the population has improved in all local self-government units. It is the smallest in the Municipality of Rakovica (89.3), primarily due to the immigration of expelled Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Homeland War and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also due to the proximity of Plitvice Lakes National Park that generates tourism and related activities. All other cities and municipalities record the value of the aging index higher than the Croatian average (which was 115.0 in 2011). The most unfavorable situation is again present in the municipalities of Ribnik (aging index 223.5) and Saborsko (272.7). It has already been mentioned that these are municipalities that are literally threatened with demographic extinction and whose eventual revitalization will depend on the immigration of the younger population in the demoreproductive age. The municipality of Saborsko should be especially emphasized. It is extremely traffic-isolated in relation to the county urban centers (Karlovac and Ogulin - which naturally gravitates), and during the Homeland War it was occupied and completely devastated. It is positive that it is located near the Plitvice Lakes National Park. Even a small part of the mentioned national park (Čorkova uvala rainforest) is located on the territory of this municipality, which represents a significant potential for tourism development. The revitalization of this municipality, which was extremely damaged in the Homeland War, should certainly be based on the above.

#### **4. RURAL SIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES OF KARLOVAC COUNTY**

##### **4.1. Natural tourist resources of Karlovac County**

The Republic of Croatia has numerous tourist resources that have great potential for the development of rural tourism. Rural space is defined by four constituent elements: village, agriculture, environment and technology. Therefore, it needs to be approached through four dimensions: socio-cultural - which is manifested in folk culture and tradition, rituals and ceremonies, superstition and religion, development - through the existence of natural reserves of resources needed by the economy, economic - through continuous renewal of resources and environmental - rural space shows through eco-approach to production and conservation of biodiversity. Rural space, therefore, is recognized as a whole that consists of an inseparable relationship between the village, technical systems and the natural environment (Lukić 2010, 66). Natural tourist resources are important for the development of rural tourism, and we divide them into climatic, hydrographic, relief and plant and animal species (flora and fauna). Karlovac

County is located at the crossroads between Pannonian and Coastal Croatia, has various geomorphological forms of relief and has significant hydrographic resources.

#### **4.2. Anthropogenic tourist resources of Karlovac County**

Unlike natural tourist resources that reflect on recreational properties and act on human physiological needs, social or anthropogenic tourist resources affect human mental functions. According to the classification, they are divided into: cultural-historical resources, monuments, artistic achievements, etc. - ethno-social resources - material and spiritual culture of a nation; artistic resources - monuments from the cultural and historical period; manifestation resources - educational and educational-recreational activities or manifestations, and on ambient resources - spatial units created by man. Some resources by the intensity of action can independently affect the arrival of tourists, while most resources appear in combination with other resources that increase their level of attractiveness, so we call them complementary resources. Among the main advantages of rural tourism development besides the richness of natural resources are: the village, which has retained the traditional, authentic Croatian character (lifestyle, hospitality, customs, local events, etc.), diverse cultural offer of rural areas (history, music, etc.) excellent local gastronomy and good attitude of local participants towards the development of tourism (Bilen 2006).

The position of Karlovac County, which connects Europe with the Adriatic coast, ultimately resulted in a rich and layered cultural and historical heritage, which is reflected in today's tourism. Based on the Register of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Croatia, a total of 211 units of tangible and intangible cultural heritage are given in Karlovac County, of which intangible cultural heritage includes two musical expressions and one art of making. 205 immovable cultural assets and three movable cultural assets of museum material belong to the tangible cultural heritage. In Karlovac County, in addition to the cultural and historical units of Karlovac, Ogulin, Duga Resa and Slunj and the Ozalj Ethno Park, in the rural area of the County there are three cultural and historical rural units, the example of Donji Mrzljaki near Netretic. The rural settlement on the slope of the Kupa is an extremely valuable rural unit whose existing structure has been preserved in its original form as well as the natural environment in which it is located. Rastoke na Slunjićici is also a protected rural ensemble, where in the 18th century the phenomenon of waterfalls was used to branch mills and mills of residential houses. The rural ensemble of Orljak near Tounj, a hamlet above the river Tounjčica, has been protected, where the original configuration of the terrain, the position of roads, the type of settlement, a garden with a closed yard and outbuildings as well as the natural environment and ambience have been preserved. All these protected rural areas have a significant preservation of preserved objects from recent life, clothing, agricultural tools, traditional inventory, supplies and traditional recipes, and various games, customs, songs and dances, legends and myths have been preserved as part of the intangible heritage transmitted from generation to generation. In the rural area of the County, castles and fortifications of fortifications have been preserved, which complement the tourist product of the destination, such as the old Drežnik Grad, the old town of Ribnik and the old towns of Ogulin, Ozalj, Slunj. Many fortifications in the rural area of Karlovac County are still in a deserted state, such as the ruins of the old town of Barilović, Cetina, Tounj, Modruš, Novigrad na Dobroj and Plaški. Minor renovation is required by the Drašković manor, Jaškovo castle, Türk castle and the old town of Bosiljevo. The rural

area of Karlovac County abounds in numerous protected churches and chapels, but also mausoleums and gravestones. In the rural area of the County there are numerous protected buildings located along the Karlovac rivers such as bridges on the rivers Mrežnica, Dobra and Lička Jasenica and a two-story bridge on Tounjčica, while on the river Korana stand out mills and a protected sawmill<sup>4</sup>.

Movable cultural assets include the museum material of the Karlovac Museum, the Ogulin Homeland Museum and the Ozalj Homeland Museum, and the intangible cultural heritage of Karlovac County includes two musical expressions: the guci musical expression and the rozganje musical expression. Through numerous events and performances such as the folklore festival "Igra kolo" in Ogulin (June), the Old Village Games in Vrhovec (July) and the Exhibition Promenade in Slunj (August), tourists are introduced to handicrafts such as weaving on the apartment, gold embroidery, wool rolling, traditional hairstyles.

Among the enogastronomic events, we single out the Vincekovo events in Duga Resa and the Wine Days in Vivodina, which are dedicated to the celebration of wine and oenology, then the Honey and Ogulin Cabbage Days, Strudelfest and Mushroom Festival, which are events. Manifestations such as Jurjevo, a manifestation with performances by cultural and artistic societies with the blessing of horses and the Manor Fair, a manifestation of the former life of nobles, old crafts, telling legends, myths and various games are some of the manifestations rural culture. The most important event that promotes the rural way of life, space and activities is RuralKA, the fair of rural development of Karlovac County, which presents all the forms that rural tourism implies. After analyzing the natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of Karlovac County, it can be determined that the richness and preservation of natural environment on the one hand and preserved rural identity on the other hand are extremely important and forms the basis for rural tourism.

#### **4.3. Accommodation facilities in the function of rural tourism in Karlovac County**

It is generally known that accommodation facilities are divided into basic ones, which include facilities from the group of hotels (hotel, aparthotel, tourist resort, tourist apartments, boarding house, etc.) and complementary facilities, which include private accommodation facilities, camps, camping sites, holiday homes, mountain and hunting lodges and the like. Objects of significant importance for rural tourism are also rural households where we distinguish between a wine shop / tasting room, picnic area, room, apartment and camp (Mesarić Žabčić, 2007). There are currently no specialized facilities in the Karlovac County in the function of accommodation for the needs of rural tourism, but all types of accommodation facilities are in the mentioned function.

#### **4.4. Promotion of rural tourism in Karlovac County**

The leading role in the promotion of rural tourism in the Karlovac County is played by the Karlovac County Tourist Board, which promotes the county's tourist offer and creates new products in the region, especially in selective forms of tourism. It also provides and encourages professional assistance to tourist boards from the county in matters important

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<sup>4</sup> See more in: Karlovac County Tourist Board [www.river-adventure.info](http://www.river-adventure.info)

for their activities and development, encouragement, preservation, improvement and promotion of all existing tourist resources and potentials.

According to the County Development Strategy, the strategic goals of tourism development in Karlovac County are: 1. revitalization of rural areas and balanced development of all areas of the County. Priority is given to the development of rural tourism through the following measures: 1. guiding, informing and educating farmers, 2. diversification of economic activities and sources of income in rural areas, 3. encouraging and revitalizing traditional crafts, 4. development of tourist infrastructure in rural areas and 5 encouraging small family businesses in tourism. The development of rural tourism in Karlovac County requires a significant step forward in terms of marketing. From this position, it is proposed to implement various measures to implement an active policy promotion from redefining and renaming the River adventure website, creating a mobile tourist application, activities on social networks and creating the official Karlovac County website on the TripAdvisor platform. By implementing such an active promotional policy, we want to present a set of experiences, feelings and images unique to Karlovac County. It is believed that such a brand will provide flexibility to generate additional lower-level sub-brands with possible implementation to individual destinations, attractions and products and will enable the creation of a stronger image in the minds of potential consumers. From the standpoint of rural tourism development, all of the above is more than excellent and strategically planned, but from the standpoint of human resources, it will be necessary to keep in mind demographic opportunities and processes that are not at all optimistic for Karlovac County<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4.5. Prospects for the development of rural tourism in Karlovac County in the future**

Karlovac County, despite its favorable traffic and transit position and the abundance of natural and anthropogenic resources, is still insufficiently valorized in terms of tourism. The readiness of the private sector to take the initiative that would contribute to additional tourism development is noticeable in the County, of course with the help of the public sector, which has a significant role in cooperation and support. All stakeholders must be guided by the principles of sustainable development that preserves quality tourism, traditional and indigenous values of space, and special efforts should be made to activate poorly or unused resources, especially in agriculture, which plays a key role in developing quality rural tourism.

In the document Analysis of the state and strategy of tourism development of Karlovac County until 2025, prepared by Horwath HTL based on development principles that include long-term sustainability, preservation of indigenous values in space, restoration of urban centers and buildings in decline, activation of unused resources and synergistic development of agriculture of higher added value, a vision of the future development of tourism in Karlovac County was formed.

With the aim of a clear future development of tourism, the following vision has been defined: In 2025, Karlovac County is the leading Croatian continental region of active

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<sup>5</sup> County Development Strategy of Karlovac County 2011-2013, Karlovac County, Karlovac, 2011

vacation that attracts visitors throughout the year, and its development is based on untouched and preserved nature, water and friendly hosts, traditional gastronomy based on local ingredients and the richness of the space where every guest finds refuge to escape from urban everyday life. The defined vision of the future development of tourism in Karlovac County includes largely elements of rural tourism, since such a specific form of tourism has a wide range of forms such as ecotourism, enogastronomic tourism, rural, hunting, cultural tourism and various other forms of tourism. largely based on the concept of active vacation<sup>6</sup>.

#### **4.6. Rural tourism as a key tourist product of Karlovac County**

The total experiences of tourists that meet their expectations, including experiences with accommodation, natural and cultural attractions, entertainment, transportation, catering, hosts are defined as a tourist product. It is based on the cumulation of various products and services on the trip and stay in the tourist place, the tourist and individual products and services are perceived as a complete experience until returning home, so it is clear that the tourist product requires professional development systematic management to maximize the quality of experience. Based on the identified resources, Horwath HTL proposes rural tourism as the second key primary tourism product of the County. Rural tourism has many forms, and forms that would further encourage and develop agritourism (stay of guests on the farm and observation or participation in traditional agricultural activities), active rural tourism (use of rural areas for various forms of sports and recreational activities) eco-tourism and cultural rural tourism (related to all cultural determinants of a rural area), and the development of all would include segments such as enogastronomy, rural events and various rural activities such as horseback riding, fishing, walking and the like. Target groups of rural tourism are families with children, older couples without children and young couples without children who are mostly highly educated guests, often travel and belong to the segment of higher purchasing power with an average consumption of 80 euros per day, of which 65% refers to accommodation and food . It is known that 7% of total world travel is motivated by enjoying wine, gastronomy and rural experience. As key levers for further development of tourism products in Karlovac County, Horwath HTL 2018 emphasizes raising the environmental value of rural areas, ensuring easy access to rural areas from the perspective of infrastructure quality and labels and raising the quality of all stakeholders in rural tourism in terms of accommodation, gastronomic offer and additional activities. Analysis of the environment or environment (SWOT) of rural tourism in Karlovac County includes research of all important characteristics of both external and internal environment in order to identify strategic factors that will determine the future of the company and in this case the development of rural tourism. The strengths and weaknesses of the future planned development of rural tourism can be observed through the variables of the internal environment while the opportunities and threats of rural tourism in Karlovac County can be observed through the variables of the external environment. The future development of rural tourism includes a moderate continental climate, rich natural and anthropogenic tourist base, many hydrographic resources, preservation of traditional rural base and architecture, cultural and historical facilities,

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<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the situation and tourism development strategy of Karlovac County until 2025, Horwath HTL, Zagreb, 2018.

favorable geo-traffic position, developed transport infrastructure, diversity of gastronomy and oenology, high level ecological preservation of soil, water, air, preservation of traditional crafts, trades, customs, tangible and intangible heritage, general preservation of rural areas and rural way of life. Weaknesses that need to be addressed are a large number of uncultivated agricultural land, untidy and neglected large part of rural areas, little or insufficient protection of certain natural and anthropogenic areas, insufficient recognition of natural resources, inadequate interpretation of attractions in the area, large number of unused resources. rural areas and rural tourism, insufficient coverage of rural areas by transport services, still mined suspicious areas, increasing number of elderly people, shortage of young people, insufficient networking of all participants in rural tourism. As good opportunities for the development of rural tourism in Karlovac County are the possibility of developing many forms of rural tourism, using state incentives to finance entrepreneurial projects in rural tourism, using EU funds, increasing tourist demand for holidays in rural areas, incentives for rural tourism by states, incentives for opening family households, incentives for agriculture, opportunities for projects through public-private partnerships, designing rural tourism products and the like. Threats that may arise in hindering the future development of rural tourism in Karlovac County are deruralization, deagrarization, emigration of young people from rural areas of the county, uncontrolled and inadequate use of resources, global economic crisis, development of intensive agriculture, loss of rural identity, sale real estate to foreigners, the loss of the art of preparing traditional food and drink, uninspiring state policy, the complexity of legal regulations in entrepreneurial ventures and the generally unplanned development of rural tourism. Insufficient connection and insufficient cooperation of all participants in the process of forming the tourist offer in rural areas with the existence of legal obstacles, is a weakness that could be mitigated by the existence of destination management company with the task of creating an integrated tourist product destination<sup>7</sup>. The most significant weakness is reflected in the increase in the elderly population and the insufficient number of young people who are a key factor in development and who are able to preserve rural areas from extinction. The most significant threats to the development of tourism in rural areas are the processes of abandoning such rural areas as a place of residence, especially for young people and abandoning agriculture in general as an economic activity, which would ultimately lead to deterioration and loss of rural identity.

#### **4.7. Guidelines for the future development of rural tourism in Karlovac County**

The most important precondition for development in general, and rural tourism in Karlovac County in particular, is to ensure long-term sustainability in all aspects of development: environmental, economic and social. Therefore, the future development of rural tourism activities and activities must strive to preserve natural and cultural values as well as ecological balance and overall biodiversity. At the same time, such a process of tourism development and management must ensure economic growth through economic benefits and thus contribute to social progress, ie raising living standards and generating new jobs, and thus contribute to stopping negative demographic trends in the County and ensure positive prerequisites for future generations! Modernization of the

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<sup>7</sup> Analysis of the situation and tourism development strategy of Karlovac County until 2025, Horwath HTL, Zagreb, 2018.

transport infrastructure is necessary in order to reduce the traffic isolation of the rural peripheral parts of the county. In addition, it is necessary to implement a model of deperiferization, which involves the generation of new central functions in peripheral areas in order to create jobs and prerequisites for the immigration of younger people in the demoreproductive age. It can be concluded that people are the basis for further development of rural tourism in the Karlovac County!

## 5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Karlovac County has a significant number of attractive elements of the offer, especially natural hydrographic and biogeographical resources and anthropogenic in terms of rural heritage, tangible and intangible nature. It also has an unquestionable tourist potential for the development of rural tourism due to its favorable geo-traffic and geographical position. Regarding the development of rural tourism in Karlovac County, the recommendation is to focus on preserving the traditional values of rural areas, lifestyles and activities, and at the same time can enable the presentation of its tourist product to potential consumers in an attractive and modern way. According to many indicators, Karlovac County is the leading Croatian continental region of active vacation that attracts visitors all year round. In accordance with this vision, the key tourist product of the County is becoming an active vacation, while the development of rural tourism is planned elsewhere. As a competitive destination of active vacation, it attracts tourists with its rich water, history and quality traditional in a quiet rural area. These are all incentive elements for investing in rural forms of tourism, but in a strategically organized way, which means that it is very necessary given the depopulation of rural areas and significant emigration from Karlovac County to take care of the population and provide incentives, employment and living. a standard that would direct them in the long run to stay in Karlovac County. Such a strategy and mission would certainly represent a successful future of rural tourism in Karlovac County.

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- Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić, Scientific Adviser, Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, e-mail: [Rebeka.MesaricZabcic@pilar.hr](mailto:Rebeka.MesaricZabcic@pilar.hr)
- Ivo Turk, Senior Research Associate, Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, e-mail: [Ivo.Turk@pilar.hr](mailto:Ivo.Turk@pilar.hr)
- Nenad Pokos Scientific Adviser, Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, e-mail: [Nenad.Pokos@pilar.hr](mailto:Nenad.Pokos@pilar.hr)



**DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES IN KARLOVAC COUNTY AS GUIDELINES IN THE  
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM**

**Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić**

**Ivo Turk**

**Nenad Pokos**

**Abstract**

The result of the 2021 census shows that Karlovac County records a significant decline in population compared to the 2011 census. We know from practice that rural tourism offers specific tourist products that are created in a certain area, and in order for the area to be constantly developed for tourism, for long-term and sustainable development of rural tourism with quality infrastructure, people are needed.

As a key lever for further development with the population and quality infrastructure is raising the environmental value of rural areas, ensuring easier access to rural areas of Karolva County and raising the quality of all stakeholders in rural tourism in the form of accommodation, gastronomic offer and all other additional activities.

The paper discusses the imbalance in the population of Karlovac County, which simultaneously includes the emigration of young people and the natural decline of the population, which has been neglected for years, and which will affect the quality and further development of rural tourism in Karlovac County.

**Keywords:** demography, Karlovac County, rural tourism, population

**Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić**

Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar

**Ivo Turk**

Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar

**Nenad Pokos**

Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar

## THE ROLE OF HERITAGE IN CREATING TOURISM EVENTS IN RURAL DESTINATION

**Danijel Drpić**  
**Sanja Raspor Janković**  
**Maja Vukelić**

### **Abstract**

Contemporary tourist flows and changes in travel motives and tourist demands for new and innovative products pose a demanding task for destination management in designing a tourist product that will enable long-term sustainability of the tourist offer and strengthen the visibility of rural destinations in the tourism market. The rural tourist destination is facing the challenge of ensuring economic and social development, and the risk of permanent disruption of the existing resource base and the disappearance of the traditional way of life and intangible heritage nurtured through the centuries. Preservation of intangible heritage is possible through tourist valorisation while respecting the postulates of sustainable development. The combination of tourism and heritage forms a unique backbone for achieving the recognizability of the destination on the market and preserving the intangible heritage for future generations. Sustainable development with balanced tourism development represents the only possible and desirable developmental direction of the rural area of Grobnišćina and provides the opportunity to preserve the cultural and historical features of the area while preserving the rich intangible heritage. Grobnišćina as a tourist destination has so far not significantly participated in the tourist product of the Republic of Croatia, but numerous elements of intangible heritage provide the opportunity to significantly increase the competitiveness of the destination. The main purpose of present research is to stress the role of intangible heritage in creating sustainable tourism product. In particular, this paper focuses on gastronomic heritage. For this purpose, gastronomic festival as an example of rural gastronomic heritage event was evaluated from visitors' perspective. The results show visitors' positive perceptions of most festivals attributes, as well as very high level of satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions toward festival.

**Key words:** gastronomy, heritage, heritage-based tourism events, sustainability, rural destination

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Heritage-based tourism events represent an opportunity for creation of a unique experience and satisfaction of visitors with the event and the tourism product itself as they are based on the original form of heritage that characterizes a particular area and represents the heritage of generations and reflects the traditional way of life. The very characteristics of the rural area provide significant developmental opportunities that can be further improved through the tourism product.

Preserving heritage today is not only a challenge but also a fundamental aspect for preserving the identity of the people. Heritage, especially intangible one, is under constant threat.

Thematic events belong to content-limited and thematically narrower focused events that are recognized by the relevant scientific and professional public. These are usually local or regional events. Over time, such events become real cultural institutions in terms of partners (organizational and financial) and a permanent group of experts who conduct them (Knešaurek and Carić 2018, 13). Thematic events become a recognizable element of the tourist product of the destination in which they occur.

Tourist events in the contemporary tourist offer are an important segment for achieving destination recognizability, increasing economic use for the destination, but also for its sustainable development if it applies international quality standards for sustainable event management. This contributes to the preservation of the environment and sustainable development of the destination and is of particular importance for rural areas (ISO 2013). Tourist events are also extremely important for creating a destination brand, designing, and applying appropriate marketing tools and development strategies for rural areas.

To be able to design a quality and sustainable tourist event based on gastronomic heritage, it is necessary to explore the needs, desires, and motives of potential visitors to the destination, and determine how destination management can successfully respond to them. This can be achieved by choosing an appropriate market niche that includes those visitors who are motivated primarily by heritage, culture, and tradition. (Milohnić 2012).

Future development of event tourism needs to be carefully planned and strategically managed, in order to enable its further development, in sense of increasing the level of tourist's satisfaction, while at the same time preserving its own resources. This will increase the visibility of rural areas in the tourism market, ensure heritage preservation and creation of additional economic benefits for all stakeholders in the rural destination, which will presumably ensure its economic and demographic development and sustainable survival in the future.

The main purpose of this research is to stress the role of intangible heritage in creating sustainable tourism product. This paper focuses on gastronomic heritage in rural destination. For this purpose, gastronomic festival as an example of rural gastronomic heritage event was evaluated from visitors' perspective. Specifically, the paper aims to address the following research questions: a) What is the role of gastronomic heritage in creating tourism events? and b) How visitors evaluate the gastronomic heritage festival?

The paper is structured in following sections. After the introduction, a conceptual background of the main research concept is provided. Following, the methodology, research aims, and research methods are described. Then, the authors present the results of empirical research, followed by concluding remarks.

## **2. GASTRONOMY AS A MOTIVE FOR TOURIST ARRIVAL IN A TOURIST DESTINATION**

According to Žaper, it is assumed that people tasted cooked food quite by accident when in the earliest development of human as a hunter, seeds and meat were accidentally fried and found after natural fires. So, people have discovered that cooked food is sometimes tastier and more digestible than raw. Like serving fire, which is an element of culture, cooking has become a human skill, requiring social organization and the transmission of culture, which is passed down from generation to generation. The development of culinary habits depends on the social, geographical, and historical aspects, and culinary cultures also differ as sets of attitudes and tastes that people associate with cooking and nutrition (Žaper 2004, 229). Žaper (2004, 232) also states that Croatia can be geographically and culturally divided into three basic zones - Pannonian, Dinaric and

Adriatic, which result in significant regional differences in nutrition. As a complex cultural phenomenon, nutrition has several aspects: the choice of foods, the way of preparing meals, the way of consumption and even customs and symbols derived from the food tradition.

Gastronomy is a fundamental element of a contemporary tourism product. With its features, it combines tradition and heritage with the modern needs of tourists. Due to its characteristics, it significantly contributes to the creation of unique experiences of tourists (Ivanović et al. 2015; Ivanović et al. 2016; Alkier and Milojica, 2021; Alkier et al. 2015; Alkier et al. 2015; UNWTO 2012, 6). Rabotić (2013, 147) points out that many world destinations have used their own unique link between their geographical location, culture, and gastronomic offer to improve the quality and diversity of their tourist offer, and thus promote their tourist offer and form a recognizable image.

Food and drinks are in the context of the culture of the society in which they are prepared, served and consumed, and given the importance they have in people's lives, an important element of many beliefs and themes of many cultural phenomena. A large part of cultural heritage of many people, European as well, was formed about and around the food (reaping songs or ceremonies concerned with wine growing, grape picking and wine producing, etc.). Food can be observed in the context of social and cultural movements and changes and thus it forms an important segment of the sociology of culture (Knešaurek and Carić 2018).

It is also equally important as an attractiveness factor of a particular destination to foreign visitors. It is known that France, as a synonym for excellence in growing and preparing food and drinks, has included food culture in the national school curriculum and that, according to surveys, children in richer and poorer parts of the country receive equal food (Knešaurek and Carić 2018).

According to the UNWTO (2012), gastronomic tourism has been registering significant growth and development over the last few decades compared to many other tourism products and is one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism (Alkier and Milojica 2021). Also, according to the regular research of the Institute of Tourism on the attitudes of tourists in the Republic of Croatia (TOMAS Summer 2010, 2014, 2017, TOMAS Croatia 2019), gastronomy is one of the main motives for tourist's visits to Croatia. At the same time, in the last ten years the share of arrivals motivated by gastronomy has been growing, and this is one of the main motives for visiting rural areas, as well (Institute for Tourism 2011, 2015, 2018, 2020).

Destinations are aware of the importance of diversifying the offer through gastronomy, especially in order to encourage local and regional development. Sustainability, ethics, authenticity, local values, and culture are intensively debated in this tourism segment. This is not surprising given that gastro tourists practice a lifestyle prone to learning from other cultures and experimenting, thus seeking experiences based on a local identity in a world that is becoming more uniform and accessible (Knešaurek and Carić 2018).

In the Republic of Croatia there is the influence of many cuisines. The Adriatic Coast is characterized by a Mediterranean diet rich in seafood and gifts of sparse land with the

influence of Italian culture, while the heartland of Croatia is characterized by continental cuisines of Austria, Hungary and all national minorities located in Croatia.

Gastronomy can become a successful promoter of the destination and guardian of its identity, as evidenced by the diet of Mediterranean countries (Greece, Morocco, Italy and Spain) which is included in the UNESCO list of intangible heritage. That is why many destinations connect gastronomy with their image and promotion in different ways and with different intensity (Knešaurek and Carić 2018).

Gastronomy, therefore, represents a feature of the region, its oenological and gastronomic history and indicates the need of preservation and sustainable development of the rural base, which is typical for destinations in rural areas that are under special pressure from mass and globalization trends.

Gastronomy is an important element of the tourist offer of the rural area. In villages all over Croatia tourists can see and experience domestic animals, decorated houses, and villages with preserved elements of traditional construction, decorated ponds, field paths intended for tourist purposes, try dishes prepared in the traditional way and other elements of rural identity (Ružić and Demonija 2013:58).

According to the survey of tourists' attitudes in the Republic of Croatia for 2019, the most frequent motives for visiting the Adriatic Croatia was sea (81%), followed by nature (56%), city break (24%), touring (21%), sports and recreation (15%), culture and art (13%), gastronomy (7%), entertainment and festivals (6%) and many other motives. In Continental Croatia, the most frequent motives for visiting are nature (32%), touring (26%), city break (26%), sports and recreation (24%), work (22%), culture and art (16%), hiking and villages (10% each), gastronomy (7%), manifestations and events (6%), etc. If we observe together gastronomy with the motives of visiting a tourist manifestation and the event (26%) and culture and art (29%), in this particular case 55% of all visitors in the Republic of Croatia represent a possible market niche for tourist events based on gastronomic heritage. The growth of the importance of gastronomy as a motive for visitors to the Republic of Croatia is indicated by the fact that from 1997 to 2017 there was a growth of motives - new experiences and gastronomy, while reducing the importance of 'vacation at sea'. The importance of (passive) rest was significantly reduced in 2017 compared to 2014 (from 75% to 55%), while the motive of gastronomy grew with motives associated with active holiday (sports and recreation, culture, health reasons and wellness and natural beauty) (Institute for Tourism 2020).

The advantages of the development of gastronomy as an element of the tourist offer are reflected in the creation of a complete, quality, and desired tourist product and enrichment of the overall tourist offer, development of tourism in continental and coastal parts of the country and in pre- and sub-season. The gastronomic offer contributes to the development of rural areas and represents an important element for the development of entrepreneurship, employment and additional economic benefits for the local community. Gastronomy provides an incentive for preservation of the authentic ambience, culture and traditions, while improving the unique image of the destination in the tourist market. Tourist valorisation of gastronomy enables an increase in

consumption and the placement of domestic products at the site of production. (Drpic and Vukman 2014).

### **3. HERITAGE AND GASTRONOMIC TOURISM EVENTS**

Tourist events based on gastronomic heritage provide visitors with the opportunity for new and unique experiences, experiences of new rural areas and getting to know the rich intangible heritage of the Republic of Croatia. Through this, the gastronomic tourist product is becoming one of the most important elements for increasing the competitiveness and recognizability of the Republic of Croatia in the tourist market.

Gastronomy and oenology are known in the world as elements of significant importance for recognizability and building the identity of the nations and cultures they represent. In gastronomy, it is often a mixture of influences from different cultures, which throughout the history have influenced the creation of unique dishes and drinks, thus creating unique gastronomic experiences.

Gastronomy, along with oenology, traditional way of preparing and serving food, and traditional way of life thematically woven into folklore and customs represent the optimal model for achieving tourist recognition and sustainable, general, and economic development of rural areas. Gastronomic events enable the strengthening of the identity of the local community, the preservation of the traditional way of life and the way of preparing food and wine products, as elements of the local gastronomic and wine offer.

Gastronomy is most often part of local events, on a smaller scale. These events are extremely important, because with their simple logistical requirements and financial plans, they offer flexibility in terms of changing the micro-location, the number of recurrences and protection from the weather. With careful organizational and financial planning and the support of the local population, they can have a strong impact on the diversity of a region's offerings. All types and sizes of events are equally valuable and important for the development of tourism, but given the existing limitations and challenges, small-scale events should be considered first (Knešaurek and Carić 2018, 18).

The offer of tourist events based on the gastronomic heritage of the Republic of Croatia is heterogeneous and very rich. Gastronomic events are most often typical of a particular tourist destination or a region, i.e., they are of local or regional importance.

Next, few events of local and regional significance in Croatia are described. These examples were chosen because of their special features: a long tradition (What did our ancestors eat?), specific island environments with significant rural areas (Krk Food Fest) and events that, according to the authors' opinion, represent the movement of future development of the rural area of Grobniščina, that is, the hinterland of Rijeka.

**Table 1. Comparative overview of the characteristics of gastronomic tourist events in selected rural tourist destinations of the Republic of Croatia**

FEATURE	EVENT		
	What our ancestors ate?	Krk Food Fest – taste the tradition - Days of šurlica and asparagus	Polenta and cheese festival
LOCALITY	Vrbovec	Malinska, Krk, Vrbnik, Baška, Šilo, Milohnići, Vrh, Klimno, Glavotok, Kornić, Punat	Čavle and Jelenje municipalities
ORGANIZER	TB Vrbovec	TB of the island of Krk and local TB	TB Čavle
TOPIC	Tourist and culinary event. Local gastronomy, competition. Sports, cultural, entertainment facilities.	Local gastronomy, šurlice - traditional handmade pasta with various sauces and natural herbs. Asparagus and wine Žlahtina	Tourist and culinary event. Local gastronomy, competition
PARTICIPANTS	Cultural and artistic societies, Women's Society, citizens of Vrbovec, associations, institutions	Catering facilities on the island of Krk	All the locals
PURPOSE	Promotion of local gastronomy and oenology, folklore.	Promotion of local gastronomy and oenology and local folklore, extension of the season	Preparation of potato polenta - a traditional dish. Accompanying events include the presentation and sale of cheese, typical products of local family farms and souvenirs.
TIME OF THE EVENT	August	March/June	June

Source: Authors' research

As can be seen in Table 1, tourist events based on oenogastronomic elements of the tourist offer can serve to extend the tourist season, but also to preserve and bring closer the traditional way of life of residents, folklore and local identity to the visitors.

To preserve local gastronomy and intangible heritage of rural areas in the Republic of Croatia, the authors consider that it is necessary:

- to create a strategy for the development of rural areas in Croatia and the preservation of its tangible and intangible heritage
- identify weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats to the sustainable development of rural areas and devise corrective actions that will contribute to the preservation of heritage and rural areas as the foundation of the identity of the people
- provide additional lines of financial assistance in the design and implementation of tourism events with elements of gastro-oenological heritage
- provide scholarships for pupils and students whose education will enable the preservation of ethno and gastro-oenological peculiarities of rural areas - tourism professionals, ethnologists, oenologists, chefs, waiters, pastry chefs, historians, and others
- organize trainings for the local community on the importance and need to preserve the intangible heritage of rural areas
- organize education programs for preschool and school age
- to involve the tourism sector more strongly in the design of tourism-recognizable and sustainable tourism products and heritage-based events
- tradition and heritage must become the basis for the preservation and sustainable development of rural areas from destruction - direct (redevelopment) or indirect (globalization, oblivion, disinterest).

In order to be able to draw the right conclusions, the authors conducted a survey of the attitudes of the local population about the importance of a tourist event based on gastronomy as an example of intangible heritage of the rural area of Grobnišćina.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The main purpose of empirical part of present research was to evaluate gastronomic festival, as an example of rural gastronomic heritage event. In particular, the study aimed to: (a) examine demographic profile of festival's visitors, (b) measure visitors' perceptions of festival attributes, and special features, (c) determine the level of visitors' satisfaction, and (d) evaluate visitors' behavioural intentions.

Primary data was gathered for the purpose of our research with the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed based on the literature review (Bitner 1992; Baker and Crompton 2000; Xie 2004; Lee et al. 2008; Marković et al. 2018; Cudny et al. 2021). Measures were modified in order to meet the context of present research.

The questionnaire incorporates four sections. First section aims to measure perceptions of festival attributes. It includes 20 items, relating to festival organization, festival site, and festival programmes, and activities and products. Items were measured with scale ranging from "very poor" (as 1) to "excellent" (as 5). Second section comprises three items for measuring festival's special features, namely festival's importance as tourism event, festival's role in promoting local gastronomic heritage, and festival's authenticity. These items were rated using scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (as 1) to "strongly agree" (as 5). Third section measures visitors' satisfaction and behavioural intentions



with three items. Items relate to overall satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth, and revisit intention. The level of agreement with these items ranged from “strongly disagree” (as 1) to “strongly agree” (as 5). Finally, fourth section of the questionnaire was designed to measure respondents’ demographic profile: gender, age, level of education, number of previous visits, number of accompanying persons, and purpose of visit.

The Polenta and Cheese festival served as the site for collecting primary data. Festival takes place in town of Grobnik, in vicinity of Rijeka (Croatia). Thus, the target population in present research is festival’s visitors. Data collection resulted with a total of 132 usable questionnaires. To answer research questions and meet research objectives, data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis.

Research hypotheses were formulated based on the above-stated starting points:

H1: Visitors of gastronomic heritage event have positive perceptions of the event.

H2: Visitors of gastronomic heritage event are very satisfied with the visit to the destination and the tourist event.

H3: Visitors of gastronomic heritage event have positive behavioural intentions toward the event.

H4: Tourist events based on gastronomic heritage are extremely important for the promotion and recognizability of the destination in the tourist market.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

Research results are reported as follows. Firstly, sample structure is described. Next, respondents’ perceptions of festival attributes are presented. Finally, respondents’ level of satisfaction and behavioural intentions are shown.

### 5.1. Sample characteristics

Table 2 presents demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 2. Respondents’ structure

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	21.2
	Female	104	78.8
Age	18 and less	2	1.5
	19 – 25	8	6.1
	26 – 39	51	38.6
	40 – 64	64	48.5
	65 and above	7	5.3
Level of education	Secondary school	69	52.3

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
	College	21	15.9
	University	42	31.8
Number of previous visits	First time	8	6.1
	1 to 2 times	17	12.9
	3 and more times	107	81.1
Purpose of visit*	Entertainment	96	72.7
	Tradition/heritage	96	72.7
	Gastronomy	77	58.3
	Socialization	101	76.5
Number of accompanying persons	Alone	1	0.8
	2 persons	20	15.2
	3 to 5 persons	66	50.0
	More than 5 persons	45	34.1

Note: \* - possible multiple answers.

Source: Authors' research

As noted in Table 2, out of 132 respondents, the majority were female (78.8 per cent). More than half of the respondents were above 40 years of age (53.8 per cent), and completed secondary level of education (52.3 per cent).

Respondents' visit characteristics indicated that sample consisted predominantly of festival's repeated visitors (94 per cent). Socialization was reported as the major reason for attending the festival (76.5 per cent), followed by entertainment and tradition/heritage purposes (72.7 per cent each). Most respondents were accompanied, visiting the festival in a group of 3 to 5 people (50 per cent) or more than 5 people (34.1 per cent), indicating that this festival caters to socialization with family members and friends.

## 5.2. Visitors' perceptions of festival attributes

The mean scores of festival attributes representing respondents' perceptions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. **Descriptive statistics for festival attributes**

Festival attributes	Mean	Standard deviation
Programmes and activities for all ages	4.26	0.797
Entertainment	4.43	0.723
Programmes and activities related to local tradition and heritage	4.54	0.714
Food and refreshments diversity	4.09	0.945
Food and refreshments quality	4.44	0.754
Availability of local products	4.27	0.818
Variety of festival souvenirs	3.73	1.132
Feeling of safety	4.86	0.366

Festival attributes	Mean	Standard deviation
Affordable prices	4.29	0.825
Parking lots	4.08	1.143
Restroom facilities	3.42	1.242
Signs for site directions	3.91	1.094
Available information (e. g. festival programme, media information)	4.34	0.855
Access to festival site	4.77	0.522
Cleanliness of festival site	4.43	0.701
Acceptable crowd level	4.64	0.596
Courteous an friendly staff	4.67	0.588
Staff's willingness to help visitors	4.55	0.755
Festival atmosphere	4.78	0.484
Overall festival evaluation	4.55	0.646

Note: mean scores range from 1 ("very poor") to 5 ("excellent")

Source: Authors' research

Mean scores for festival attributes ranged between 3.42 and 4.86. The lowest score was given to restroom facilities, and the highest score was appointed to feeling of safety. Overall, respondents positively perceived most festival attributes (mean scores 4 and above). In addition, respondents were neutral regarding one attribute ("restroom facilities"). None of the attributes was evaluated negatively. What is more, overall mean score for festival evaluation was also high. These results indicate visitors' moderate to very high perceptions of the festival.

Table 4. **Descriptive statistics for visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions**

Items	Mean	Standard deviation
I am satisfied with my visit to this Festival.	4.53	0.682
I plan to visit this Festival again.	4.73	0.628
I will recommend this Festival to others.	4.73	0.640

Note: mean scores range from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree")

Source: Authors' research

Mean scores for both, visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions are very high. Overall, these results show that respondents were highly satisfied with their visit to the Festival. In addition, they displayed very positive behavioural intentions toward the festival.

Next, mean scores for festival's special features are shown.

Table 5. **Descriptive statistics for festival's special features**

Items	Mean	Standard deviation
Festival is important tourism event in Grobnik destination.	4.92	0.429
Festival promotes local gastronomic heritage.	4.86	0.475
Festival represents authentic tourism event.	4.82	0.522

Note: mean scores range from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”)  
 Source: Authors’ research

Respondents evaluated festival’s special features with very high mean scores. These results indicate that festival is perceived as very important local tourism event that promotes local gastronomic heritage and represents authenticity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The focus of this research was on evaluation of gastronomic heritage event in rural destination from visitors’ perspective. Using quantitative approach, visitors’ perceptions regarding festival attributes and festival special features were measured, and satisfaction levels and behavioural intentions were empirically examined. Thus, research questions were answered, objectives achieved, and hypotheses tested.

Polenta and Cheese Festival served as the site for conducting empirical research. This event is important factor in creating sustainable tourism offer in Grobnik as rural tourism destination. It serves as a means for preserving intangible heritage of the area, by promoting local gastronomy and disseminating knowledge on younger generations.

Research findings clearly indicate that gastronomic heritage festival predominantly attracts repeated visitors, who attend the festival for different purposes (socialization, entertainment, tradition/heritage, gastronomy), in a group of 3 or more people. In addition, they demonstrated positive perceptions toward the event. Thus, hypothesis H1 is supported. Specifically, visitors of gastronomic festival highly value feeling of safety, festival’s atmosphere, site, and staff friendliness. On the other hand, restroom facilities, variety of festival souvenirs, and availability of signs for site directions were evaluated with the lowest scores, although these scores were still on the upper range of the evaluating scale, indicating positive visitors’ perceptions regarding these festival attributes, as well. Thus, festival’s attributes that visitors valued the highest can be grouped in three main festival’s features: festival’s site (e. g., atmosphere, access, crowd level), festival’s organization (e. g. safety, staff, information, parking lots), and festival programmes, activities and products (e.g. local products, food, refreshments, traditional activities, souvenirs).

In addition, visitors were highly satisfied with the entire event, and displayed positive behavioural intentions toward the festival. They are very likely to spread positive word-of-mouth and to become festival’s repeated visitors. Hence, the hypotheses H2 and H3 are confirmed. What is more, according to the results, festival is perceived as very important local tourism event that promotes local gastronomic heritage and represents authenticity. These results support the hypothesis H4.

Previously stated indicates quite clearly that gastronomic heritage events can add value to tourist experience and be appealing element of rural destinations. They contribute to differentiation of the destination, thus enhancing destination's competitiveness. In addition, gastronomic heritage festivals can be particularly important for sustainable development of rural destinations with limited number of tourist resources.

This study contributes to both academics and practitioners. It extends the literature of heritage tourism events by exploring visitors' perceptions of gastronomic festival as an example of rural gastronomic heritage event. In addition, it provides event managers a better understanding of visitors' reactions to gastronomic heritage festival that attracts local visitors and has potential to attract nonlocal visitors. By understanding how visitors perceive festival's attributes, event managers and local community decision makers would be able to create better designed programmes and offerings, thus enhancing visitor satisfaction, and consequently positive behavioural intentions.

Based on the results of the conducted research, the authors propose that additional promotion of the intangible heritage of rural areas of the Republic of Croatia should be ensured with the design of heritage elements that can be sustainably included in the tourism product. It is extremely important that the tourist product of rural areas is fully included in the tourist product of the Republic of Croatia and that this element of the tourist offer of the Republic of Croatia is no longer neglected or underused.

The authors believe that it is necessary, for further sustainable development of tourism in rural areas and the economic development of rural areas, to ensure continuous market research, but also observe the views of the local community on the state of tourism and demand in rural areas to avoid potential gaps between local communities and tourists. By applying international and devising our own quality criteria, the tourist offer will ensure the strengthening of the recognisability of the rural area, the preservation of local heritage and the creation of new economic benefits for the entire community.

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## **THE ROLE OF HERITAGE IN CREATING TOURISM EVENTS IN RURAL DESTINATION**

**Danijel Drpić**  
**Sanja Raspor Janković**  
**Maja Vukelić**

### **Abstract**

Contemporary tourist flows and changes in travel motives and tourist demands for new and innovative products pose a demanding task for destination management in designing a tourist product that will enable long-term sustainability of the tourist offer and strengthen the visibility of rural destinations in the tourism market. The rural tourist destination is facing the challenge of ensuring economic and social development, and the risk of permanent disruption of the existing resource base and the disappearance of the traditional way of life and intangible heritage nurtured through the centuries. Preservation of intangible heritage is possible through tourist valorisation while respecting the postulates of sustainable development. The combination of tourism and heritage forms a unique backbone for achieving the recognizability of the destination on the market and preserving the intangible heritage for future generations. Sustainable development with balanced tourism development represents the only possible and desirable developmental direction of the rural area of Grobnišćina and provides the opportunity to preserve the cultural and historical features of the area while preserving the rich intangible heritage. Grobnišćina as a tourist destination has so far not significantly participated in the tourist product of the Republic of Croatia, but numerous elements of intangible heritage provide the opportunity to significantly increase the competitiveness of the destination. The main purpose of present research is to stress the role of intangible heritage in creating sustainable tourism product. In particular, this paper focuses on gastronomic heritage. For this purpose, gastronomic festival as an example of rural gastronomic heritage event was evaluated from visitors' perspective. The results show visitors' positive perceptions of most festivals attributes, as well as very high level of satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions toward festival.

**Key words:** gastronomy, heritage, heritage-based tourism events, sustainability, rural destination

**Danijel Drpić**  
Asistent  
Veleučilište u Rijeci  
Trpimirova 2/V, 51000 Rijeka, Hrvatska  
E-mail: ddrpic@veleri.hr

**Sanja Raspor Janković**  
Profesorica visoke škole  
Veleučilište u Rijeci  
Trpimirova 2/V, 51000 Rijeka, Hrvatska  
E-mail: sraspor@veleri.hr

**Maja Vukelić**  
Studentica  
Veleučilište u Rijeci  
Trpimirova 2/V, 51000 Rijeka, Hrvatska  
E-mail: mvukelic@veleri.hr

## NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE NERETVA DELTA IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

**Svjetlana Stanić-Koštroman**  
**Nevenko Herceg**  
**Ana Buljubašić**

### **Abstract**

Due to its biological, geological and landscape diversity, the Neretva Delta is a very important area in terms of nature protection. This area includes the largest and most valuable remnants of Mediterranean wetlands, ecosystems whose areas in Europe have been significantly reduced in recent decades. The Delta covers an area of 20,000 ha, of which about 8,000 ha of the upper part of the valley is located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the lower part of the valley, which covers an area of about 12,000 ha, is located in Croatia. Due to the natural heritage, a large part of the Neretva Delta on both sides of the border is protected at the national level, in the category of nature park (Hutovo blato), special ornithological (Prud, Orepak, Pod Gredom, Modro oko and lake Desne, Kuti) and ornithological-ichthyological reserve (Neretva estuary), as well as an important landscape (Predolac-Šibenica). In addition, these habitats are also wetlands of international importance, protected by the Ramsar Convention. Protected areas of the lower Neretva River Basin are also recognizable on a large scale as very attractive tourist destinations, which is a comparative advantage for the development and improvement of sustainable tourism activities, and thus for sustainable development of local communities. The aim of this paper is to consider the possibilities of improving the tourist valorisation of natural resources of protected areas in the Neretva Valley, their tourist visibility and competitiveness, as a strategic point of nature protection and driver of economic development in this area.

**Keywords:** Neretva Valley, rural tourism, nature protection

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Neretva is the largest river in the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea basin, whose cross-border catchment area connects two countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. The Neretva springs on the north-western slopes of the Gredelj Mountain, where it originates from five springs (at 1,340-1,200 meters above sea level), including four permanent springs and one occasional one. The main stream is formed by merging small streams at an altitude of 1,050 meters, southeast of the settlement of Luka (Agency for Watershed of the Adriatic Sea 2021). The main features of the Neretva basin are: large area and heterogeneity of the basin, large number of tributaries, strong karst impact on the entire basin with all the specific features of karst areas and a great diversity of habitats, primarily aquatic and wetland ecosystems. Particularly valuable wetland ecosystems are located in the lower part of the Neretva River, where this river in the last thirty kilometres of its course expands into the alluvial delta, before the confluence with the Adriatic Sea (Mateljak and Matić 2011). The strong mountainous character of the upper course of the river, which flows through Bosnia and Herzegovina, during high waters, causes the influx of large amounts of nutrients and organic substrate, which settle downstream, creating very fertile soil in the Neretva Valley.

The Neretva Delta is the only real delta and also the largest estuary in this part of the Adriatic coast. It covers an area of about 20,000 ha (Mateljak and Matić 2011) and



contains the largest and most valuable remains of Mediterranean wetlands with preserved coastal lagoons and is one of the few remaining in Europe. Although wetland habitats have been significantly reduced in recent decades, and the wetland delta has been largely transformed into a rich agricultural area, large areas of natural wetland habitats are still preserved. Due to its exceptional natural heritage, a large part of the Neretva Delta on both sides of the border is protected nationally and internationally. About 8,000 ha of the upper part of the valley, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is protected at the national level, in the category of nature park Hutovo blato. The lower part of the valley, which covers an area of about 12,000 ha, located in Croatia contains several protected areas:

- special ornithological reserves: Prud, Orepak, Pod Gredom, Modro oko and lake Desne, Kuti,
- ornithological-ichthyological reserve: Neretva estuary and
- important landscape: Predolac-Šibenica.

In addition, these habitats are also wetlands of international importance, protected by the Ramsar Convention. The Neretva Delta is one of the five areas in Croatia included in the Ramsar List. As the largest reed complex in Croatia, the entire Neretva Delta area is important as a resting place during the migration of birds to Africa, as well as for wintering bird populations from northeastern and central Europe. Over 150 bird species regularly occur in the area, and over 300 species have been recorded. Out of the total number, 65 of them are considered the target species of the Neretva Delta ecological network area. The wider area of the Neretva Delta is part of the ecological network of the Republic of Croatia, both as an area of conservation important for birds and as an area important for species and habitat types (Portal zaštita prirode Dubravačko - neretvanske županije)

## **2. NATURAL HERITAGE OF NATURE PARK HUTOVO BLATO**

Hutovo Blato is a unique sub-Mediterranean wetland, located in the Neretva Delta, in the southeast of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This karst green beauty covers an area of 7,824 ha, which administratively belongs to the Herzegovina-Neretva County, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the beauty of the landscape, this area is characterized by a wealth of different aquatic ecosystems: wetlands, lakes, and rivers, which are habitats of many endangered and endemic species. Due to its exceptional natural values, Hutovo Blato is protected nationally and internationally.

### **2.1. Geography**

Hutovo Blato Nature Park is located in the Dinaric Karst area in southeastern Herzegovina. It is surrounded by cruciform massifs of hills and karst fields with typical geological forms characteristic of karst. In terms of geology and structure, the area of Hutovo Blato belongs to the Adriatic carbonate platform. The area of the Nature Park is mostly (51.3%) flat terrain. The plain part includes two valleys (depressions): Svitavsko Blato and Hutovsko Blato, separated from each other by the limestone ridge, Ostrovo. The low parts of the Svitava Depression have an altitude of 1.5 to 3.5 meters, while the altitude of Hutovo Blato ranges from -1.5 to 2.5 meters.

The Nature Park consists of two separate geomorphological units: Deransko area or Gornje Blato and Svitavsko area or Donje Blato. Gornje Blato consists of six natural lakes: Deransko, Orah, Radanovac, Drijen, Jelim and Škrka interconnected by ravines, while Donje Blato, i.e. Lake Svitava during the 60s of the 20th century was turned into an accumulation lake for the needs of the reversible hydroelectric power plant "Čapljina".

## **2.2. Hydrology and aquatic ecosystems**

Located in the Dinaric Karst area of south-eastern Herzegovina, the Hutovo Blato has a richly developed underground hydrological network. Surface runoff in the karst area is generally less pronounced.

The wetland habitats of Hutovo Blato are under the direct influence of two hydrological systems: the river system of Trebišnjica (with Bregava) and the Neretva River. The waters of this area originate from the immediate catchment of Hutovo Blato, but also from waters of the Neretva River basin. In addition, the waters in Hutovo Blato flows from springs in the southern and south-western part of the Svitava depression, as well as in the southern, eastern, and north-western part of the Deran Depression. Waters from the Bregava River supply Hutovo Blato with colder water, which is of great importance for the survival of certain endemic species in the northern part of Nature Park. There are more than 70 springs in the area of Hutovo Blato, most of which occur occasionally, during periods of high-water levels. The most important springs are: Škrka, Jamica, Kućine Jelim, Drijen, Orah and Babino Oko.

The Krupa River is the main watercourse of the Hutovo Blato, which drains the waters of Gornje Blato and Lake Svitava into the Neretva River. The Krupa River has no real source but flows from Lake Deran. The length of Krupa is 9 km, and its average depth is about 5 meters. The entire length of the riverbed is below sea level. As a result, during high levels and high water flow, the Neretva River suppresses the Krupa. Thus, in addition to the normal flow: from the place of origin to the mouth, the Krupa flows in the opposite direction: from the mouth to Lake Deran, which makes it a unique river in Europe.

Waters of Hutovo Blato have a good chemical and ecological status. However, insufficient groundwater quantities can pose a potential danger to the aquatic ecosystems of Hutovo Blato. Changes in the water regime are related to the construction of hydropower systems. Namely, with the construction of a number of facilities in the Neretva riverbed since 1953, and then in the Trebišnjica Basin, the ecological system of this area is quite burdened. Inadequate regime of operation of hydropower systems may cause a further reduction in the water quantities in the area of Hutovo Blato in the period of low waters and the penetration of salt water. Reducing the inflow of water in Lake Deran also leads to drying of wetland vegetation and its deposition, and consequent overgrowing of ravines and lakes and can affect the tourist potential of this area.

## **2.3. Biodiversity**

Due to favourable ecological factors and the influence of the Mediterranean climate, the area of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park has a very diverse vegetation cover. The flora of the Nature Park consists of more than 700 species of plants, and the vegetation cover consists of 45 communities that are classified into 16 vegetation classes. Some of these communities, due to the presence of rare and endangered plant species, specific orographic-edaphic and other ecological conditions, can be marked as rare and endangered communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A special scientific value of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park is the description of two newly discovered communities, described by Professor Nenad Jasprica in 2009 from this area. The plant cover in the Nature Park can be divided into four types of vegetation: aquatic, hygrophytic, meadow and forest. Hygrophytic and aquatic communities are dominant in this area, while elements of maquis, characteristic for the Sub Mediterranean area, are developed on the surrounding hills (Jasprica and Carić 2002, Jasprica et al. 2003).

Fauna of Hutovo Blato Nature Park is very diverse. A special feature of this area is the numerous species of bird fauna and endemic fish species, for which this wetland area is a temporary or permanent habitat. The Hutovo Blato is located on one of the four migratory routes of birds from Northern and Central Europe to Asia and Africa. With favourable abiotic factors (climate, geographical position, water, soil, etc.) and biotic conditions (vegetation, microfauna and macrofauna, etc.), birds in the Hutovo Blato find plenty of food, silence and peace to rest. Therefore, this area since ancient times has been recognized as an important habitat for wetland birds. The diverse water habitats of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park also provide stable conditions for numerous fish populations (Glamuzina et al. 2001). Species are critical for a healthy planet, but growing pressures from human activities are putting them at risk of extinction (Herceg et al. 2018). The Red List of Endangered Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the most comprehensive list of the world's conservation status, includes 36 species that inhabit the Hutovo Blato, which are endangered globally or regionally according to the IUCN. Nearly 200 species of invertebrates and vertebrates of Hutovo Blato are protected by the annexes of international conventions and directives (i.e. Bern Convention<sup>1</sup>, Birds Directive<sup>2</sup>, Habitats Directive<sup>3</sup>), which indicates the value of this relatively small area on a global scale.

#### **2.4. Protection of the natural heritage of Hutovo Blato**

The Hutovo Blato as habitat for many plant and animal species has been mentioned since ancient times. After World War II, Hutovo Blato was protected solely as an elite hunting ground. The history of this place as a protected area of nature begins from 1954, when the ornitho-fauna reserve "Hutovo Blato" was established. Within the ornitho-faunal reserve in 1959, a strict bird reserve Škrka was isolated. Because of its international importance, "Hutovo Blato" was included in the List of the Wetlands of International Importance in 1971, and in 1980 it was included in the International Project for

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<sup>1</sup> Convention on the Conservation of the European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, Bern, 1982

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds

<sup>3</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

Mediterranean Wetland Protection. As a special hunting ground, Hutovo Blato officially existed all the way until 1995, when it was declared a Nature Park, due to its natural values. The International Council for Bird Protection (ICBP) included Hutovo Blato in 1998 in the list of internationally important bird habitats. Then, in 2001, it was inscribed on the list of the Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention methodology and registered at the UNESCO Directorate in Paris. Thus, Hutovo Blato Nature Park is confirmed as a truly special area of great national and international importance (Pletikapić et al. 2014).

#### **2.4.1. National importance**

The area of Hutovo Blato is the last remnant of a wetland habitat in the Neretva River basin in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a well-known bird reserve for migratory birds in this area. It is one of the two nature parks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with the Blidinje Nature Park, also located in the Herzegovina-Neretva County. According to the Law on Nature Protection of the Federation of BiH (Official Gazette of FB&H, no. 33/03), the nature park is a protected area in which the long-term interaction of man and nature has produced distinctive ecological, biological, cultural, and aesthetic values, and where the maintenance of that relationship is necessary in order to preserve these values (Herceg et al. 2018).

#### **2.4.2. Hutovo Blato as a Ramsar Site**

The Hutovo Blato Nature Park was included as Ramsar area number 1105 on 24 September 2001. Located near the lower reaches of the Neretva River, the Site comprises swamps, lakes, wet meadows, and riverine forests. These provide favourable conditions for many wetland species, particularly of birds and fish, several of which are internationally threatened.

#### **2.4.3. Hutovo Blato as a IBAs**

The International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) enlisted Hutovo Blato as an internationally important bird habitat in 1998. Within IBA, two wetland-dependent threatened bird species have been recognized which regularly appear in Hutovo Blato in significant numbers: ferruginous duck and pygmy cormorant.

The ferruginous duck is a species threatened by the degradation and destruction of its favoured habitats by anthropogenic causes which are very wide and varied including impoundment, drainage, pollution, and mismanagement.

The pygmy cormorant is a species with habitats strongly affected by human actions. Threats include the drainage and serious degradation of wetlands and their associated woodland, water pollution, disturbance, and poaching as well as drowning in fishing nets.

#### **2.4.4. Hutovo Blato as a potential Natura 2000 site**

The Natura 2000 ecological network is the basis of European nature conservation policy. It came to life in 1992 when EU governments adopted legislation to conserve the most endangered habitats and species in Europe, with the adoption of the Habitats Directive, which complements the previously adopted the Birds Directive (Herceg et al. 2018).

In 2007, the Natura 2000 implementation project was launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As part of the project "Support to the Implementation of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (EuropeAid / 131488 / C / SER / BA), a potential Natura 2000 area for B&H were identified. One of them is also the Hutovo Blato Nature Park.

### **3. INTEGRATING NATURAL HERITAGE INTO THE TOURISM SECTOR: GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE - HUTOVO BLATO AQUA PATH**

The Aqua Path is a unique tourist and educational offer of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, which allows visitors to enjoy the natural benefits of this protected sub-Mediterranean wetland. The Hutovo Blato Aqua Path is a water route that shows the true natural values and beauties of this area. With more than 70 occasionally or permanently active springs and six lakes: Deransko, Jelim, Drijen, Orah, Škrka and Svitava, which are connected by canals and ravines, together with the Krupa River, Hutovo Blato Nature Park offers great diversity and richness of water landscapes, which can rarely be seen and experienced anywhere. Sailing on the Krupa River, and a number of lakes: Deransko, Drijen, Orah, as well as canals and ravines that connect them, the Aqua Path provides a view of the untouched richness and diversity of the Hutovo Blato wetland, which is interesting and significant from ornithological, ichthyological, scientific, ecological and tourist point of view.

This route starts in Karaotok, where the gathering place and boarding of boats on the plateau of the pier. On the hill near the pier, the Motel Park is located, hidden in a beautiful coniferous forest. The Motel has authentic ambiance with spacious yard and playground for children. Gastronomy is a special feature of the Motel Park, with traditional and indigenous dishes, particularly local meals from Hutovo Blato, like brudet (fish stew), spit-roasted eel, grilled carp, meals with venison, and the like. The motel offers accommodation, reception services, cafe restaurant, salon, central restaurant, two terraces and summer garden.

After boarding the boats, visitors with expert guidance sail from the Karaotok through the Kanal Sunca to the Krupa River, and then by river to and across Deransko Lake. Through untouched nature of Bjelinska and Deranska Rječina, the road leads further to the lake pearls: Drijen and Orah, deep lakes, supplied with cold water of the Bregava River by underground springs. After a rest and refreshment on a landscaped picnic area on the shore, in the hilly surroundings of Lake Drijen, visitors return by the same Aqua Path to the Karaotok. The whole ride in both directions takes about three hours, and during it, visitors can enjoy not only the natural beauty but also the unique local specialties and drinks.

#### **3.1. The Kanal Sunca**

The Kanal Sunca (The Sun Channel) is a natural waterway that was deepened and widened in the 1980s for navigability. It is 1100 meters long, and it connects the Karaotok with the Krupa River. The ride through the Kanal Sunca provides a unique impression of the surrounding natural habitats, through which it passes. Dense

overgrowth of wetland vegetation, which are dominated by plant species such as reeds, bulrushes, sedges and rushes, is a habitat for many species of birds and provides protection for spawning fish and shelter for many insects. Wetland plants, or hydrophytic "water loving" vegetation, are those plants which have adapted to growing in the low-oxygen (anaerobic) conditions associated with prolonged saturation or flooding. Due to intensively developed vegetation, wetlands are highly productive ecosystems and habitats of great biodiversity (Herceg et al. 2018). Diverse vegetation, different land habitats and great diversity and affluence of freshwater habitats of the Hutovo Blato provide great living conditions for dragonflies. Dragonflies spend the first stage of their life cycle in the water, so they are very sensitive to the pollution, drainage and devastation of water habitats and wetland vegetation. Since adult dragonflies need different land habitats and vegetation for their stages of maturing, hunting and breeding, these insects are very dependent on waterways, grasslands and forest. The fauna of dragonflies of the Hutovo Blato consists of 43 species, which is 68 % of the dragonfly fauna of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kulijer 2015). This area is a habitat for two endangered European species: the bladetail and the ornate bluet, protected by the Habitats Directive.

Along this part of the Aqua Path, from the Karaotok to the Krupa River, there are also protected Natura 2000 habitats. Hutovo Blato is an area of exceptional biodiversity, with numerous habitat types. Among the mentioned habitats, there are also types of habitats of European importance (Natura 2000 habitats), based on which the Hutovo Blato Nature Park was included in the Draft of ecological network Natura 2000 areas for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two of these Natura 2000 habitats are endangered because they are disappearing in Europe and have been identified as priority habitats. Special protection and management rules apply to them, and these habitats are: Mediterranean temporary ponds and Alluvial forests with black alder and European ash (Skoberne 2015).

### **3.2. The Krupa River**

The Krupa River is the main watercourse of the Hutovo Blato, which connects wetland ecosystems with the lower course of the Neretva River. Krupa does not have its own source, but represented the flow of Lake Deran, and has specific physico-chemical and biological characteristics in relation to other streams. The Krupa River depth varies significantly (1-5 m), as well as width ranges (10-30 m). The water level of the Krupa fluctuates from 89 cm to 208 cm.

According to a legend that is of biblical provenance, the origin of the Krupa River is related to St. Peter. According to popular belief, St. Peter had a residence in this area, and even today, he often visits it. It is believed that the Hutovo Blato at that time was densely overgrown with oak forest, and St. Peter could cross it through the oak canopy, without touching the ground. The legend about the origin of the Krupa River is related to an event near the village of Jelim, when St. Peter asked a mother to give him a child. The mother did not want to separate from the child, and began to run away. It was in vain for the mother to flee, because according to the legend, St. Peter prophesied that the water, today's the Krupa River, would flow after the mother. For a long time, the unfortunate woman ran away from the water. When she ran out of strength, the waters of the Krupa River reached her and took her away, and the child came to the saint. The

place is believed to be located near the confluence of the Krupa and Neretva rivers, where Krupa is the deepest today (Pletikapić et al. 2014).

The bottom of the river is covered with algae and higher aquatic plants. In the second half of the course, the river is regulated by the construction of an embankment, while the bank of the upper part is overgrown with reeds and sedges. Ten fish species are recorded in the Krupa River, five of which are endemic. This river is a major route for daily and seasonal migrations of fish species in Hutovo Blato.

### **3.3. The Deran Lake**

With an area of 297 ha, Deran Lake is the largest and richest among all water bodies of Gornje Blato. It is a shallow lake, whose depth varies from 20-100 cm. During the summer, Deran Lake is reduced to about a third of its surface. Water temperature fluctuates between 10°C in winter to 21°C during summer. In places of slower water flow, the bottom of Deran Lake is covered with macroalgae, creating places favourable for the growth of fry. In the middle part and parts with faster water flow, there is no algae cover.

Large areas of Deran Lake are overgrown with white water lilies and yellow pond lilies, creating an idyllic image especially during the flowering of these species. The white water lily is a plant that is rooted in the mud, while the leaves and flowers float on the surface. Because of the beautiful white flowers, they are also called the white swamp decorations. The yellow pond lily also has large, floating, heart-shaped leaves and floating yellow flowers. It is a vulnerable species (VU), listed on the Red List of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Škrijelj 2013). The entire shore is overgrown with thick vegetation, common reed and sedge, which create shelter for various bird fauna. The ornitofauna of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park is a special natural asset of this area. The most species of birds have been recorded during the autumn and spring migration, but a large number of species stay here for wintering and nesting. More than 160 bird species from 39 families have been recorded in the area of Hutovo Blato Nature Park. Almost all bird species (95%) that inhabit this area are under protection under international conventions and directives. According to the seasonal status, the majority of birds, i.e., 53 species, belong to wintering birds. During the winter bird migration, several thousand specimens of various bird species reside at the Hutovo Blato. Due to favourable climate conditions and abundance of food, a certain number of birds stay in this area throughout the year, nesting and rearing their young. Some of these species are little egret, grey heron, purple heron, squacco heron, black-crowned night heron, mallard and other species. Two wetland-dependent threatened bird species that regularly appear in the Hutovo Blato in significant numbers are ferruginous duck and pygmy cormorant (Pletikapić et al. 2014).

The Lake Deran is the richest in fish in the Hutovo Blato. Seventeen fish species have been recorded in the lake, nine of which are endemic. In a major part of the lake, cyprinid species are dominant, while endemic species can be found in border areas, with lower water temperatures.

### **3.4. Lakes Drijen and Orah**

Lakes Drijen and Orah are deep lakes that belong to the Gornje Blato. The depth of Drijen Lake at location Njukića Đaje is 14 m, and the depth of Orah Lake is up to 9 m. These lakes are with stable temperatures (13 °-13.5 °C) and rocky bottom that is below sea level.

Due to its natural features and numerous endemic species of ichthyofauna, including the Neretvian roach for which this area is an important hatchery, lakes Drijen and Orah belong to the zone of strict protection in Hutovo Blato Nature Park. The Neretva roach is species distributed only in the Adriatic Sea watershed of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (Tutman et al. 2018). The most individuals of this species are concentrated in lakes and streams characterized by specific living conditions (temperatures between 13 ° and 15.2 °C), which are directly influenced by numerous sources. In the Hutovo Blato this species is common, with relatively stable populations. However, a number of factors threaten the Neretva roach, such as the loss of hatcheries and nurseries due to reduced water capacity. Restricted movements that prevent linkage of local population to nearby habitats also threaten those populations. Hence, the Neretva roach is listed as endangered (EN) in the Red List of Fauna of Federation of B&H Croatia is a strictly protected species (Škrijelj 2013).

The exceptional diversity of aquatic habitats: springs, streams, stagnant and groundwater, as well as the proximity of marine ecosystems has led to a great ichthyofaunal diversity in the Hutovo Blato, which was previously a traditional fishing area (Glamuzina et al. 2001). The area of the Park is a significant fish hatchery in the Neretva River Basin, among which are numerous endemic species.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The rich natural and cultural heritage of the Neretva Delta is a good basis for diversifying the tourist offer of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and southern Dalmatia, through the promotion of alternative forms of tourism, such as eco-cultural tourism. Namely, cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing segments in the tourism sector and according to the World Tourism Organization accounts for about 40% of all tourist trips. In addition, the negative consequences of mass tourism, in the form of new social problems, disturbance of ecological balance, outflow of profits to economically developed countries and the extinction of traditional cultures, contribute to the symbiosis of alternatives to mass tourism, such as ecotourism and cultural tourism, which are in the function of sustainable development, especially in developing countries. Eco-cultural tourism includes a cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary approach and model for designing new tourism products and routes and can ensure sustainable development and sustainability of protected areas of the Neretva Delta, local community development and reduction of negative demographic trends in rural areas with optimal management of natural and cultural resources.

Although agriculture is currently the most developed economic branch in the Neretva Delta, the tendency to develop tourism and its specialized branches is becoming more and more pronounced. The current situation indicates an underdeveloped tourism



development strategy, because certain activities are developed independently of each other and as such do not reach their full potential. Therefore, the Neretva Delta needs to be viewed as not only a unique biological, but also a unique tourist entity through regional connections and cooperation. In order for this area to become an attractive, sustainable, smart and inclusive destination, it is necessary to determine the carrying capacity of the environment and nature protection measures areas in the Delta, especially those with endangered and rare species and habitats. In order to attract more tourists to this area, it is necessary to improve the appropriate infrastructure, which is in the function of nature protection and diversification of tourist offer. In addition, it is necessary to improve cooperation between individual branches of tourism, i.e. connect not only rich natural and cultural heritage, but also autochthonous gastronomy, adventure tourism and to promote and brand the Neretva Delta as sustainable tourist destination.

A good example of connecting various forms of tourism and regional cross-border cooperation is the Hutovo Blato Aqua Path. It is a new tourist offer of the Nature Park, an educational trail that allows visitors to experience a world of aquatic habitats and the unique flora and fauna of the sub-Mediterranean wetland. The Aqua Path is an example of sustainable tourism activities and integrated management in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, because it is part of a common tourism product, the so-called blue pass. Namely, the blue pass connects the natural and cultural-historical heritage not only of the Hutovo Blato, but also the aquarium and historical heritage of Dubrovnik, Boka and Mostar with the Neretva River. The purpose of the blue pass is to promote aquatic biodiversity and cultural heritage, with the aim of preserving nature, but also attracting more tourists to this area, and presents an example of good practice in the context of symbiosis of tourism and nature protection.

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## **NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE NERETVA DELTA IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

### **Abstract**

Due to its biological, geological and landscape diversity, the Neretva Delta is a very important area in terms of nature protection. This area includes the largest and most valuable remnants of Mediterranean wetlands, ecosystems whose areas in Europe have been significantly reduced in recent decades. The Delta covers an area of 20,000 ha, of which about 8,000 ha of the upper part of the valley is located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the lower part of the valley, which covers an area of about 12,000 ha, is located in Croatia. Due to the natural heritage, a large part of the Neretva Delta on both sides of the border is protected at the national level, in the category of nature park (Hutovo blato), special ornithological (Prud, Orepak, Pod Gredom, Modro oko and lake Desne, Kuti) and ornithological-ichthyological reserve (Neretva estuary), as well as an important landscape (Predolac-Šibenica). In addition, these habitats are also wetlands of international importance, protected by the Ramsar Convention. Protected areas of the lower Neretva River Basin are also recognizable on a large scale as very attractive tourist destinations, which is a comparative advantage for the development and improvement of sustainable tourism activities, and thus for sustainable development of local communities. The aim of this paper is to consider the possibilities of improving the tourist valorisation of natural resources of protected areas in the Neretva Valley, their tourist visibility and competitiveness, as a strategic point of nature protection and driver of economic development in this area.

**Keywords:** Neretva Valley, rural tourism, nature protection

### **Svjetlana Stanić-Koštroman**

Full Professor  
University of Mostar  
Matice hrvatske bb, 88000 Mostar, B&H

### **Nevenko Herceg**

Full Professor  
University of Mostar  
Matice hrvatske bb, 88000 Mostar, B&H

### **Ana Buljubašić**

Senior Assistant  
University of Mostar  
Matice hrvatske bb, 88000 Mostar, B&H

## **BIBLICAL AND RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LAND AS A BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM**

**Durica Pardon**

### **Abstract**

The land is so deeply set into human soul and represents the central place of the worldview, which shapes human actions. Biblical faith directs the human race toward the need of reshaping our fundamental beliefs about the land and its value, for which we feel a desperate need in our times. In descriptions of the journey of the people of Israel with God, biblical narratives testify the constant human need to seek and discover their own place within time and space. Finding a place to which we belong, looking for our home, where people as a whole and individuals can be safe, where they can enjoy prosperity, where they can experience the meaning of their walk and travel, implies and requires a sense of dwelling, settling, rootedness, a sense of grounding. Just as the universal human longing for security and meaning belongs to the realm of faith, to the same realm of human identity belongs the sense of place and home. The biblical understanding of the land can be a powerful impetus for new steps in rebuilding ties with one's own land, territory and with one's homeland. By our care for the land, for fertile soil, for the territory, for the state, for the economy and politics, and by our caring for the present condition and future fate of the homeland, we make our land desirable for visit of tourists. Caring for the well-being and beauty of our own place of residence is a magnet that attracts other people and makes our place of living valuable and likable to other people for their stay and visit. The biblical theology of the land encourages believers and other inhabitants of an area to develop the religious identity of the "placed people" who love their place of residence. Through daily expressions of respect of our own land, we form an environment of home even for those who just visit our county. Promoting environmental well-being, agriculture, healthy eating and sustainable food farming, based on biblical and religious worldview values, can lead today's rural inhabitants to build a homely atmosphere that does not stem from a greedy desire to make money, but from their love to their homeland. Such an approach opens the door to sustainable and equitable development of the rural communities. We want to share our own satisfaction and the joy of living on our land with the people who come to our places as our guests.

**Key words:** Biblical theology, theology of the land, homeland, ecology, sustainable development, rural tourism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Relationship between people and place is important for individual and community identity. Visiting a particular place, which has special worth for the indigenous inhabitants the visitor can feel and experience the real attachment and build real personal relationships with native population, their feelings and values towards the place and experience their own sense of a place. In the place where attachment of the people to the land of their living exists not just as a feeling, but also as a reality, for unrooted and unsettled people, for travellers and tourists, it is an extraordinary experience, which serves as a glue in attachment to the land of touristic travel.

Bible is a book in which the experience of mobility is described almost on every page. In this article, a special approach to the tourist problematics is taken. On the basis of biblical texts about human attachment to the land a relationship of hosts and tourists to the place of visit is reconsidered. Instead of considering a touristic industry as a dual host-gest relationship, the tripartite: host-gest-place relationship as its main domain of interaction is suggested. In biblical worldview the goal of the entire history of the world,

form its beginning to its end, is to be a place of prosperity, safety, well-being and abiding of God and his people. It is argued that sense of a place brings both to guests and hosts an individual spiritual, religious or even theological, experience of finding the place of rest and peace – a home. As much, the hosts are attached to their place, their home and land, on all levels of their identity, the more of that attachment they can offer in a way of hospitality to the tourists. The love of hosts to own land is fundamental for growth of tourism, but when the land is not loved and respected by its own citizens and by its own people touristic activity is diminished.

Bible itself is a product of agricultural society and its message is addressed to the people whose life was attached to the land and its fertility. Even in contemporary world, the land is the constitutional element of rural character and identity. The land in rural way of life is still existential element. That is why the biblical mind-set still remains actual for people who live today on the land and try make their rural areas attractive for a visit of tourists. For that reason, understanding of the significance of the land in biblical accounts is a crucial while explaining tasks and opportunities for sustainable development of rural tourism.

## **2. SPACE, PLACE, BELONGING AND TOURISM**

### **2.1. There is no place like home**

The sense of belonging is one of the core features of humanity. People live together build a bonds between each other constantly transforming their social relations and relations with the space and a place of their living. Space and place are basic components of the lived world. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between space and place. The word *space* designates an area in which things, physical objects, countries, towns, villages, houses and buildings, as well as living beings, people and nations exist. Space is limitless and unrestricted universe open and free to all kinds of possibilities. Although human beings live in space and time, they are necessarily *located beings*. People, however, do not connect and bond themselves with a *space* but with a *place*. People make living relationships with a particular location on the surface of the earth, with one particular place and in a particular social location (Radley 1992). Relationship between people and place is important for individual and community identity. Place, as distinct from space, provides a profound centre of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties and is part of the complex processes through which individuals and groups define themselves (Convery et. al. 2012). That particular part of space – the place – people usually call their *home*. As the originator of humanistic geography Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, 3) briefly said: “There is no place like home“.

### **2.2. Mutual beneficially of the love of a place**

The feeling of having a home and being at home, one’s own safe and secure place filled with familiarity, comfort, and emotional attachment, is a both intimate and socially shared aspect of the sense of belonging (Lähdesmäki et. al. 2022). The concept of belonging captures the desire and wanting to belong (Probyn 1996, 19) or to become attached to a wide range of interdependent spatialities: homes, neighbourhoods, suburbs,

villages, cities, regions, countries, and even the planet. It is a process that is fuelled by yearning to leave the status of unrootedness and fulfil the need to belong to something real, physical, material, and embodied (Boccagni 2014). The place includes all the environmental, cultural, and social qualities and values of a locality that are assigned to the space by people who live in it. Staying in this particular place which has special worth for the indigenous inhabitants the visitor can feel and experience the real attachment and build real personal relationships. By being a part of the love of a place of native population, their feelings and values towards the place, the tourists, even being there for some time, experience as their own sense of a place (Vanclay 2008). According to that, welcoming of tourists into the homes and places of hosts transforms a host-gest relationship, from the “holy trinity” of hospitality (food, drink, accommodation) area only, to a new domain – the place – which makes a touristic visit mutually beneficial both for the hosts and guests, and for the place where they meet (Bell 2009).

### **2.3. Tripartite relationship of hospitality**

Tangible, physical environments make people emotionally connected to place. It is true that tourists are more likely to experience some sense of connectedness or spirituality, or feel it more intensely, when physically interacting with a place during their visit. However, being in a place, interacting with people who are native and experience their sense of a place as their own home, brings a guest/traveller to an opportunity for the broader and deeper type of connectedness with natural environment which they visit (Kurtz and Simmons 2015, 166). Therefore, just a mere awareness of hosts that they rent their property or sell their food and drink to the travellers and visitors is not enough for real and truthful hospitality. In making plans for innovative steps towards new values of contemporary and modern tourism the relationship towards the place should be seriously taken into account as well. Instead of considering a touristic industry as a dual host-gest relationship, the tripartite: host-gest-place relationship should be accepted as its main domain of interaction. The sense of place, as noted by Stedman (2003), is of most relevance in interaction with, or being in, a particular place – both for the host and a gest. If there is no a sense of a place of hosts in tourist dealings, the emotional connection or place attachment/bonding will be limited and reduced, or even totally absent. When hosts do not appreciate and respect their place of living, neither will tourists nor visitors. The love of the place, the love of the country and homeland of native population enhance civilized and environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists. Behaviour of the tourists towards the land they visit depends substantially on the socially recognized moral norms of the destination and (dis)respects the local culture and customs (Qu 2021).<sup>1</sup>

### **2.4. Living and visiting a place where the home is**

The attachment to a place cannot be limited only on physical, cultural and social area. It is noticed lately that sense of a place might be described more accurate as an individual spiritual, religious or even theological, experience of finding the place of rest and peace – a home (Olsen et. al. 2022). That place of peace and rest which the guest/traveller visits is the place where actually is the home and homeland of their hosts (Sharpley 2016). In

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<sup>1</sup> The basic ethics code, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” is also an important code of conduct for tourists.

the world of mobility in which many people feel unrooted and detached from their places and their own land, the attachment and a love of the hosts to their own place, feeling their own place a home, finding in their own country a homeland is a real and rare attraction. The hosts should be attached to their place, their home and land, on all levels of their identity so they could offer a hospitality to the tourists. They should be familiar with the place of their living, be committed to it, be connected with it, grow a satisfaction in it, have a sense of it and love their own place of living (Vanclay 2008). To stay, at least for some time, in the place where attachment of the people to the land of their living exists not just as a feeling, but also as a reality, for unrooted and unsettled people, for travellers and tourists, it is an experience of finding a heaven on the earth (Manzo 2003).

That mostly a spiritual and emotional experience both for the guests and hosts transfers a touristic activity from the economic and cultural field of enterprise to a higher level of human endeavours. It lifts a travel industry up to a religious and theological field of activity (Betson 2019, 3) giving simultaneously to a theology completely a new task not to be concerned about finding a place of everlasting rest and peace for human beings only, but to take care about earthly dwelling, about home and homeland (Gorringe 2002, 11). It is not the case of pilgrimage and religious travels only, but of all tourist travels. All travels happen in dynamics between those who are on the road and those who are at home. Beyond all of journeying there is, on one side, an existential need to find a home and homeland, and, on the other side, a strong conviction that yearnings for home can be fulfilled, and that hunger and thirst for the place have ultimate meaning (Manzo 2003).

### **3. BIBLICAL TEACHING ON HUMAN ROOTEDNESS AND ATTACHMENT TO THE LAND**

#### **3.1. On the road with God to the place of belonging**

Seeking and finding the place of belonging is one of the greatest themes of all religions, and specifically in the Bible. The Bible is full of travelling, seeking and longing for a place. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place is a deep and moving pursuit which is attested in biblical religious tradition. The sense of a place, a land and a home is the central theme and primary category of biblical faith (Brueggemann 1977, 4). Biblical accounts describe a history of traveling of God's chosen people of Israel. Bible is a book in which the experience of mobility is described almost on every page. On the first pages of the Bible we can find a first nomadic story about the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The book of Exodus describes the escape of Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. After their long-term wanderings throughout the desert of Sinai, the people of God entered to the promised land and eventually created their kingdom. However, 700 years later (in 586 BCE), the Babylonians conquered the kingdom of Israel. Jerusalem was destroyed and most of the population was sent into exile and slavery. A great number of Israelites returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and re-establish their state which finally collapsed in 70 CE when Roman emperor Titus took Jewish captives to Rome. Since then Jewish communities and people moved and resettled frequently in new places without the right to own the land (Cohen Ioanides and Ioanides 2006).

However, biblical texts do not see or promise the *mobility* as a goal or permanent status. The purpose of all mobilities in the Bible is settlement, finding a home, becoming localized and rooted in one and particular place – the land. Despite experience of exiled life and landlessness Jewish people always lived in a hope of new restoration for their nation and their land. Under the ashes of destruction and national disaster the promise of the land given by God always smouldered and has been kept alive. Jewish people have never imagined their life with God without the land (Kickel 1984). This biblical faith about land and purpose of human life can be noticed in both Old Testament and New Testament traditions. The whole Bible, as well as the history of Hebrew people, is about struggle how to find the secure and safe place, a place of well-being, how to find a home (Marchadour and Neuhaus 2011).

Although it looks like Israel's land has very little relevance in New Testament, the ethics and morals about the land of the Old Testament is still relevant then and even today. The values and morals on relationship to the land of the Old Testament were continued in New Testament's proclamation of Kingdom of God. The land in times of New Testament and nowadays is a place of communion with God and other people. The land is "the place of a specific lifestyle before God, characterised by security, inclusion, fellowship, blessing, corporate sharing and responsibility" (Sexton 2019, 299). In New Testament theology, as well as in Old Testament, contrary to usual opinion, the land does not have any transcendental or metaphysical values and it is not an idealistic eschatological heavenly reality, but real and historical term (Burge 2010). New Testament texts insist that each person through Christ is connected to the land itself and "in land has its source of life and hope for the future" (Burge 2010, 53).<sup>2</sup> While Old Testament tradition on the land refers mostly to the Land of Israel, to the land of one chosen people, the New Testament texts assumes that the promise of the land in Christ and in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God is extended to all humanity, and to all nations of the Earth (Wright 1990). To be settled into one's own land, to be rooted and to be attached to particular own turf of the land is the aim of all life wanderings and travels of every man. The attachment to the land is one of the main ideas of great theological and existential importance, as well as the most important religious aspiration expressed in the Bible (Gorringe 2002, 54).

### **3.2. Tourism in a conflict between *unsettled* and *located* religious worldview**

There is a deep and widespread conviction by religious people that the migration is certainly the main metaphor of human life. Biblical survey of Israel's ancestors as sojourners and wondering through the desert served through the history as "paradigm" of religious life. In that worldview the land was considered as a space of traveling to the eternal homeland – to Heaven. Attachment to the land, to a particular place, has often been seen as a walking astray from the right path. Affliction to earthly realities, to the place and to the land usually was proclaimed as a sin. This was the reason that in Christian tradition a spiritual theology of salvation did not take care of earthly and natural world as an important field of life. Everything that is earthly has been considered as unworthy for the eternal salvation. This conviction produced a theological worldview

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<sup>2</sup> Principal metaphor describing this rootedness in the land is the vineyard. See the New Testament parable on the vineyard: John 15, 1-6; and the Old Testament parallels: Isa 5,1-7; 27,2-6; Ps 80,9; Ez 17.



that unsettlement and attachment to the land is better than being rooted and connected to the land and to the place of living. To be a stranger and a traveller is considered as better position and state than to be bound to the land (Pardon 2019, 281). Accordingly, pilgrimage to holy places was the highest form of religious behaviour. To be on the road, to be a traveller or pilgrim, was considered more valuable way of religious life than to stay at home and cultivate the land (Hall 2006).

Contrary to the custom convictions in Christian religion that Bible is about the rules which can lead humanity to the eternal life in heaven only, biblical texts, from the first to the last pages, firmly attest: human beings are made to live safe and secure life on their land which is given to them by their Creator here and now, for the earthly life (McGrath 2012, 216).<sup>3</sup> In the account of creation, the entire world has been shaped as a place of communion between God and humankind (Kennedy 2011). The goal of the entire history of the world, from its beginning to its end, is to be a place of prosperity, safety, well-being and abiding of God and his people (Zenger 2008). God himself made a land as his place of residence. This truth about land in biblical faith Israel has never to fail out of remembering (Da-Don 2020).<sup>4</sup> The remembrance of the land is the main idea that unites and makes coherent all biblical accounts, even those that describe experiences of the days and years when Israel was far away of the land that God gave to them to be their home (Mendels 1987). Even in the most difficult times, throughout almost 2000 thousand years, as well as nowadays when they have their own state, Jewish people for the greatest holidays of their faith confess their belief in full restoring of Jerusalem and their land by singing a cheers during the Pascal supper and on Yom Kippur: “*L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*” – Next Year in Jerusalem! (Da-Don 2020, 417).

To be at home, to live on the place, to abide on/in one's own land is a fundamental belief of the Bible. This is also a fundamental belief of Christian tradition, which is based on New Testament theology. In person of Christ God *enearthed* himself, and made his home in the land, not to travel around it, but to live in/on it with his people. The land is God's household and the place where his home is (Davies 1994). God is a ruler of whole world and His people dwell in his home. God gave to his people his home, and his land as their place to live (Diepold 1972). Christ is the locus of divine presence and in Him all places and lands got value and significance as possible locations for meeting God present on the land equally (Burge 2010, 130). In New Testament theology there is, by no means, any word about prefiguration or replacement of the attachment to the land, but even deeper explanation of human relationship to one's own territory of life, to one's own land and country, to one's own place.<sup>5</sup> Instead of narrow understanding of belonging to

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<sup>3</sup> Christian theology struggles to explain historical reality by temporal eschatological terms „now“ and „not yet“. By stressing that tension about presence of Kingdom of the Lord the main point on „here“, has been neglected very often. Whatever happened or happens for the salvation of the people happened, and happens here on the land. Biblical view of history strongly affirms that presence of Kingdom is already here, but not in its full power and complete dimension yet.

<sup>4</sup> “How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.” (Ps 137, 5-6)

<sup>5</sup> In the well-known Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) Jesus describes a *meeek* (domesticated, landed and rooted – mostly peasants) as those who will inherit the land (Matt 5,5) Here is an echo of Ps 37,11 in which inheritance of the land belongs to those who are delighted with their social status of living on the land and who are happy with their dependance on the land. Humbleness and meekness are attributes of the peasants who work on the

the territory of the land of Israel that was central to the Old Testament, in New Testament believing Christians were inspired to adopt new idea about the land. Christianity, as Davies concludes, did not bring a message of braking the bonds of death only, but it broke the bonds and borders of the land itself (1994, 375). To live in communion with God they had no more need to live in the land of Israel, since every land of the world is God's place of abiding with his people. They were not attached to the Holy land any more; they could move to every territory and stay in communion of God's family. However, living on any part of the land still required of them to make of that particular land a place of care and attachment, their home with God, whenever or wherever they were settled (Burge 2010, 57). Christians are free of attachment to the Holy land, but attachment to the land and care for the particular part of land where they live and have a home still exists as the central dimension of Christian faith. In Christ whole world became "sacred place", whole Earth and each country is "the land of the New Covenant, the promised land and the holy land" (Smith 2015, 412).

### 3.3. The biblical experience of attachment to the land

In biblical texts the main anthropological truth is conveyed through the centuries: to be a human is to be in living communion with the land (Pardon, 2014, 102).<sup>6</sup> By the picture of being bound to the land the Bible (Gen 2,7) describes identity and character of human being. According to the biblical creation story humankind ('*adam*') is taken and made from the dust of the land (*adamah*) – rooted and existentially attached to the soil. By serving the *adamah* humankind '*adam*' attests its special and absolutely necessary relationship to the soil. This vocation of humankind is defined in terms of *tilling* and *caring* for *adamah* (Gen 2,15) which is precisely the work that peasants, land workers and rural inhabitants do for their living. The land, given to the ancestors of the people of Israel by their God, is a patrimony and inheritance for their living and dwelling, and should be kept and cherished as a familial property for the next generations (Brown 1965). People of Israel should live in the land and be aware of interdependence of their moral behaviour and the prosperity of their land. In times when Israel treated their land as a precious, and as a gift of love for their life, as their place of freedom and well-being, the land sustained abundantly their life. Fruitfulness and generosity of the land was interdependent on their behaviour to it.<sup>7</sup>

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land and wait for God's blessing according to seasons of land fertility. A violent attitude towards land brings no more crops out of the field, but meekness and humbleness in waiting that land brings the fruit by herself is the evangelical picture for success in the Kingdom of God (Lk 12,13-21).

<sup>6</sup> Latin word „humus“ is a root for the word „humanus“. Hebrew word „dm“ – blood – is the root of „adam“ – a humankind. The word „adamah“ – fertile land – is a feminine form of the word „adam“. The land and humankind are bloodrelated, like brother and sister. The humankind „adam“ and „adamah“ are in the same grammatical dependance as male and female. Between „adam“ and „adamah“ there is a bondage and attachment like it happens in the marriage – the bond and connection of love. (Pardon, 2014, 102)

<sup>7</sup> “If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land.” (Lev 26, 3-6)

By the biblical accounts, the main attitude to the land that should be kept and cherished in Israel's life, is to love their land and treat it as a member of the family (Habel 1995).<sup>8</sup> When Israel treated the land as their own home, and sensed it as the place of their permanent living, the land was fruitful enough to sustain their life and gave them more than they needed.<sup>9</sup> When they treated the land as their own home and felt on the land at home prosperity and well-being was at their hand. Keeping the sacredness of the land and experiencing it as the place of God's and people's home, is the main task of humanity (Pardon 2018, 156). If this is the case, all the nations of the world is eager to come and see that land, all the kings and queens of the world admire and respect the land which is loved and respected by their people. They all come with the wish to learn how to transfer the experience of Israel's love towards land into their lands and kingdoms.<sup>10</sup> When love and respect of Israel towards their own land prevails than travellers from all the nations come with urgent haste. Some of them, even want to take a soil of the land they visit (as a souvenir) into their own countries in wish to maintain the sense of attachment to that land.<sup>11</sup>

However, biblical texts reveal also the other side of picture. The writers of biblical texts, based on historical experience of Israel, transferred to us what are the consequences when the opposite attitudes towards the land are taken and lived. Any kind of unfair treatment of the land, any kind of derogation and humiliation, any kind of selfish exploitation and abuse, any kind of selfish benefiting from resources of the land without respect and love is punished by banishment, expulsion, expatriation, deportation and uprooting from the land.<sup>12</sup> The land itself does not bring the fruits anymore and withers in the mourning over the exiled people.<sup>13</sup> The people who did not love their land and did not obeyed the rules of God, the Bible names as "dull".<sup>14</sup> The unloved, despised, scorned and abandoned land by its own citizens is no more attractive to anyone, and all nations turn the head from that land. The land becomes an "object of gossip and slander among the people" and no one has any wish to come and settle there.<sup>15</sup>

The above-mentioned biblical experiences are in accordance with conclusions of modern studies in rural tourism. The love of hosts to own land is fundamental for the rising or falling of other people's interest to visit their country. When the land is not loved and respected by its citizens and by its own population tourism will come to a standstill! As in biblical experience, so in modern tourism experience, the love of the land of hosts is a main reason for growth of tourism, and the absence of love of local hosts is a main

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<sup>8</sup> The familial attachment to the land is expressed by the Hebrew term "nachalah" – inheritance, patrimony. See 1 Kings 8,53; Ps 33,12; Is 63,17; Jr 10,16; 51,19; Mich 7,14.

<sup>9</sup> "Then you shall again obey the Lord, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil." (Dtr 30,8-9)

<sup>10</sup> See: Is 60,3; 66,18; Mic 4,2; Hag 2,7; Zech 8,22

<sup>11</sup> See: 2 Kings 5,17

<sup>12</sup> See: Jer 12,4; Is 24,3-23.

<sup>13</sup> „The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.“ (Is 33,9)

<sup>14</sup> They „Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.“ (Is 6,9)

<sup>15</sup> See: Dtr 29, 26-28; Jer 19,8; 48,39; "Because they made you desolate indeed, and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became an object of gossip and slander among the people." (Ez 36,4)

reason of decline in touristic activity (Tucker 2003; Beeton 2006; Chambers 2010; Molz and Gibson 2016).

#### **3.4. Rural tourism as opportunity to exercise biblical land bondage**

Rural life is a special way of living. In rural way of life, the fundamental connection between place and a land is experienced as part of everyday life. Bible itself is a product of Semitic agricultural society that deeply appreciated values of hospitality in their homes and on their land. Most of the population in times when biblical texts were written were living in close touch with land and with agricultural work. Even those who lived in towns had fields around urban area. Inhabitants of towns owned and worked the arable land. It is not a wonder that rural and agricultural people widely accepted such basic and very old ideas and beliefs, convictions and opinions, about the land and somehow retained them as a core and crucial values of their lives and mind-sets. Even the technology and circumstances of life had changed a lot from biblical times, the identity and mind-set of rural population's life retained almost the same (Pardon 2019, 123).

Although the biblical texts were written far before 3 thousand years ago, the same thoughts and conclusions can be read, as in contemporary anthropological studies of rural life. While in the cities and towns the land is simply perceived as the foundation for the constructions of buildings and houses, in rural culture the physical ground is deeply connected with historical discourses, with economy and society and even with religion. Vis-à-vis urban areas, where direct attachment to the land is declining and sometimes there is no awareness of what occurs to the land in exchange of seasons, in rural places the land is at the heart of the life of people (Woods et. al. 2012). Contemporary studies on rurality argue that "the blurring of rural-urban distinctions is bringing crucial changes to urbanity as well as to rurality" and that rural idyll of „tranquillity, goodness, wholeness and problemfreedom“ is fading away, when confronted with modern globalistic and consumeristic attitudes and practices of life (Cloke 2006, 380.), the idea(l) of rural life still endures as an counterpoint to modern human lack of rootedness and loss of connection with the land. Values that sustain the rural idyll, as Bunce explains, „speak of a profound and universal human need for connection with land, nature and community, a psychology which, as people have become increasingly separated from these experiences, reflects the literal meaning of nostalgia; the sense of loss of home, of homesickness.“ (2003, 15). Rural tourism is rather the realm of generosity in which the host receives a guest in thankfulness for the fact of having a home where the guests can be respectfully received and homed. This special guest-host relation of hospitality in rural tourism gives a deeper sense of homing and re-grounding in gratitude for place, food, drink and land to both participants of touristic exchange (Molz and Gibson 2016). As Gibson concludes: "Feeling at home enables the host to reach out and touch (and be touched by) the other by 'embracing' those welcome strangers" (2016, 164).

The main attitude of humanity, which biblical writers suggest, is gratitude for the land and to the land. Biblical faith relies on a belief that God, who is Creator of the world, gave the land to his people. Rural population in biblical times knew that the land and its fruitfulness is a gift given to them by God. However, biblical accounts confirm that the land is a special gift which binds its inhabitants and users with the giver of it – God (Brueggemann 1977, 57). Inhabitants of the land have to take care about prosperity of

the land and keep it in condition that it can feed generations of their children. Any kind of degrading the land is a sin against God and a sin against people; as well, it is a sin against human identity. The land in biblical tradition is always considered as gift that obliges and binds users and inhabitants on faithfulness to God and on keeping just relationships with other inhabitants, even with strangers and travellers. Beneath hospitality towards strangers and travellers stands a belief that the land is not a property and not the real estate, but a gift that should not be sold. That belief opens the door of homes to other people and makes people and the land hospitable. When hosts feel thankful and grateful for their land, guests are welcome too.

Even today, as wisely argued by Macnaghten and Urry (1998, 200) “Rural people live on the land, work the land, tend the land and know the land”. The land is not just a physical and tangible base of the rural life on which people stand and walk, which they plough, sow, graze, and build their houses upon, but it is also a fundamental part of rural people’s culture of life. The land is the constitutional element of rural character and identity (Bell 1994). The land is central to rural sense of place (Woods et. al. 2012, 57). That is, by no means, true in the mind-set of Croatian people. As it is argued by the member of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, one of the greatest agricultural and soil scientist of Croatia, Ferdo Bašić: “the value and importance of soil is deeply engrained in the minds of Croatian men“ (2013, 9). In that sense, hospitality of hosts in (rural) tourism given to travellers and tourists who are seeking a refuge and rest in Croatia should be far away of being an interaction, which is reduced on some kind of monetary exchange only, but it has to be deepened on the sense of gratefulness for our own home and our own homeland. For that reason, understanding of the significance of the land in biblical accounts is a crucial part of explaining tasks and opportunities for sustainable development of rural tourism.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The land, throughout the history of humankind was, still is and will be the place of living for human and other species of life. The land has been sensed and experienced by generations as *the place* – our common home – to which our very life is attached and bounded. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place is a deep and moving pursuit which is attested in biblical religious tradition. However, biblical texts do not see or promise the *mobility* as a goal or permanent status. The purpose of all mobilities in the Bible is settlement, finding a home, becoming localized and rooted in one and particular place – the land. To be settled in the land, to be rooted and to be attached to particular turf of the land is the aim of all wanderings and travels. The attachment to the land is one of the main ideas of great theological and existential importance, as well as the most important religious aspiration expressed in the Bible.

In rural way of life, the fundamental connection between place and a land is experienced as part of everyday life. The land and rural population are connected and attached to each other by existential bonds. The attachment to the land in rural way of life is natural and interdependent. Rural people and their land are mutually bonded with bonds of love. In the Biblical accounts, the land is considered as God’s household and the place where his home is. God is a ruler of whole world and His people dwell in his home. The land should

be kept and cherished as a member of the family, and as a gift to humanity. Human beings are made to live safe and secure life on their land which is given to them by their Creator. The love of the place, the love of the country and homeland of native population enhance civilized and environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists. The biblical understanding of the land can be a powerful impetus for new steps in rebuilding ties of rural people with their own land, territory and with their homeland. The love of hosts to own land is fundamental for growth of tourism. By care for the land, for fertile soil, for the territory, for the state, for the economy and politics, and by caring for the present condition and future fate of the homeland, the land becomes desirable for visit of tourists. When attitudes and attachment to the place of living of rural people is built on biblical faith about the land new possibilities of rural tourism can be raised on higher levels.

The quality of the love to the land of the local inhabitants, of the hosts who are engaged in tourist activities, raises attractiveness of rural area for visitors. Caring for the well-being and beauty of our own place of residence is a magnet that attracts other people and makes our place of living valuable and likable to other people for their stay and visit. As much the visitors see and feel, as they experience a sense of a place of the hosts towards their land, the more they shall wish to come and enjoy the well-being of relationship that is happening on the place of their visit. As much the hosts respect their own land and feel it as their precious gift, the more will, after the example of local people, the tourists appreciate that land and treat it as special place of rest and peace.

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**BIBLICAL AND RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LAND AS A BASIS FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM**

**Durica Pardon**

**Abstract**

The land is so deeply set into human soul and represents the central place of the worldview, which shapes human actions. Biblical faith directs the human race toward the need of reshaping our fundamental beliefs about the land and its value, for which we feel a desperate need in our times. In descriptions of the journey of the people of Israel with God, biblical narratives testify the constant human need to seek and discover their own place within time and space. Finding a place to which we belong, looking for our home, where people as a whole and individuals can be safe, where they can enjoy prosperity, where they can experience the meaning of their walk and travel, implies and requires a sense of dwelling, settling, rootedness, a sense of grounding. Just as the universal human longing for security and meaning belongs to the realm of faith, to the same realm of human identity belongs the sense of place and home. The biblical understanding of the land can be a powerful impetus for new steps in rebuilding ties with one's own land, territory and with one's homeland. By our care for the land, for fertile soil, for the territory, for the state, for the economy and politics, and by our caring for the present condition and future fate of the homeland, we make our land desirable for visit of tourists. Caring for the well-being and beauty of our own place of residence is a magnet that attracts other people and makes our place of living valuable and likable to other people for their stay and visit. The biblical theology of the land encourages believers and other inhabitants of an area to develop the religious identity of the "placed people" who love their place of residence. Through daily expressions of respect of our own land, we form an environment of home even for those who just visit our county. Promoting environmental well-being, agriculture, healthy eating and sustainable food farming, based on biblical and religious worldview values, can lead today's rural inhabitants to build a homely atmosphere that does not stem from a greedy desire to make money, but from their love to their homeland. Such an approach opens the door to sustainable and equitable development of the rural communities. We want to share our own satisfaction and the joy of living on our land with the people who come to our places as our guests.

**Key words:** Biblical theology, theology of the land, homeland, ecology, sustainable development, rural tourism

**Durica Pardon**

Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište - Zagreb

## FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN RURAL TOURISM - AS TOURIST OR ENTREPRENEUR

**Romana Caput-Jogunica**  
**Hrvoje Radić**  
**Sanja Ćurković**

**Abstract:**

The famous football players like Beckham, Pique, Pirlo, Iniesta are or were successful not only in top sports but also in business. Did you know that Iniesta and Pirlo run wineries with their family and sell their products all over the world? An excellent Croatian example is Domagoj Vida, the professional footballer who, together with his friends, has built an ecological pig farm and produces meat products for restaurants under this brand. The main objective of this article is to determine the interest of football players in rural tourism as tourists and after their sports career like Vida. The pilot study involved 140 athletes (33.7% between 21 and 25) from the 3rd Croatian Football League, who were interviewed via online questionnaire. In the role of tourist, football players preferred outdoor sports activities (55.7%) and water sports (26.4%). Regarding careers in tourism, 38.6% of the participants confirmed their interest in working in tourism after their sports career: 10.7% as the owner of a family business, 10% as a caterer, 9.3% in the production of fruits and vegetables, 6.3% as manager of summer sports camps, and 2.3% in animal breeding.

**Keywords:**

football player, career, interest, rural tourism, sports activities

### 1. INTRODUCTION

With the aim of improving the development of tourism, the Croatian government has adopted a strategy for the development of tourism until 2020, which focuses mainly on sports tourism. Considering the comparative advantages that Croatia has, sport and recreation should be promoted as one of the key products, as we have the possibility to organize them in the same quality in different environments. Petrović et al (2017) noted that sports have a great attraction to different types of entrepreneurship due to their popularity in the media. The development of sports tourism contributes to a longer tourist season in some areas, overcoming seasonality and increasing non-hotel consumption. In the development of a sports leisure offer and its efficient management, management plays an important role at all levels: tourism organisations and institutions, local communities or at the state level. The authors emphasise that there is no single and standardised model of sports and leisure tourism that can be adapted everywhere, as tourism models depend on the nature and geographical characteristics of a given area. By including sports in tourism, we can create an additional market for the sports industry and products, as well as for sports infrastructure.

*An example how the Faculty of Agriculture can contribute to the popularization of sports activities in rural tourism*

Since 2019/2020, “Sports recreation in rural tourism” is an elective subject in the Master's programme “Ecological Agriculture and Agro tourism” at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb. The main objective of the elective subject (30 hours, 3 ECTS) is that students will be able to apply for different sport recreation and wellness activities in rural tourism. By the end of the semester, students will be able to: define the role of sports recreation in rural tourism; propose the most appropriate sport leisure activities according to the specifics of the destination; demonstrate the most represented sporting activities in rural tourism and to explain the possibilities of implementing ancient and popular customs and games in rural tourism.

The most common motives for tourists to visit Croatia are: relaxation and passive rest (54.9%); gaining new experiences (31.3%); enjoying gastronomy (29.0%); getting to know natural beauty better (26.2%), entertainment (24.2%), and sports and recreation (19.8%) (Institute of Tourism 2017). According to an analysis of motives by age, the majority of tourists between 30 and 49 years old chose sports and recreation (Caput et al. 2020).

Šulc and Fuerst-Bjeliš (2021), who analysed the changes in tourism in the (post)Covidian Croatian tourist region, noted a new attitude towards urban green spaces and their new contextual meaning, resulting from the search for physical distance and isolated places. Some of the outdoor sport activities such as hiking, Nordic walking, trekking, cycling and others are becoming more popular and represent a new way of connecting with the environment, with the aim of maintaining and promoting well-being.

Our first goal was to explore the motives of football players as tourists. Our second goal is to educate them and show them ways to live in the countryside as entrepreneurs or in another profession after their sports career.

*Entrepreneurship in sports and tourism*

Less well known is that young athletes are interested in entrepreneurial and business majors, which are at the top of the list along with kinesiology, medicine, and physical therapy (Caput et al. 2007). To summarise mentioned: the interest of athletes in entrepreneurship, the changes after covidianism and the growing interest in sport leisure activities, within the elective subject “Sport recreation in rural tourism”, we decided to conduct an experimental study with a sample of football players. Football is not only a sport, but also an industry. We wanted to know what the football players think about the role of sports in rural tourism and if they are interested in rural tourism after their sports career. The idea came about when we realised that several very famous professional footballers, such as Iniesta and Pirlo, run wineries with their family and sell their products all over the world. “Pirlo had taken over his parents’ winery and it now sells products across Europe. His vineyard produces a large number of bottles a year, around 15.000 to 20.000. The Italian seems to be able to touch everything he turns into a success” (khelnow.com)

It is also well known that Domagoj Vida, member of the Croatian national football team and very famous football player at the national level, together with his friends, has built an

organic pig farm and produces meat products for restaurants under this brand. The main objective of this work is to find out the interest of football players in sport leisure activities as tourists and the interest in a career in rural tourism, as the mentioned famous football players do. We also wanted to educate the football players who participated in this study about selective forms of rural tourism and the potential of ancient sports and sports games, traditions, etc.

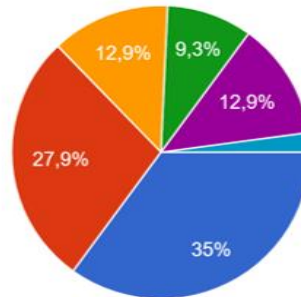
## **2. METHODS**

The participants of this study are 140 football players in the 3rd Croatian football league. The instrument used was a questionnaire with 8 items designed to collect information on age, sports involvement, status (school, university, work), interest in certain forms of tourism, sports activities, and associative terms of rural tourism. We collected the data during the season (May and June) in 2021. The analysis of the questionnaire was calculated with Statistika 7.1.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Before considering the results of the study, we must introduce the sample. The majority of football players (34.3%) are between 21 and 25 years old, 20.78% are between 15 and 20 and 20.78% are between 25 and 30 years old. Most of them (70%) are active players for 7 or more years; 16.4% are active for less than 5 years, while 13.6% are active for 5-7 years. Most of them (37.9%) are working, 35% are players - students, 10% players in secondary schools, 12.9% unemployed and others. As for the interest of football players in different types of tourism, 35% of them have interest in sports and leisure tourism (blue), which was to be expected. It was interesting to note that in second place was rural tourism (27.9%, red) (Figure 3.1.)

Figure 3.1. Football players' interest in different types of tourism



We wanted to know what interest the respondents have as tourists and what sport activities they participate in. Most of them participate in outdoor activities (55.7%) and sports on the water (26.4%). We are a little surprised by the low interest in fitness (9.3%), but we can explain it as it is part of their daily training, so as tourists they prefer different sports activities, especially when they spend their vacations on our coast.

As mentioned above, the indirect objective of this study is to promote rural tourism in the Football League. Therefore, we asked the respondents to select the answers that they associate most with rural tourism: 26.4% answered nature and ecology; 22.1% farm, 17.1% local gastronomy; 7.9% wine tourism and hunting.

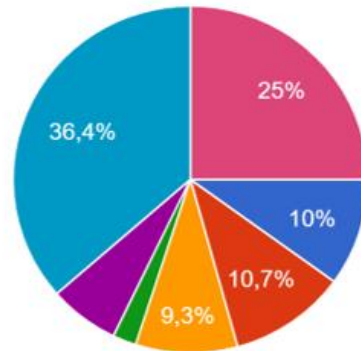
The opinion of football players about the role of sport in rural tourism are: 50% thought that sport is very important for tourism and that rural tourism is very important because of the different experiences. 40% of the study participants suggested that old sports (ancient sports, traditional games and customs, etc.) should be used more in promotional campaigns for rural tourism.

*Do we need lifelong educational programme for entrepreneurship in rural tourism at the Faculty of Agriculture?*

One third of the participants (38.6%) confirmed that they were interested in working in tourism after their sports career. The majority of the football players are between 15 and 25 years old and according to them, sport is very important for the development of tourism and rural tourism, as it offers different experiences of nature and the possibility to promote the natural beauty with different sports (traditional old sports, children's games and customs).

61.4% of participants: were not sure (36.4%) or did not know (25%). 38.6% of the participants confirmed their interest to work in tourism after their sport career. In Figure 2. we see the list of tourism professions: 10.7% as owner of a family business, 10% a caterer, 9.3% in the production of fruits and vegetables, 6.3% as manager of summer sports camps and 2.3% in animal breeding. Our target group, to whom we want to introduce a career in rural tourism through the educational programme, is 61.4% of the players who are not sure or do not know yet because of their age.

Figure 3.2. Football players interest for different tourism professions



#### 4. CONCLUSION

With this paper we wanted to open a discussion about the interest and opinion of football players in relation to sports in tourism and its importance in rural tourism, as well as its opportunities after the sports career and its promotion in the football society. The majority of the football players are between 15 and 25 years old and according to them, sport is very important for the development of tourism and rural tourism, as it offers different experiences of nature and the possibility to promote the natural beauty with different sports (traditional old sports, children's games and customs). The great interest of football players is entrepreneurship, which is a fundamental tool for business in sports and tourism. We hope that with this experimental study we can present rural tourism as a possibility for a career after the sports career, especially for young athletes who have no plans for education and career after the sports career.

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### **FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN RURAL TOURISM - as tourist or entrepreneur**

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**Abstract:**

The famous football players like Beckham, Pique, Pirlo, Iniesta are or were successful not only in top sports but also in business. Did you know that Iniesta and Pirlo run wineries with their family and sell their products all over the world? An excellent Croatian example is Domagoj Vida, the professional footballer who, together with his friends, has built an ecological pig farm and produces meat products for restaurants under this brand. The main objective of this article is to determine the interest of football players in rural tourism as tourists and after their sports career like Vida. The pilot study involved 140 athletes (33.7% between 21 and 25) from the 3rd Croatian Football League, who were interviewed via online questionnaire. In the role of tourist, football players preferred outdoor sports activities (55.7%) and water sports (26.4%). Regarding careers in tourism, 38.6% of the participants confirmed their interest in working in tourism after their sports career: 10.7% as the owner of a family business, 10% as a caterer, 9.3% in the production of fruits and vegetables, 6.3% as manager of summer sports camps, and 2.3% in animal breeding.

**Keywords:**

football player, career, interest, rural tourism, sports activities

**Romana Caput-Jogunica**, Assoc. professor  
University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
rcaput@agr.hr

**Hrvoje Radić**, Mag. ing. agr.

**Ćurković Sanja**, Assist. professor  
University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture  
scurkovic@agr.hr



## **MARKET VALUATION MODELS IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM**

**Berislav Andrić**  
**Anastasiia Pendas**  
**Mario Hak**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the experience of applying SWOT analysis for the purpose of quality management and sustainable development in rural tourism. Companies and institutions, including those in the field of maintenance and tourism, use valuation models in their strategic planning of geographical area. At the very beginning of the paper, the terms of tourism, geography and sustainable development, their application and possibilities are described, including key valuation models. Through examples of good practice, an overview of the application of SWOT analysis on the example of Požega-Slavonia County will be presented.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, geographical area, valuation, sustainable development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism as a social phenomenon finds its foothold in the establishment of the tourist market. The emergence of market relations in the tourism market occurs when there are potential consumers interested in meeting the needs for rest and recreation on the one hand, and on the other hand, providers who offer economic compensation and appropriate goods and services needed to meet these needs. The market in tourism is constituted in the same way as in all other markets, which presupposes the fact that market entities, market object and price are the basic constitutive elements of the tourism market. However, tourism theorists agree that in tourism there is an interaction between supply and demand but in a specific way, different than in other markets. One of the most important theorists of tourism, Kurt Krapf, in his work *Grundriss der allgemeinen Fremdenverkehrslehre* (Hunziker and Krapf 1942) considers tourism to be a market of a special kind, ie a market that has certain specific characteristics. Due to these specifics, it is necessary to monitor the relationship between sustainable development of geographical area and the development of tourism for the benefit of all stakeholders in the area, using the models that will be presented in the paper.

### **2. CONCEPTUAL DEMARCATIONS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM MARKETING AND GEOGRAPHY**

Considering numerous scientific and professional researches and attitudes of authors who dealt with theoretical problems of tourism, and especially respecting the attitudes and opinions accepted today, it seems that the least controversial should be considered that peculiarity of the tourism market which states that unlike all other tourism markets. (travels) the consumer, not the goods. Without movement, ie without travel, there is no tourism. But it is precisely from this fact that many relationships emerge that emerge in the tourism market and that make it specific. This certainly includes personal consumption, and that special form of it that is set aside for the needs of tourism,

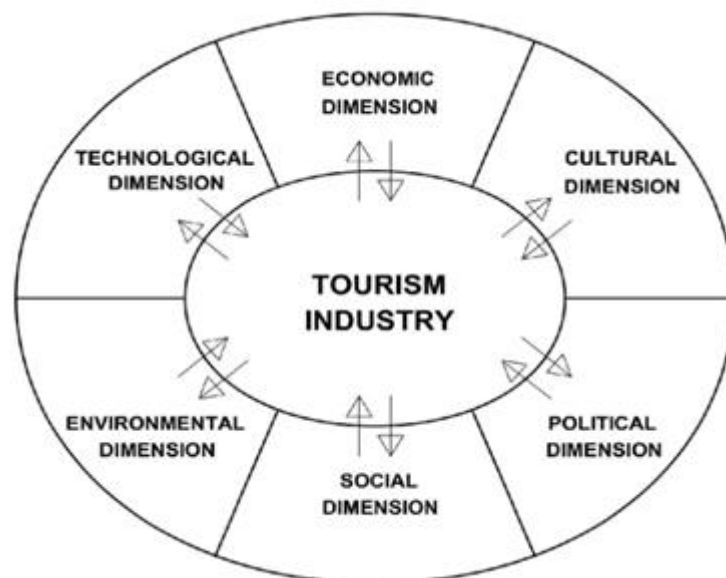
profitably "spends for tourist purposes", so in theory it is called tourist consumption. It is possible to state that, due to the peculiarities of tourism, its dynamic and interdisciplinary character and especially multiplicative effects, it is not possible to give an accurate definition of the tourist market.

The most frequently cited definition of the tourism market in domestic tourism research is that of S. and Z. Markovic, which reads: "The tourism market is a set of supply and demand relations aimed at exchanging goods and services through money, to the extent determined by price of these goods and services (Marković and Marković 1972). The mentioned authors determine the tourist service as a market product of tourism, because it reflects the character and work process of the main activities in tourism. Also, they believe that the object of exchange in tourism can be different goods, which is a classic result of the process of material production, but also certain goods that without tourism would not have the character of goods.

Vukonić, on the other hand, defines the tourist market as an imaginary space in which tourist offer and tourist demand meet, intertwine and in a certain way connect and mutually determine each other (Vukonić 1983). Kobašić and Senečić view the tourist market as a set of supply and demand relations in the sphere of services and goods that serve to meet tourist needs in a certain geographical area or as a set of supply and demand relations that arise under the influence of tourist trends (Kobačić and Senečić 1982).

The operation and specifics of the tourist market can be presented as follows:

Figure 1. **Tourism industry valuation**



Source: Papatheodorou et al. 2016.

Newer definitions and classifications of the tourism market divide the tourism market into the following types:

- Market in a narrower sense - this market includes typical tourist services in the offer that is most intensively monitored and studied within tourism as a scientific activity. It is a sphere of hotel and catering, transport and mediation in tourism.
- Market in a broader sense - this is a part of the tourist offer that is not typical for tourist entities, but which are from the point of view of tourists and as important because they complement the basic tourist offer (souvenir market, transport market, tourist equipment market, tourist publications market, etc.).
- Marginal tourist market - these are atypical elements of the tourist offer. In fact, these are products and services intended for the general population, not only tourists, but which are important for total tourist consumption (sports equipment market, clothing and footwear market, photo products market, food market, utilities, etc.) (Senečuč and Grgona 2006).

We can say that tourism marketing is a system and coordination that must be carried out as a policy for companies, groups, both private and government, within the scope of local, regional, national or international to achieve tourist satisfaction by obtaining reasonable profits (Rironga et al. 2018).

It can be concluded that tourism takes place in a certain geographical area, and tourist demand is moving towards the tourist offer, and in this sense is dynamic. The tourist offer communicates with the demand market in two possible ways: indirectly through tourist intermediaries, or by direct communication.

### **3. TOURISM PLANNING AS A FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Planning in tourism is becoming increasingly difficult due to the extremely changing and complex environment without continuous marketing thinking. Despite the uncertain opportunities in some of the world's tourism markets, it is generally predicted that the global social and economic situation will result in a large increase in tourism in the next ten years. Changing economic conditions, changing consumer behavior and the development of new technologies will cause the emergence of new or growth of existing tourism markets. On the other hand, natural resources will be increasingly endangered and disappearing, so it will be necessary to build an ecological approach to tourism. The basis of the progress of the tourism market is the development, diversification and individualization of tourism needs and competition activities in order to generate new benefits. Based on the analysis of tourists' behavior and the development of their preferences, two basic trends are visible:

- quantitative growth of tourist trends
- qualitative growth of tourist trends (Stipanović 2007).

Quantitative growth of tourist movements is reflected in the fact that an increasing number of people turn to tourism and participate in tourist movements. Tourist travel is no longer a luxury adapted to the higher strata of society. They become an integral part of life and tourist needs are included in the basic (primary) life needs. Quantitative

growth of tourist traffic in recent years confirms tourism as an active generator of economic development. According to the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization 2018), the growth of travel defines tourism as one of the most significant social phenomena today. The number of international arrivals increased from 25 million (1950) to 900 million (2018), according to an annual growth rate of 8%. The same survey provides an overview of the number of international arrivals to the world's major tourist regions. The European and American markets are slowing down and stagnating due to market saturation, while the Middle East and African markets are experiencing significant growth due to the development of quality transport lines and changing tourist preferences in terms of destination selection. These shifts in growth and impact on the geographical environment are also visible in the Croatian market, so it is necessary to use certain models of spatial valuation in order to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of tourists and the domicile population while conserving resources for future development. Such development involves managing resources in a way that meets basic economic, geographical and social requirements for preserving cultural integrity, basic ecological processes and biodiversity.

#### **4. MODELS OF TOURISM EVALUATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL AREA IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

Environmental analysis is the process of evaluating and interpreting information obtained from environmental research. Along with the development of world tourism, the number of dominant factors in the marketing environment is increasing. The specific relationship between tourism and its marketing environment implies the fact that it is necessary to think much more carefully and understand the impact of the environment than in other branches of the economy. The external environment of any industry, especially tourism, contains a multitude of interdependent factors that need to be identified and classified in a certain way with the aim of sustainable development (Dibb et al. 2005).

One of the simplest and most commonly used tools for analyzing the business environment is PEST analysis. It considers political, economic, social and technological factors that can affect an economic entity. This analysis is acceptable for entities in industries that are less susceptible to changes in the market. However, since tourism is complex and dynamic in nature, this analysis has many shortcomings in marketing planning in tourism, so new methods and tools for environmental analysis have been developed (Marketingteacher 2021).

The next used and most comprehensive model of macro-environment research in tourism is SCEPTICAL analysis, which takes into account the influences of the environment with regard to:

- social factors
- cultural factors
- economic factors
- physical factors

- technical factors
- international factors (international)
- communication and infrastructure factors
- administrative and institutional factors
- legal and political factors (Moutinho 2005).

The next type of analysis and assessment of the tourism market is the so-called SWOT analysis that, despite numerous changes in evolution, has enjoyed its popularity with both scientists and practitioners for decades. SWOT analysis is an analysis of the current situation, opportunities and threats, as well as an analysis of the environment and the evaluation of geographical and tourist resources (Strengths, W-weaknesses, O-opportunities, T-threats). Using this analysis, they systematically counter the internal capabilities and weaknesses of the market and weigh the prospects for success in relation to competition and threats in the environment. Strengths and weaknesses are internal, while opportunities and threats are external factors. It usually finds its application in two situations:

- analysis of the success of the existing strategy
- analysis of possible changes in the basic strategy of the organization (Marketingteacher 2021).

A well-done SWOT analysis enables experts in tourism geography to focus on key areas of their activity in which the company has specific knowledge and can use its own advantages. It also enables them to address clearly identified own weaknesses in those areas where knowledge and skills are insufficient in relation to competition and the environment.

All tourist attractions and attractions are strongly spatially marked, regardless of whether they are part of the space, or their appearance is strictly spatially determined. The development of "new tourism, on the trail of" sustainable development ", also depends on the complete identification, valorization and protection of the tourist attraction base, in the existing or potential tourist destination. The following is the basic functional division of tourist attractions and attractions in tourism as follows: (1) Geological features of the area; (2) Climate; (3) Water; (4) Flora; (5) Fauna; (6) Natural heritage; (7) Cultural and historical heritage; (8) Cult and religious institutions; (9) Sports and recreational buildings and grounds; (10) Tourist trails, roads, roads; (11) Natural health resorts; (12) Manifestations; (13) Famous people and events; (14) Culture of life and work; (15) Attractions due to attractions; (16) Tourist paraattractions (attractions similar to attractions) (Kušen 2000).

For the development valorization of tourist attractions and attractions, in addition to the functional division, it is necessary to analyze other data on the basic tourist resource, such as their category, seasonality, tourist characteristics, reception capacity and the like.

## **5. CASE STUDY: SWOT ANALYSIS OF POŽEGA-SLAVONIA COUNTY AS A GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

With an area of 1,815 square kilometers and slightly more than 85,800 inhabitants, Požega-Slavonia County is one of the smaller counties in the Republic of Croatia. It is a

county that shatters the common notion of flat Slavonia, since here in a relatively small area, along with plains with fertile fields, there are mountains and mountains whose foothills, in turn, adorn the well-known vineyards, while the higher parts are mostly under forest. Požega-Slavonia County consists of two spatially separated units - Požega Basin and Pakrac-Lipik region. The Požega valley is surrounded by Psunj, Papuk, Krndija, Dilje and Požega mountain. Particularly interesting is the northern mountain massif Papuk, which with its ridges and peaks from the eastern Tromeđa (713 m) above Kutjevo over the main peak Papuk (953 m) all the way to the western Petrov vrh (615 m) near Daruvar protects the valley from northern winds. On the southern slopes the climate is milder than in the Požega valley itself. The county's economy is in crisis due to the consequences of the transition from socialism to capitalist society, and due to various malversations that have made and are making various political structures. Industry and agriculture are the most profitable industries, followed by trade and trade. Slightly more than 40% of the area is arable. Agriculture is most developed in the Požega area, and the main crops are corn, wheat, sunflower, oilseed rape, sugar beet and grape. The objective of this research is to show how SWOT analysis can be made more attractive, useful and accurate in research (Collins-Kreiner and Wall 2007). Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is a very useful technique which analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an organization for taking strategic decisions and it also provides a foundation for the formulation of strategies (Ajmijera 2017).

The following part of the paper presents the strengths and weaknesses as internal factors, and opportunities and threats as external factors of this geographical area, with a link to key activities and trends in the environment. Majority of authors of this papers were actively included in creation of SWOT analysis as part of project management team for creation and writing Požega-Slavonia County Strategy. To plan and implement this, different management and decision making tools were used including interviews and questionnaire surveys as well as SWOT analysis. (Reihanian et al. 2012). A series of interviews was conducted in order to identify actions taken by authors of this paper. Results are stated, as follows:

#### Strengths:

- Preserved and rich natural resources
- Tradition of metal processing, textile, wood, food industry, road transport passengers and goods and construction
- Export orientation of business entities
- Development of crafts, small and medium entrepreneurship
- Existence of entrepreneurial infrastructure and business premises in certain parts counties
- Existence of a network of educational institutions (vocational schools, Polytechnic of Požega, adult education institutions)
- Development of the tradition of growing vines, winemaking and winemaking
- Existence of geological study of potential study and basics of mineral resources management
- Existence of strategic and development documents in certain socio-economic spheres (Human Resources Development Strategy)

- Preserved nature and environment, and rich cultural and historical heritage – potential for tourism development

Weaknesses:

- slow implementation of development plans and programs
- Lack of networkings among businesses subjects
- discrepancy / differences in the existence of entrepreneurial infrastructure (in some parts of the county the entrepreneurial infrastructure was destroyed by the war, or it is not there at all and in some parts it is developed)
- lack of processing capacities in agriculture (the problem of placement and added raw material values)
- a large percentage of the unemployed, especially young people
- Insufficient support to entrepreneurs
- weak competitiveness of entrepreneurial entities with county areas
- Entrepreneurial barriers - low level of new ones investment, pessimism in the business world
- Decrease in the number of active business entities
- Population aging
- Lack of tourism development strategy on county area
- Poor development and presentation of tourism offers

Opportunities:

- Decentralization of public administration to local self-government,
- Availability of the European Union market
- Cooperation between economic, educational and public sector,
- Encouraging the development of entrepreneurial infrastructure (incubators and business zones),
- Encouraging small and medium enterprises
- Strengthening advisory / consulting institutions,
- Entrepreneurial education of the local population
- Existence of investment funds from the EU and beyond
- Existence of national programs as well as the EU funds to help entrepreneurship and the economy
- Existence of the tourism development strategy of the Republic Croatia, as a framework for the development of tourism in PSG (selective forms of tourism, souvenir development, putting facilities into tourist function, establishment of a tour agency. offers...)
- Rising trend of rural tourism
- New trends in tourism demand - looking for healthy natural environment

Threats:

- Inadequate economic and tax policy in the Republic of Croatia (disregard for weaker developed regions)
- Uneven development of regions at the level of the Republic of Croatia
- Lack of coordination between the state and local self-government,

- Unstable business conditions: common variability of energy prices, change tax policy,
- Insufficient facilities for entrepreneurs
- Lack of support for co-financing projects from EU funds or from the state level
- lack of financial resources for co-financing projects of entrepreneurs and others
- unfair competition of the local economy and retail chains (quality vs price)
- import of cheaper products from foreign markets,
- Neglect of continental tourism,
- Insufficient / non-existent funding on in the field of development of certain forms of tourism.
- Traffic isolation
- Negative trends at the national level economies (Pozega Slavonia County Strategy 2020).

For the realization of this analysis, recent models used in tourist geography were used to evaluate the attractiveness of the space. All the properties of this area classified by the research are classified here in order to point out the important connections and relations between socio-geographical factors and the tourist development of the observed area. By applying the deductive method, the obtained research results will be formed in the form of a development model, which will be presented in descriptive and quantitative-statistical form in the following works of the author. In this way, the positive and negative effects of tourism on the geographical area will be identified.

For solution for Pozega- Slavonia County we can use model from more developed markets which will define rural tourism with full use of tourism resources in rural areas to adjust and optimize rural industrial structures, extend the agricultural industrial chain, develop rural tourism services, promote nonagricultural employment, increase the incomes of farmers, and create a better economic base for the new rural construction (Zhang 2012).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Using SWOT analysis, it is possible to collect, create, maintain and analyze geographical data and perform various tasks: from spatial development planning to implementation and realization of operational tasks in tourism, while establishing a quality basis for management to make the right decisions in tourism, sustainable and rural development and related activities. SWOT analysis is frequently used in a fragmentary manner which should be considered as a serious methodological oversight and may jeopardize the value of the entire process related to the strategic management of the tourism destination (Goranczewski and Puciato 2010).

The SWOT analysis can be divided into "positive" attributes (advantages) of the County, and "negative" attributes (disadvantages), i.e., existing weaknesses of the County and development threats that the County will have to face in the near future. The assessment of the economic potential of the County is based on positive attributes. In order to realize the economic and tourist potential, it is necessary to overcome several obstacles to development. By using this and similar valuation models in tourism geography, it is



possible to plan and maintain the development of tourism in the specified geographical area.

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## **MARKET VALUATION MODELS IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM**

**Berislav Andrić**  
**Anastasiia Pandas**  
**Mario Hak**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the experience of applying SWOT analysis for the purpose of quality management and sustainable development in rural tourism. Companies and institutions, including those in the field of maintenance and tourism, use valuation models in their strategic planning of geographical area. At the very beginning of the paper, the terms of tourism, geography and sustainable development, their application and possibilities are described, including key valuation models. Through examples of good practice, an overview of the application of SWOT analysis on the example of Požega-Slavonia County will be presented.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, geographical area, valuation, sustainable development

**Berislav Andrić**  
Doc.dr.sc.  
Vice Dean for Development, Polytechnic in Požega  
E-mail: bandrlic@vup.hr

**Anastasiia Pandas**  
dr.sc.  
Assistant Professor, Odessa State Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture  
E-mail: intercom@ogasa.org.ua

**Mario Hak**  
dr.sc.  
College Professor, Tax Office Požega  
E-mail: hak.mario@gmail.com

## **RURAL TOURISM IN THE SERVICE OF DEVELOPMENT OF WEST HERZEGOVINA COUNTY**

**Žana Ćorić**  
**Marina Perić Kaselj**  
**Katica Jurčević**

### **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that the number of international tourist arrivals will grow at a 3.3% annual rate, resulting in 1,800 million international tourist arrivals in 2030 (UNWTO, 2017). According to the same organization, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased interest in rural tourism. After numerous lockdowns carried out to varying degrees by all countries around the world, tourists are increasingly seeking specific, authentic experiences that are inherent in rural areas.

Bearing in mind that rural tourism is the driver of development in rural (often underdeveloped) regions, that it helps to preserve local identity, traditions and customs, improves the quality of life of residents, prevents depopulation and increases employment of traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women and young people, this paper is going to analyze the possibilities for developing this type of tourism in West Herzegovina County, one of the (ten) counties within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rural areas are home to 75% of the county's population, and its natural beauty, rich flora and fauna, diversity and preservation of the landscape, valuable cultural and historical intangible and material heritage, the richness of customs and traditions, good transportation connections and geographical location lend themselves to significant tourism development. We are going to focus on the analysis of legal and strategic documents for the development of tourism in this county, as well as give an overview of tourism development so far (statistics on tourist traffic). We are going to present the most important natural, cultural-historical and gastronomic sites and manifestations that can make West Herzegovina County an appealing tourist destination and enable the sustainable development of rural areas.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, West Herzegovina County, specific forms of tourism, sustainable development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In a very short period, tourism has become one of the largest industries in the world, as well as a driver of local and regional development in many countries. The global tourist movement is constantly increasing, and the main reasons for this are modern telecommunications and transportation systems, rising living standards, longer vacations and more free time, a higher level of education and environmental awareness, the

integration of technology and science and the informatization of the world (Lukić, 2002). Tourism, as the most massive, dynamic and complex socioeconomic phenomenon and one of the fastest-growing branches of the world economy, is becoming a global phenomenon because it encompasses a wide range of phenomena and relationships that arise during a tourist trip, and in its realization encroaches not only on the economic but also on the ecological, social and cultural aspects of life (Grgić, 2013). The term “rural tourism” refers to a wide range of activities and forms of tourism that emerge in a rural area.<sup>1</sup>

According to one of many definitions, rural tourism is “*a collective name for various activities and forms of tourism that occur outside cities and those areas where mass tourism has developed*” (Demonja; Ružić, 2010, 12).

Rural tourism, according to the Council of Europe, is tourism in a rural area with all activities carried out in the area, and the most important characteristics of this type of tourism are a peaceful environment, the absence of noise, environmental preservation, communication with hosts, local food and learning about peasant work. The Council divides rural activities into seven categories: tours (hiking, horseback riding, motorized tours, cross-country skiing, cycling); water activities (swimming, staying near rivers, fishing, sailing, canoeing and rafting); activities in the air (small aircraft, hot air balloons, gliders); sports activities (rock climbing, golf, tennis); cultural activities (handcrafting courses, archaeology, folklore groups, art workshops, cultural, gastronomic and other sources and origins); health-related activities (health benefits and fitness training) and activities for discovering new things to do and work processes (Ružić, 2009, 14).

Given the new trends and needs of modern tourists, rural tourism is increasingly being recognized as a significant factor in the function of rural development. It provides rural residents with opportunities for survival and employment, especially traditionally underserved groups such as women and young people, and it prevents emigration from rural areas.

In this paper, we are going to discuss rural tourism in West Herzegovina County, which is located in the southwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>2</sup> and is one of ten counties that make up the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It shares borders with Herzegovina-Neretva County and Herzegbosnian County, as well as the Republic of Croatia, which is also the border with the European Union. In the southern regions, the climate is Mediterranean, with hot summers and mild winters, whereas in the northern regions, the climate is continental, with mild summers and very cold winters.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD's (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) methodology is one of the most widely used methodologies for the differentiation of urban and rural areas in the European Union. The methodology is based on the population density criterion, according to which rural areas have fewer than 150 people per km<sup>2</sup> (OECD, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country in Southeast Europe. It consists of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ten counties) and Republika Srpska and the Brčko District.

West Herzegovina County covers 1,362.2 km<sup>2</sup> or 5.2% of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's total area. It consists of the towns of Široki Brijeg and Ljubuški and the municipalities of Grude and Posušje. The County has an average population density of 68.5 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and is classified as a rural region by the OECD. The rural area of West Herzegovina County is home to 75.50% of the population, or 70,743 people (Strategija ruralnog razvitka ŽZH 2020.-2030., 2019).

According to the 2013 census, West Herzegovina County has 94,898 residents, 50% of whom are women.

**Table 1. Population of West Herzegovina County (source: Federalni zavod za statistiku - FZS)**

MUNICIPALITIES AND TOWNS	POPULATION
Grude	17,308
Ljubuški	28,184
Posušje	20,477
Široki Brijeg	28,929

Source: Authors

In 2019, there were 10,492 unemployed people on the records of the West Herzegovina County Employment Service. 56% of the unemployed were women and 44% men. The majority of unemployed people were between the ages of 25 and 29. People aged 55 to 59 made up the second-largest group (Strategija razvoja ŽZH 2021.-2027., 2019).

## **2. TOURISM IN WEST HERZEGOVINA COUNTY – OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

There are a number of factors that affect the development of tourism. In this paper, we are going to focus on communicative, receptive and attractive factors in the West Herzegovina County area.

### **2.1. Communication elements**

The term “communication elements” in a tourist destination primarily refers to all aspects of traffic and transportation connections that the destination shares with the rest of the world. West Herzegovina County is relatively easy to reach and well-connected by road. We would like to highlight the proximity of the A1 highway through Croatia (which connects to Vrgorac or Zagvozd via border crossings in Posušje, Grude and Ljubuški). Furthermore, work is underway on the Mostar-Split expressway, which runs through West Herzegovina County, as well as the pan-European route, i.e., Vc corridor, which connects the port of Ploče in Croatia with Central Europe via Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bijača-Ljubuški border crossing, Mostar, Sarajevo). It also applies to rail transport. Parts of this corridor have already been built, and work is currently underway to build the section between Mostar and Sarajevo (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

Most international air traffic passes through Mostar International Airport. In addition, the proximity of airports in Split, Sarajevo and Dubrovnik is a plus in terms of connectivity.

## 2.2. Attractive elements

Attractive elements are objects and parts of space that can be natural or artificial. The Natural ones are those created by nature. Artificial ones are man-made

### 2.2.1. Natural heritage

West Herzegovina County has a lot of protected natural heritage as well as 12 monuments of nature.

Table 2. Protected natural heritage in West Herzegovina County, source: EUI-ŽZH, 2019

No.	Name	Category	Municipality/Town
1	Lake Krenica	geological monument of nature	Grude
2	Tihaljine Springs near Peć Mlini	geomorphological monument of nature	Grude
3	Vrbine near Kongore	geomorphological monument of nature	Grude
4	Travertine areas around Kravice Waterfalls	geomorphological monument of nature	Ljubuški
5	Vrioštica Spring in Vitina	geomorphological monument of nature	Ljubuški
6	Hardomilje Cave	geomorphological monument of nature	Ljubuški
7	Koduša Waterfalls	geomorphological monument of nature	Ljubuški
8	Vitina Waterfalls	geomorphological monument of nature	Ljubuški
9	Lake Blidinje (Čvrsnica)	geomorphological monument of nature	Posušje
10	Blidinje Nature Park	geomorphological monument of nature	Posušje
11	Lištica Spring and Canyon (Borak)	geomorphological monument of nature	Široki Brijeg
12	Pravačeva Cave near the spring of Lištica	geomorphological monument of nature	Široki Brijeg

Source: Authors

In this paper, we are going to identify the most important natural resources in West Herzegovina County.

*The Blidinje Nature Park* has a total area of 358 km<sup>2</sup>. The area was designated a nature park in 1995 due to its geomorphological features, richness in flora and fauna and beautiful and untouched nature. So far, around 1,500 plant species have been recorded in this unique area, with over 200 of them being endemic, relic or subendemic. The Blidinje Nature Park is also known as the largest habitat of the endemic ivory pine. The Nature Park is dominated by Lake Blidinje, which is surrounded by the Čvrstica and Vran mountain ranges. The lake is a geomorphological monument of nature. Within the area of the Nature Park, the forest area of Masna Luka is protected as a nature reserve with a distinctive phytocenological forest community, rare and endemic flora and fauna. With Boricevac, it forms the largest complex of ivory pine. The atmosphere of this ecological oasis attracts tourists and excursionists during all four seasons. Blidinje provides the following recreational content: cycling, horseback riding, hiking, skiing, quad tours, kayaking and more. The most value is given to ski tourism because of the ski slope on Risovac and the accommodation capacities along the slope (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

**Image 1. The Blidinje Nature Park**



Source: Ured Vlade ŽZH za Europske integracije

*The River Trebižat* flows for more than 50 km from its spring in Peć Mlini to the mouth of the River Neretva. It is considered a natural rarity and phenomenon of the Herzegovinian karst. There are several attractive bathing areas along the river for both tourists and locals: Bašćine, Tegaševac, Otunj, Čeveljuša, Božjak, Koćuša and Žabar. The waterfalls Kravica and Koćuša, which are protected as geomorphologic monuments of nature, have the greatest potential and value (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

**Image 2. The River Trebižat**



Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški

*Koćuša Waterfall* is one of the most beautiful natural gems in this part of Herzegovina. The natural riches of this region include sedimentary rocks known as travertine, which add to the appeal of this natural oasis. The waterfall is 50 meters long and five meters high. The presence of old mills and columns nearby adds to the allure of the oasis.<sup>3</sup>

### Image 3. Koćuša Waterfall



Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški

*Kravica Waterfall* is the most beautiful site on the River Trebižat. The height of the waterfall ranges from 26-28 meters and beneath is a 120-meter-diameter water amphitheater. There was a time when the waterfall was lined with mills and rolling poles. Kravica Waterfall has been protected as a monument of nature since 1995. What makes it special are the travertine areas around the waterfall, similar to those in the Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)

<sup>4</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)



**Image 4. Kravica Waterfall**



Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški<sup>5</sup>

*Peć Mlini* is a monument of nature with a high level of biodiversity in flora and fauna. Just above the spring of the River Tihaljina in Peć Mlini is the Ravlića Cave. The cave's depth is 95 m, its height is 20 m, and its opening width is 28 m. The cave contains Neolithic culture remains, and it has been restored, protected and illuminated.

**Image 5. Ravlića Cave**



Source: Ured Vlade ŽZH za evropske integracije

A zip line was installed as part of an adventure park, allowing visitors to descend in lengths of 400 or 600 meters. A promenade was built at the spring of the River Tihaljina, a new wooden bridge was built and an old one was restored. In addition, as part of the

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<sup>5</sup> The famous American travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveller* has included Kravica Waterfall near Ljubuški among the most beautiful places in Europe (*The 27 Most Beautiful Places in Europe | Condé Nast Traveler (cntraveler.com)*).

project, a 300-meter-long sports climbing area was built within the cave. The project was completed at the end of 2019 (EUI-ŽZH, 2019). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project has not reached its full potential. An insufficient number of visitors can also be attributed to poor advertising. Apart from their Facebook page, which had no recent posts or updates at the time of this review (end of February 2022), the location has not had any other forms of promotion or advertising. However, given the natural beauty and an appealing tourist offer, it will undoubtedly attract many visitors.

**Image 6. Peć Mlini Adventure Park**



Source: Ured Vlade ŽZH za europske integracije

West Herzegovina County is also rich in canyons that have the potential to be developed as tourist attractions. We would like to highlight Brine Canyon, which is located on the territory of the municipality of Posušje and is already partially established as a tourist attraction thanks to a well-maintained hiking trail. Near the town of Široki Brijeg, there is the canyon of the River Ugrovače and Borak Canyon. Borak Canyon (Lištica River Canyon) is one of the more appealing areas, and it offers a plethora of opportunities for active and adventurous tourism. As part of the Adriatic Canyoning project, a zip line was built across the canyon, as well as a promenade and a free climbing range, and the medieval fortifications of Kruševac were restored. Both hiking and canyoning trails pass through the canyon and can last up to three hours (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

**Image 7. Brine Canyon, Posušje**



Source: Ured Vlade ŽZH za evropske integracije

### **2.2.2. Cultural and historical heritage of West Herzegovina County**

West Herzegovina County has about 600 sites with recorded material remains dating from prehistory to the new age.

*The fortress of herceg (duke) Stjepan Kosača* is located on the hill Buturovica above the town of Ljubuški. It was first mentioned in 1444 as Lubussa. It has been extended several times over the years. The fortress is a protected architectural unit and a national monument of the second category.<sup>6</sup>

**Image 8. The fortress of herceg (duke) Stjepan**

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<sup>6</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)



Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški

*Bigeste* is a Roman military camp that served as a resting place for the legions as well as a defensive fortress. This fort is thought to have been built between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. During excavations, numerous remains of ceramics, jugs, vases, coins, jewelry, rings, glass, tools and weapons were found. This archaeological area was declared a national monument in 2003.<sup>7</sup>

*St. Ante's Monastery in Humac* was founded in 1876. The monastery is located next to the oldest museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was founded in 1884. The most valuable exhibit in the museum's collection is the Humac Tablet, which dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is written in Croatian Cyrillic and Glagolitic scripts. The Tablet is the oldest monument in the folk language in Herzegovina.<sup>8</sup>

**Image 9. Museum in Humac**

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<sup>7</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)

<sup>8</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)





Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški

*The Franciscan monastery and church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Široki Brijeg* is the first Catholic church and monastery built in Herzegovina after the Ottoman destruction in 1860. The construction of the current church was started by Friar Didak Buntić in 1905, and construction lasted in stages until 1969. Within the monastery, there is also a Franciscan gallery with a large treasury. The church and monastery are powerful spiritual, educational and cultural symbols not only of Široki Brijeg but of Herzegovina as a whole (Grad Široki Brijeg, 2017).

**Image 10. The Franciscan monastery and church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Široki Brijeg**

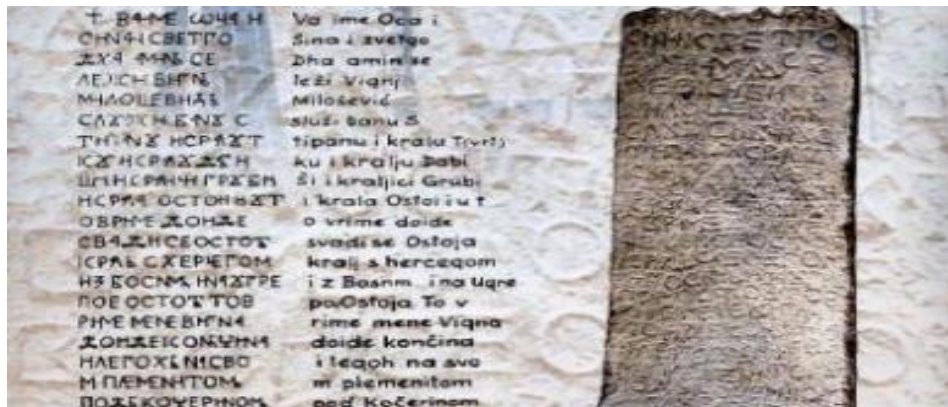


Source: Grgo Mikulić

*The Kočerín Tablet* (Inscription of Viganj Milošević) is the tombstone of the nobleman Viganj Milošević from 1404. It was written in Croatian Cyrillic, known as *bosančica*, allowing the names of the Bosnian rulers of the time to be read from it. The Tablet was moved from a field in Kočerín more than 130 years ago and built into the

Rectory in Kočerin before being transferred to the newly built Rectory in 1927 (Grad Široki Brijeg, 2017).

Image 11. The Kočerin Tablet



Source: Grgo Mikulić

*Stećak* tombstones are medieval tombstones that represent one of the most important segments of cultural and historical heritage. It is assumed that there are about 2,500 *stećak* tombstones of various shapes and with rich ornaments in West Herzegovina County. There are many sites of *stećak* tombstones in the County, but several important ones are going to be singled out in this chapter.

*The Ričina Necropolis* is located in Posušje municipality. Prehistoric tumuli, a medieval church and a dozen *stećak* tombstones in the shapes of slabs, sarcophagi and chests can all be found on the site. Remains of an early Christian church in this area can be seen between the *stećak* tombstones. The necropolis is included in the national monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Općina Posušje, 2014).

Image 12. The Ričina Necropolis



Source: Općina Posušje

*The Dugo polje Necropolis* is located in the Blidinje Nature Park, near Lake Blidinje. Within the necropolis, there are 150 *stećak* tombstones, which are well preserved and decorated with beautiful ornaments (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

*The Varda Necropolis in Široki Brijeg* is a medieval necropolis with about 198 chest-shaped *stećak* tombstones, with relief-decorated specimens. It is the largest necropolis in the area of Široki Brijeg (Grad Široki Brijeg, 2017).

*The Bijača Necropolis* (Ljubuški) has 34 *stećak* tombstones decorated in relief. They stand out with quality workmanship and rich iconographic content such as a tendril with a trefoil, a cross, a shield and a sword, a bow and arrow, a new moon, a rosette, arcades, hunting scenes and the dance *kolo*. In 2016, the necropolis was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2.3. Other cultural heritage in West Herzegovina County

*The Franciscan Museum - Collection "In My Father's House in Posušje"* was founded in 2007. The museum houses an ethnographic collection in which the culture of the Posušje region from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is set. The collection has 173 exhibits, of which 91 are on display. In addition to the ethnographic collection, the museum also houses a sacral collection, which contains about 60 exhibits. The oldest exhibit is a missal from 1827. In addition, there is an archaeological collection, with about 110 exhibits on permanent display and a numismatic collection. (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

*Croatian Archaeological Collection of St. Stephen the Protomartyr in Gorica* was exhibited in 2006. The exhibition consists of the items found during the archaeological excavations of the Šamatorje, Grabarje and Grotuša sites, conducted in the period from 1995 to 2003. The oldest finds in the collection belong to the New Stone Age (Neolithic).

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<sup>9</sup> [www.visitljubuski.com](http://www.visitljubuski.com)

An early Christian basilica - an old Croatian pre-Romanesque church with a cemetery, was discovered in Šamatorje, and the remains of a Roman necropolis, temple and buildings were found in the wider area (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

**Image 13. Croatian Archaeological Collection of St. Stephen the Protomartyr in Gorica**



Source: Općina Grude

*The Franciscan Museum-Gallery in Široki Brijeg* was officially opened in 1990, but art exhibitions were held before that, and the first was in 1979. Today, this gallery has over 4,500 valuable works of art. In the monastery's Treasury, a separate section of the Gallery, there are paintings by old masters and artistically designed metal objects of worship and liturgical attire, as well as old books, including an incunabulum from 1493 (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

#### **2.2.4. Cultural and gastronomic events in West Herzegovina County**

West Herzegovina County has several traditional events that have great tourist potential and have achieved an enviable international reputation: *West Herzegovina West* (Široki Brijeg) - a festival of amateur art; *Mediterranean Film Festival* (Široki Brijeg) - documentary film festival; *A Cappella Festival* (Posušje) and *Raštikijada* (Grude) - competition in cooking *raštika*. It is important to note that a winemaking and viticulture culture tailored to the needs of tourists has recently emerged. A notable step forward in this area is visible in Ljubuški, where there are seven successful wineries (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

#### **2.3. Receptive elements**

All facilities that are categorized and have a permit to provide accommodation services are considered receptive elements. There are 14 accommodation facilities registered in West Herzegovina County - two are not operational and one is partially operational. Of the 12 accommodation facilities in operation, four are hotels, five motels, two facilities



for resorts and short breaks and one a rural tourism facility. There is a total of 185 accommodation units. Most accommodation units are registered in Ljubuški, then in Posušje and then in Široki Brijeg and Grude (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

In addition to these registered accommodation facilities, there are numerous other accommodation facilities in family houses that have been refurbished to accommodate guests. When it comes to tourist arrivals, there is a visible increase. Until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of arrivals grew from year to year. From 3,564 recorded arrivals in 2016 to 9,740 in 2019. In the mentioned period, the number of arrivals of foreigners grew, as well as the number of overnight stays.

**Table 3. The number of tourist arrivals in WHC, source: FZS**

The number of arrivals WHC	
Year	Number of arrivals
2019	9,740
2018	6,134
2017	3,679
2016	3,564

**Table 4. The number of foreign tourist arrivals in WHC, source: FZS**

The number of foreign tourist arrivals WHC	
Year	Number of foreign tourist arrivals
2019	6,340
2018	3,626
2017	2,327
2016	2,135

**Table 5. The number of overnight stays in WHC, source: FZS**

The number of overnight stays WHC	
Year	The number of overnight stays
2019	14,513
2018	9,517
2017	6,092
2016	5,724

**Table 6. The number of foreign tourist overnight stays in WHC, source: FZS**

The number of foreign tourist overnight stays - WHC	
Year	The number of foreign tourist overnight stays
2019	9,467
2018	6,274
2017	4,190
2016	3,766

### **3. LEGAL AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN WEST HERZEGOVINA COUNTY**

In order to develop tourism as a strategic activity, a legislative and strategic framework for tourism development was created in West Herzegovina County.

*The Law on Tourism of West Herzegovina County*<sup>10</sup> was adopted in 2019. It regulates the categories of tourist entities, as well as the establishment and operation of tourist boards of towns/municipalities and defines measures for the promotion and development of tourism. When it comes to tourist boards, the Law on Tourism provides the establishment of county and town/municipal tourist boards and encourages cooperation between the public and private sectors in creating a tourist product.

*The Tourism Development Strategy of West Herzegovina County for the period 2020-2027* was adopted in 2019. It provides an analysis of the situation and recommendations for further development of tourism. In the SWOT analysis, the following are recognized as tourism forces in West Herzegovina County: beauty, diversity and preservation of landscapes, valuable cultural and historical heritage, agricultural tradition (livestock, gardening, vines, fruit growing), low pollution, pleasant climate, several solid hotel facilities, several solid family accommodation facilities, a large number of restaurants, events and manifestations, the need for tourism development recognized by public authorities, developed awareness of the need for tourism promotion and hospitality of the local population. Weaknesses include inadequate valorization of natural resources for tourism purposes, inadequate valorization of cultural resources for tourism purposes, lack of adequate development and management organization, insufficient number of tourist experiences ready for the market, insufficient general and tourist signalization, non-existence of tourist information centers and interpretations of tourist attractions, lack of service facilities in attractive tourist locations, lack of accommodation capacity, lack of services for tourism and undeveloped trade offer for tourists.

In that regard, it is emphasized that the entire West Herzegovina County area can be maximally dedicated to the development of six groups of tourist products: “outdoor” tourism, “activity-based” tourism, sports and adventure tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism. These six groups of tourist products complement each other and create a richer tourist offer, and the inclusion of natural and cultural sights creates a complex tourist offer that has great potential now and for future development (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

*The Development Strategy of West Herzegovina County for the period 2021-2027* was adopted in 2019. It also recognizes tourism as a potential for economic development and emphasizes the following measures: development of tourist infrastructure; support for the development of entrepreneurship in tourism and increase of accommodation capacities and promotion of West Herzegovina County as an attractive region for tourists and business. Financial resources in the amount of KM 5,770,000.00 (or approximately HRK 22,530,300.00) are also planned for these measures. Most of the funds, KM 3,710,000.00, are planned to be withdrawn from external sources (Ministarstvo gospodarstva za Vlada ŽZH, 2019).

*Rural Development Strategy of West Herzegovina County for the period 2020-2030* was adopted in 2019. Rural tourism is also recognized as an important potential for the development of rural areas. But it is also emphasized that this type of tourism in West

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<sup>10</sup> [Zakon-o-turizmu-Zupanije-Zapadnohercegovačke.pdf \(mg-zzh.com\)](#)

Herzegovina County is underdeveloped. Therefore, measures are proposed: development of family farms, support for young people in rural areas through the development of business ideas and business opportunities and the promotion of rural tourism (EUI-ŽZH, 2019).

#### 4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF TOURISM IN WEST HERZEGOVINA COUNTY

Although West Herzegovina County Tourism Act stipulates it, the institutional framework for the development, promotion and management of tourism development at the County level has not yet been developed. There are almost no promotions of tourist content and destinations in West Herzegovina County. The natural, cultural and historical heritage and tourist facilities can only be partially read about on the websites of towns/municipalities. The exception is the town of Ljubuški, which founded its Tourist Board in 2019 and which, through its public company *Parkovi*, designs and implements a number of promotional campaigns. In addition to a representative website and profiles on social networks (Facebook and Instagram), the town of Ljubuški promotes its tourist destinations through regular billboard advertising campaigns - along the roads and at local and international airports (Zadar, Split, Tuzla, Mostar), TV and radio commercials, advertisements in daily newspapers. In 2020, they included online advertising on social networks in their promotional activities and created the mobile application *Ljubuški Tour Guide*. All this has resulted in an increased number of visits to this town. Excluding 2020, which we characterize as “pandemic”, the number of visits, for example to the Kravica Waterfall, increased by almost 100% in the period from 2016 to 2019.

Table 7: The number of recorded visits, Kravica Waterfall

The number of recorded visits - Kravica Waterfall	
Year	Number of visitors
2020	34,059
2019	306,509
2018	279,017
2017	205,557
2016	163,631

Source: JP Parkovi, Ljubuški<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to emphasize that in parallel with the development of the legal and strategic framework, in previous years a step forward was made in the development of the necessary tourist infrastructure in all municipalities and towns in West Herzegovina County. New facilities have been developed that are fully or partially ready for the tourist market. The initiative was launched by the Office of the Government of the West Herzegovina County for European Integration. Some of these projects, which we mentioned in previous chapters, are being implemented as part of cross-border cooperation (EU) and with the support of international partners in Bosnia and

<sup>11</sup> Note: Data from JP Parkovi, Ljubuški received by e-mail upon request

Herzegovina (USAID and UNDP). For example, through the *Adriatic Canyoning* project, the locations of Borak Canyon, Peć Mlini Canyon and Ravlića Cave, have been arranged and equipped with adrenaline content. Through the *Heritage REVIVED* project, the fortress of *herceg* (duke) Stjepan is being renovated and a modern visitor center is being built in Gračine. Cycling and tourist offers in the open and in rural areas of West Herzegovina County are developed and promoted through the projects *Via Dinarica* and *Cycling rural*. The total value of these investments in tourism is about 4.5 million euros or 10 million KM.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

Tourism is a dynamic activity that contributes to the development of the economy and as such is considered a global economic phenomenon. This is supported by data from the World Tourism Organization (2019), according to which a total of 1,401 million arrivals and an income of 1,451 billion US dollars were realized in international tourism.

The development of tourism activity in West Herzegovina County so far, especially in the context of statistically registered tourist arrivals and overnight stays, but also in the context of the number of available accommodation units, cannot be assessed with a high grade. Also, systematic and thoughtful promotion of tourist facilities at the County level is almost non-existent.

The most important tourist center in West Herzegovina County for now is the town of Ljubuški, which due to its natural potentials (Kravica and Koćuša waterfalls) and promotional activities, attracts many visitors from the region and abroad and is already part of tourist packages of various agencies and tour operators from Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad. Through legal and strategic documents, West Herzegovina County emphasized the development of tourism as an economic activity that leads to the development of society as a whole. The County wants to profile itself as a destination for “activity-based” and “outdoor tourism”, which can significantly contribute to the development of rural areas. In addition to the infrastructure that is largely built, there is an opportunity to design additional tourist facilities and offers (gift shops, gastro tourism, ecotourism) which will contribute to the stay of young people and greater employability of hard-to-employ groups, such as women. The great potential for the development of rural tourism in West Herzegovina County stems from the rich natural and cultural-historical heritage and a significant percentage of rural space that is ecologically clean. In that regard, the integration of agriculture and tourism is especially important, as well as the design of support programs for young people and families in rural areas through the development of business ideas and business opportunities.

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- [ZHŽ iz EU fondova povukla preko 10 milijuna maraka / Bljesak.info | BH Internet magazin](#)

## RURAL TOURISM IN THE SERVICE OF DEVELOPMENT OF WEST HERZEGOVINA COUNTY

**Žana Ćorić**

**Assistant Professor Marina Perić Kaselj**

**Katica Jurčević**

### **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that the number of international tourist arrivals will grow at a 3.3% annual rate, resulting in 1,800 million international tourist arrivals in 2030 (UNWTO, 2017). According to the same organization, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased interest in rural tourism. After numerous lockdowns carried out to varying degrees by all countries around the world, tourists are increasingly seeking specific, authentic experiences that are inherent in rural areas.

Bearing in mind that rural tourism is the driver of development in rural (often underdeveloped) regions, that it helps to preserve local identity, traditions and customs, improves the quality of life of residents, prevents depopulation and increases employment of traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women and young people, this paper is going to analyze the possibilities for developing this type of tourism in West Herzegovina County, one of the (ten) counties within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rural areas are home to 75% of the county's population, and its natural beauty, rich flora and fauna, diversity and preservation of the landscape, valuable cultural and historical intangible and material heritage, the richness of customs and traditions, good transportation connections and geographical location lend themselves to significant tourism development. We are going to focus on the analysis of legal and strategic documents for the development of tourism in this county, as well as give an overview of tourism development so far (statistics on tourist traffic). We are going to present the most important natural, cultural-historical and gastronomic sites and manifestations that can make West Herzegovina County an appealing tourist destination and enable the sustainable development of rural areas.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, West Herzegovina County, specific forms of tourism, sustainable development

**Žana Ćorić, teacher**

Student in the second year of the postgraduate university program "Sociology: Values, Identity and Social Changes in Croatian Society," Catholic University of Croatia

[zcoric@unicath.hr](mailto:zcoric@unicath.hr)

**Assistant Professor Marina Perić Kaselj, Ph.D.**

Senior research associate,  
Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies

[marina.peric@imin.hr](mailto:marina.peric@imin.hr)

**Katica Jurčević, Ph.D.**

Senior research associate,  
Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies

[katica.jurcevic@imin.hr](mailto:katica.jurcevic@imin.hr)

# STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROTECTED RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**Anamaria Pisarović**  
**Sanja Tišma**  
**Damir Demonja**  
**Andrea Solić**  
**Iva Tolić**

**Abstract:**

The paper presents the results of the study of stakeholders' opinions and their attitude toward protected natural areas as a driving force for sustainable integrated local development in rural areas. Analysis shows that the protected areas are an important resource of the Republic of Croatia having the potential to start and strengthen socio-economic development in rural regions and local communities where they are established. The results show that stakeholders whose daily activities do not include nature protection are less interested in these areas. It is necessary to strengthen their awareness of the economic and developmental potentials of protected natural areas, especially those related to rural tourism development. In this regard, the paper highlights the opportunities offered by the model of participative planning and management in local communities. The overall conclusion of this research is that the protected natural areas are still largely viewed through the protection, control, and preservation of nature, and therefore seem closed to potential investors and the business sector in general. Involving local communities in protected areas, national and nature parks management will allow local stakeholders to understand the possibilities, significance, and role of protected natural areas and ecosystem services in enhancing the rural tourism development, their living standards, and the overall quality of life.

**Keywords:**

The Republic of Croatia, integrated local development, stakeholder analysis, rural development, protected areas management

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Protected areas are closely related to the local communities where they are established. However, more active involvement of local communities in the management of the protected areas is often missing. Therefore, one of the prerequisites to improve the engagement of local communities is strengthening their potential to make an impact on shaping and supervising national policy on environmental and nature protection. That would significantly contribute to a more adequate and efficient transfer and implementation of the European Union (EU) legislation on the environment. The fact is that protected areas have a significant social and economic impact on the local population. Positive effects are to a great extent a foundation for tourism activities that enable employment growth of the local population. However, they can also largely influence the pollution or damage of natural resources and cause a decrease in biodiversity (Tišma 2018). Numerous international experiences show a wide range of

cooperation opportunities between protected areas and local communities that contribute to sustainable development on local and regional levels (Đukić et al. 2014). Leal Filho and Brandli (2016) consider that the involvement of stakeholders in management of the protected areas development contributes to the sustainable development of the local community. In addition, if the academic community and the student population are involved in the development of protected areas, the educational function of protected areas is realized on the one hand, while better protection of nature is enabled on the other. The increase in the level of trust in public administrations and a simultaneous decrease in the level of trust in other stakeholders is one of the directions of joint development and progress in local communities (Gallo et al. 2018).

Involving stakeholders in protected areas management is one of the key challenges for effective management of protected areas. According to Zhang et al. (2022) the top three keywords related to protected areas are management, community and conservation. The concerted efforts of all stakeholders are essential to achieving the global sustainable development goals for Nature Protected Areas (Zhang et al. 2022). This is especially important today in response to a number of security challenges associated with climate change the world is facing, which require greater resilience from communities. These challenges call for new policies and actions at the regional and local levels having the concept of resilience as their main driver and core component (Morelli et al. 2021).

The involvement of stakeholders in collaborative management is a proven mechanism for surpassing this and other challenges and helping effective protection and management of protected areas (Galambos et al. 2019).

The nature protection system in the Republic of Croatia today is relatively well organized. However, the key problems are still some inconsistencies in law enforcement, lack of finances as well as lack of cooperation with the local community in the management of protected areas. Bulat (2012) highlights the experience in the governance of protected areas in the United States as a good example of cooperation between protected areas and local communities in local development. Also, the involvement of stakeholders in the management of protected areas has its ethical component. Thus Matijević (2019) on the example of Krka National Park indicates that the park should increasingly focus on the role of local stakeholders in the development of the protected area, particularly regarding the raising of ecological awareness of the population, knowledge on climate changes and the like.

Results of the study presented in this paper prepared during 2016 show that various stakeholders are interested in protected areas and that the majority of them see these areas as a possibility for the development of both national and regional communities as well as subjects who have the opportunity to cooperate with these protected areas. Such approach is regarded as an important developmental possibility on local and regional levels. Despite several analyses and development plans as well as a solid legal framework, current cooperation of local communities and protected areas can be further developed. The main obstacle to their stronger cooperation is inadequate public institutions' governance of protected areas. Similar experiences were also recorded in the international context (Getzner



2003). Another challenge is the fact that ideas regarding development and business opportunities for cooperation between various stakeholders and national parks are still missing (Zawilinska and Mika 2015).

Due to policy recommendations at the European level and a number of challenges, the connection between stakeholders and protected areas has been strengthening over the past few years. This growing link is the result of responding to security challenges, as well as to climate change, increasing resilience and strengthening decentralization in development management at the local level. There are similar trends in the Republic of Croatia.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The analysis of key stakeholders' interests and their impacts in the Republic of Croatia on the decisions being made about protected natural areas was conducted in the period from April 22 to June 13, 2016. The research was conducted using the method of semi-structured interviews combined with a survey of 43 respondents. The key criterion for the selection of interviewees referred to the identification of the sectors that usually are not concerned with nature protection, but are supposed to have a significant intermediate impact on the protected natural areas (i.e. secondary stakeholders). The analysis took into account the status of the respondents and the level of action thus encompassing institutions, organizations, firms, and civil society associations on national, local, and regional levels. A multisector analysis covered also sectors of nature protection, economy, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, forestry, health care, education, employment, spatial planning, and sport.

A semi-structured questionnaire, the interviews, and surveys were based on twelve key theses, offering the respondents to express their attitudes ranging from 1 (completely incorrect) to 5 (completely correct). The respondents also provided additional judgments, attitudes, and opinions, which were considered while analysing the results. The analysis includes 65.12% replies from the representatives of national organizations, bodies, and associations and 34.66% replies from the respondents who act on regional/local management levels. Key national actors are included in the analysis such as relevant ministries (e.g. Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, The Ministry of Labour and Pension System), public bodies (e.g. Hrvatske Šume (Croatian Forests) - public enterprise for forest and woodland management in the Republic of Croatia; Hrvatska Elektroprivreda (HEP Group) - the national energy company; Croatian Health Insurance Fund, and Institute for Spatial Planning), national branches of international organizations (e.g. United Nations Development Program, UNDP), corporations and diplomatic representations (e.g. Siemens, Embassy of Sweden, etc.), academic community (e.g. University of Dubrovnik, Faculty of Science, Institute for Tourism), etc. On the regional level, the analysis encompasses city and county development agencies (e.g. Development Agency of the City of Dubrovnik, DURA; Istrian Development Agency), town governing bodies (e.g. Town of Duga Resa, Administrative Department for Entrepreneurship, Sea and Tourism of the City of Dubrovnik) and associations (e.g. local action groups, hunters' associations).

In 2017, the Nature Protection Strategy and Action Plan of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2017-2025, were adopted. One of the five strategic goals in the strategy is raising the level of knowledge, understanding, and support for nature protection among the general public. Priority 5.4. “Improve participation in decision-making directly or indirectly connected with nature protection” is of particular significance. In the 2017-2022 period, breakthroughs have been made in the nature protection system due to systematic implementation of the measures envisaged by the Strategy. Also, significant financial resources were invested through the use of the EU funds in improving infrastructure, strengthening the capacity of institutions in the system of environmental protection and promotion of parks and their role in local and regional development, which also contributed to changing the attitude of key stakeholders.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Decision-makers and public bodies, which are directly involved in the environmental policy-shaping process, stand out on the national level by the expressed interest in protected natural areas (Figure 1). Thus, the statement stressing the contribution of the protected natural areas to the overall social and economic development was given by the Ministry of Public Administration, Hrvatske Šume, Croatian Agency for the Environment and Nature (mark between 4 and 5 – partly correct and completely correct). The replies from the business sector (Siemens, Boehringer Ingelheim) regarding the same issue were mainly neutral. Similar was the reply provided by the international organizations and diplomatic representations (UNDP, Embassy of the Netherlands, Embassy of Sweden) as well as by the civil society organizations (Society for Sustainable Development Design, DOOR, and Association of Cities and Municipalities).

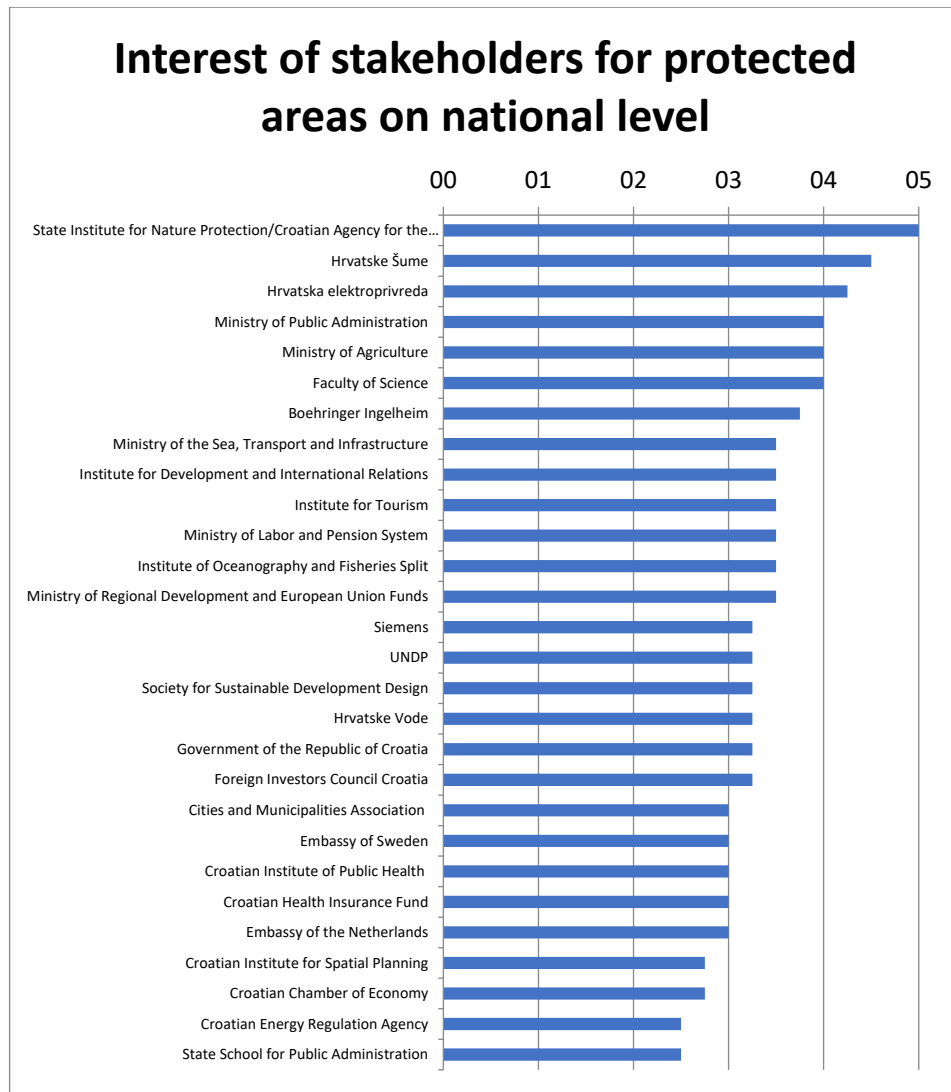
Interest in protected natural areas varies from the least, expressed by the water management sector (Hrvatske Vode (Croatian Waters) – mark 3,3) to a somewhat bigger interest expressed by the representatives of the academic community with the research focus on sectors of tourism, culture, and science (Institute for Tourism, Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO; Science Faculty – marks 3,5 to 4,0). The majority of respondents on the national level particularly stressed the significance of the role of protected natural areas regarding the development of tourism (e.g. Ministry of Public Administration, Science Faculty, Hrvatske Vode).

The interview results suggest that the potential of protected natural areas in the Republic of Croatia is mostly considered from the tourism development aspect. The Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2020 (2013) recognised national and nature parks as key sources for eco- and camping tourism development. Protected areas are equally assessed as a potential for local development in the Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period up to 2020.

Sectoral strategic and planning documents of other economic sectors such as entrepreneurship and agriculture, do not recognize national and nature parks as particular

development resources. The understanding of the economic potentials of national and nature parks is reduced only to their tourism potential since these documents do not specify expansion possibilities for certain economic activities of the protected natural areas. Still, recent strategic documents, i.e. National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period up to 2030, stress the importance of the protected areas as a resource for local and regional development. They also point out that the protected areas are a foundation for environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and mitigation of climate changes.

Figure 1. **The Interest of stakeholders for protected areas on a national level**

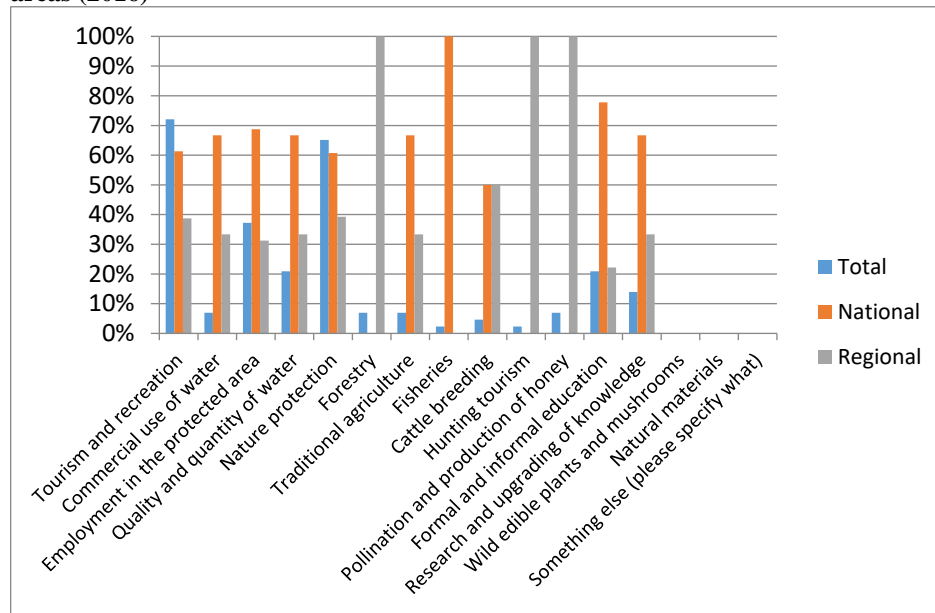


Note: values – completely correct (5), partly correct (4), neutral (3), partly incorrect (2), completely incorrect (1)  
 Source: Authors' research results

Most of the respondents stress protected areas management style as an important guideline in creating social benefits from protected natural areas (72% of respondents replied with “correct” or “partly correct”). The respondents think that the parks management changes according to political changes and therefore lacks continuity, capacity, vision, and support. Although there are expressed interests and areas for cooperation in different sectors (Figure

2.), such initiatives in terms of mutual development and benefits demand a longer period and trust. The biggest interest in *cooperation with protected areas* is visible in the fields of fisheries, formal and informal education on a national level, and in the fields of tourism, forestry, and secondary forest products on the regional level. Regarding the local level, most respondents share the opinion that the importance of the protected natural areas in strengthening the social and economic development, primarily stems from their contribution to the development of tourism and tourism-related activities, protected area's ecological functions (e.g. climate change mitigation and natural disasters such as floods (Kramarić et al. 2006). Therefore, the benefits of cooperation are the least recognized as a possibility for economic development on the local level.

Figure 2. Evaluation of significance and interest of stakeholders in protected natural areas (2016)



Source: Author's research results

The reason for such an evaluation of the cooperation potential on the local level is respondents' perception that dealing with protected areas means mainly dealing with the problems, i.e. insufficient capacities and resources. The respondents mainly focus on the income from the visitors instead of focusing on the income increase due to cooperation with the local community in terms of joint development in the long run.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

International experiences point out to a wide range of possibilities for the cooperation with local communities concerning protected areas that contribute to their sustainable development, emphasizing the country's reputation as an ecologically preserved, interesting, and inspiring tourist destination pleasant for living. However, insufficient use of those potentials is often caused by the lack of managerial capacities for cooperation as well as for the acceptance of new entrepreneurial ideas.

The analysis of strategic development documents in the Republic of Croatia also pointed out poor recognition of the protected areas' capacities to boost local development. The exception is the Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2020 where these possibilities are pointed out to. The document considers national and nature parks as the key resources for eco- and camping tourism development. Other strategic documents on a national level, apart from those directly related to the environment and nature protection do not recognize protected areas as development potential.

The results show that the viewpoints of various stakeholders and their attitudes towards protected natural areas, on national and regional levels as well as on the level of representations of international organizations in the Republic of Croatia, show that protected natural areas are both an important resource of the Republic of Croatia and have a potential for boosting social and economic development in the regions and local communities. Although the first analysis pointed out the lack of ideas on development and business cooperation opportunities between various stakeholders with national and nature parks, a subsequent check after 6 years showed that cooperation has advanced significantly and that parks have become drivers of local development and cooperation with local entrepreneurs.

Organizations with the greatest impact on protected natural areas management, which have most strongly expressed their interest are the institutions involved in the system of environmental protection, particularly the Croatian Agency for Environment and Nature and other relevant institutions on the national level such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds. Public enterprises that use natural resources in their everyday activities such as Hrvatske Šume, Hrvatske Vode, and Hrvatska Elektroprivreda, also expressed strong interest in protected areas. These enterprises have a great impact on the decisions made about the management and sustainable use of protected areas.

Significant interest is shown by the academic community in Croatia whose research, scientific and professional work are related to natural resources as well as by the local and regional administrative units that would benefit from cooperation with natural and nature parks in terms of development.

Although the first analysis showed that local and regional administrative units did not directly participate in decision-making in protected areas management where their impact was formally restricted, this has also changed. It is common nowadays for representatives of the local community to be present in the governing bodies of the parks and *vice versa*, the park representatives are internally involved in local development plans, so synergies have been at a much higher level for the past few years. Likewise, the interest in protected natural areas is expressed by the businessmen who see the development potential of the parks but do not have any impact on decision-making in that field. In the first analysis, the businessmen often considered parks as a restriction for investments rather than business opportunities, which has also changed greatly. Namely, the incentives for the development of rural tourism and eco-tourism based on the sustainable use of natural heritage have made significant steps forward in cooperation and contribution to local development.

Local action groups (LAGs), even though some protected areas are co-founders of the LAGs, i.e. hunters' associations, and the Croatian Chamber of Economy, show the least impact on and interest in protected natural areas as a development resource.

In general, the first analysis showed that there is a need for additional involvement of those stakeholders who have already shown a certain interest in protected areas. Stakeholders, whose everyday activities do not include nature protection, show lower interest in those areas. Pointing out to the development potentials of protected nature areas creates a potential for expansion of their activities. Considering that a significant progress has been made in the past few years at the national level in the promotion of protected areas, which involved all relevant stakeholders, this claim is no longer justified, i.e. new significant positive effects have been achieved. Stakeholders' (e.g. LAGs, Croatian Chamber of Economy, hunters' associations) awareness of the business and development potentials of the protected natural areas has increased.

Although significant steps forward have been made in the past few years in stakeholders' involvement in the work and management of protected areas, there is still a need for further steps towards green and digital management of protected areas in cooperation with the local population. Some of the recommendations in this direction are as follows:

- Enhancement of protected area's knowledge of their local/regional environments, methods, and mechanisms for bridging the gap between professional knowledge and participation management knowledge and for bringing different perspectives together;
- Harmonization of multilevel frameworks in the governance of intervention in local protected areas;
- Effective guidelines for fostering public administration capacity building regarding a participatory approach to protected areas governance;
- Effective and efficient frameworks for cross-sectoral cooperation on the level of protected areas projects and integrated governance at the policy level;

- Enhancement of balances between economic, social, and environmental benefits;
- Effective transition of protected areas to a circular economy, the clean energy transition, and cost-effective renovation towards zero-energy performance;
- Introduction of green innovation in the cooperation with the local community (e.g. business models, financial efficiency, accessibility, safety, user needs, affordability, etc.).

Modern trends in participatory management and stakeholder involvement in management have greatly contributed to improving the management of protected areas in the Republic of Croatia. The importance attached to this issue at the policy level can be seen through one of the strategic priorities in the Nature Protection Strategy, and through the wider interested public's general perception of stronger links between stakeholders and protected areas. Although some of the previously emphasized challenges may seem smaller in recent times, there is still room for improvement and further strengthening of connections and cooperation to contribute to local development.

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**STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVEMENT  
IN SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE PROTECTED RURAL AREAS  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

**Abstract:**

The paper presents the results of the study of stakeholders' opinions and their attitude toward protected natural areas as a driving force for sustainable integrated local development in rural areas. Analysis shows that the protected areas are an important resource of the Republic of Croatia having the potential to start and strengthen socio-economic development in rural regions and local communities where they are established. The results show that stakeholders whose daily activities do not include nature protection are less interested in these areas. It is necessary to strengthen their awareness of the economic and developmental potentials of protected natural areas, especially those related to rural tourism development. In this regard, the paper highlights the opportunities offered by the model of participative planning and management in local communities. The overall conclusion of this research is that the protected natural areas are still largely viewed through the protection, control, and preservation of nature, and therefore seem closed to potential investors and the business sector in general. Involving local communities in protected areas, national and nature parks management will allow local stakeholders to understand the possibilities, significance, and role of protected natural areas and ecosystem services in enhancing the rural tourism development, their living standards, and the overall quality of life.

**Keywords:**

The Republic of Croatia, integrated local development, stakeholder analysis, rural development, protected areas management

**dr. sc. Anamaria Pisarović**, Ph.D.

[apisarov@irmo.hr](mailto:apisarov@irmo.hr)

Znanstvena savjetnica / Research Adviser

Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, IRMO / Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO

Lj. F. Vukotinovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska / Croatia

**dr. sc. Sanja Tišma**, Ph.D.

[bsanja@irmo.hr](mailto:bsanja@irmo.hr)

Znanstvena savjetnica u trajnom zvanju / Research Adviser in permanent position

Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, IRMO / Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO

Lj. F. Vukotinovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska / Croatia

**dr. sc. Damir Demonja**, Ph.D.

[ddemonja@irmo.hr](mailto:ddemonja@irmo.hr)

Znanstveni savjetnik u trajnom zvanju / Research Adviser in permanent position

Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, IRMO / Institute for Development and International Relations, IRMO

Lj. F. Vukotinovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska / Croatia

**Andrea Solić**, mag. oecol.et. prot. nat.

[andrea4nature@gmail.com](mailto:andrea4nature@gmail.com)

Voditeljica projekata / Project manager

CARNIVORA MAGNA – Institut za istraživanje, očuvanje i upravljanje velikim zvijerima /  
CARNIVORA MAGNA – Institute for Research, Conservation and Management of Large Carnivores

[andrea@genom.hr](mailto:andrea@genom.hr)

Direktorica / CEO

Genom d.o.o. / Genome Ltd.

Ilica 60/1, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska / Croatia

**Iva Tolić**

[itolic@irmo.hr](mailto:itolic@irmo.hr)

Stručna suradnica / Expert associate

Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, IRMO / Institute for Development and International Relations,  
IRMO

Lj. F. Vukotinovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska / Croatia

## **SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFFIRMATION OF RURAL-HEALTH TOURISM**

**Željko Mudri**  
**Antea Marinović**  
**Marija Margetić**

### **Abstract**

Health tourism is defined as a tourism whose original goal is to preserve and improve health, as well as to improve the quality of life overall. In doing so, it is a health and tourist destination that primarily offers users health, preventive, curative, or rehabilitation services. The tourist experience is primarily a multi-sensory experience because it includes all five of human's senses. Rural tourism can offer an authentic experience during the provision of a health service and thus have a positive effect on human holism. In the context of the recent COVID-19 crisis, the research carried out points to the already existing and forthcoming implications for the mental and physical health of citizens, which include an increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and more frequent substance abuse. In addition to the impact on the micro-sociological aspects of society, the implications on the economic aspects are visible, which is why additional affirmation of the rural - health segment of tourism is needed. Health tourism in rural areas is underdeveloped and uncompetitive despite offering a unique blend of healthcare and service, a multi-sensory experience of the natural environment and the cultural and natural beauty of rural landscapes to various facilities such as Nordic walking, swimming, horseback riding, cycling and gastronomy. Consequently, it is implied to present a theoretical consideration of the positioning of health tourism in rural areas, thus being able to meet several prerequisites and aspects of demand derived from the specified selective type of tourism. Also considering the sociodemographic context, Croatia is in a trend of demographic ageing, which increases the share of the older population, which is more often in need of healthcare, thus confirming the sustainability of this concept. In this context, in addition to overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the permanent sustainable goal is to ensure the successful aging of the Croatian population.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, rural tourism, an ageing population, health tourism

### **1. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW**

When considering sociodemographic implications, one of the most important constructs is the age structure, which is directly related to the socioeconomic aspects of sustainable development of society. The context of a demographic transition in which high fertility and birth rates have been replaced by low rates, resulting in an increased proportion of older people in the total population. These demographic implications defined as an ageing population are recognized as a global process (UN 2019, 3). The focus of studying the aging of the population is based on the need to study and predict the consequences of these processes. The tendency of an ageing population is a process that is actively present in the entire European environment, which is confirmed by the fact that in 2019 there were 90.5 million people over the age of 65 living in Europe, or one fifth of the total population. Predictions suggest an increase of up to 129.8 million people by 2050 when the aforementioned population would make up 29.4% of the overall European population (Eurostat 2022, 8).

By examining the demographics of the Republic of Croatia based on the censuses carried out, the continuity of the increase in the share of the elderly population is observed and the Republic of Croatia is included in the group of the oldest peoples in Europe (ISCWeB 2020). The group of countries with the highest share of the elderly population in 2020, except Croatia with 21.0 %, includes Germany 21.8 %, Bulgaria 21.6 %, Greece with 22.3%, France with 20.4%, Italy with 23.2%, Latvia with 20.5%, Portugal with 22.1%, Finland with 22.3% and Serbia with 21.0% (Eurostat 2022).

Demographic changes generate social policy challenges in society, so it is necessary to react in a timely manner. Potential solutions exist in sociological perspectives that state the necessity of attaching importance to changes in activities, interactions, and changes in the role of the elderly (Bara and Podgorelec 2015, 65). The practical aspect of sociological perspectives includes the concept of active aging, which encompasses new activities to everyday life in old age, which is largely conditioned by the opportunities provided to the elderly in society.

## **2. HEALTH TOURISM: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AS OPPORTUNITIES**

Health tourism is defined as a "temporary change of persons' permanent residence by moving to a favourable climatic or bathing area for health prevention, curative and rehabilitation" (Vukonić and Čavlek 2001). Even though medical and health tourism are used as synonyms in certain literature, and medical tourism services are defined as the most common models of health tourism, a certain group of authors states that, regardless of existing connections, health and medical tourism differs significantly. According to Nakić et al. (2013) health tourism is one of the oldest selective forms of tourism, and what is specific for this type of tourism is that "natural healing factors are used with the aim of preserving and improving health, and also improving the quality of life". Thus, the emphasis is not on the cure of the disease, but on those services that are mainly based on the aspects that we primarily associate with the relaxation or regeneration of the organism, or the improvement and improvement of personal health status. Health tourism services are used in spas and wellness centres. The health type of tourism refers to spas and special hospitals and it is mainly used as a preventive form of maintaining and preserving health or preventing diseases, while wellness services are exclusively used for the purpose of personal well-being (Mainil et al. 2017). Thus, health tourism encompasses a term that bases certain tourist services on physical as well as psychological relaxation, stimulation, and regeneration of its' users. Recent trends in health tourism are increasingly evolving towards improving existing health services, but also linking and shaping newer and alternative content. Today, this type of tourism includes a wide range of different concepts covering various health, therapeutic, healing, physical and tourist elements; holistic and alternative approach to medicine, thalassotherapy, phytotherapy, organic products, staying within the natural environment, kinetic therapy, a diverse offer of sports activities, indigenous and healthy nutrition, and various curative, relaxation, regenerative and cosmetic treatments.

Unlike health tourism, medical tourism implies "organized travel outside its own health jurisdiction with the aim of improving human health through medical interventions" (Carrera and Bridges 2006). Kušen (2011) says there is an important and clear difference

between health and medical tourism, although medical tourism for most authors is a segment of health tourism. He sees the difference in the fact that medical tourism initially stems from the need for medical intervention and is not based on "motivation based on personal well-being, but on concrete medical procedures", for which there must be adequate infrastructure (hospitals, clinics, polyclinics, professional but also professional staff consisting of doctors and healthcare professionals, and adequate medical equipment). Thus, unlike health tourism, medicine tourism is associated with the cure of the disease and most often takes place in medical offices, clinics, polyclinics, and special hospitals.

Research has shown that wellness tourism is the most common form of health tourism offered in Croatia, and users of wellness services are predominantly foreigners, about 82%. Spa tourism services are used to a smaller extent, and users of spa services are in greater numbers of domestic guests, of about 67% (Institute of Tourism, 2018). However, such figures can also be greatly influenced by the insufficiently attractive and competitive offer of health tourism services in Croatia. On the other hand, in the last few decades, health tourism is one of the fastest growing trends, with an increase of between 15 and 20 percent of total income in the tourism sector globally. Reason for this is the increased awareness people have about health, care for health, increase in free time and total income of the population, but also inevitable changes in the way they work, and a very hectic and stressful lifestyle. In Republic of Croatia, health tourism brings revenues of only 300 million euros per year, which accounts for less than three percent of the total revenue in tourism in 2013 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports 2013). Gračanin (2010) points out that Croatia's health tourism product is extremely poorly developed, even though it is a frequent tourist destination and a competitive tourist country. Since Croatia has natural resources such as high-salinity sea, unpolluted nature, healing mud and geothermal sources, it is a health tourism destination with high potential. The Government of the Republic of Croatia has been developing strategies in the last ten years that encourage the development of health tourism to form competitive specific health tourism products regarding the long traditional tourist culture, favourable climate, natural capacity, and natural capital. Health tourism, therefore, in the last year has been identified as one of the priority tourism products of Croatia (Ministry of Health, 2020).

As stated by Mesić et al. (2001) the results of the study also show that respondents belonging to the older age group use health and tourism services more frequently than younger subjects, which means that the age structure of the health type of tourism is a third-age population. Given the long-standing culture of aging of the Croatian population, as well as the general trends of the aging population of economically strong countries, health tourism has the potential to develop and expand, and as such has the potential to become one of the leading and main forms of selective type of tourism in Croatia. According to research by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015), international tourism highlights "a high degree of stability and resilience despite sluggish economic growth and geopolitical tensions". Regardless of the before mentioned geopolitical and economic aggravating circumstances, terrorism contributes dominantly and significantly to the global economy and employment. All the greater globalization of the world has implications for many international trips. WEF research shows that the number of foreign trips is constantly growing and every year it is growing by 4% compared to the previous year (Madžar et al. 2016).

### **3. RURAL TOURISM: QUALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND INCLUSIVENESS**

Health and rural tourism are connected at the level of a holistic approach. In health tourism natural healing factors are used with the aim of preserving and improving health and improving the quality of life. In rural tourism it is possible to affirm these concepts due to the multisensory experience, natural environment, and cultural and natural beauties of rural landscapes to various facilities such as Nordic walking, swimming, horseback riding, cycling and gastronomy. Adding to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with negative health implications, in particular mental health, which was manifested by the increased incidence of anxiety and depression, it has become even more important to affirm rural tourism into everyday life. These benefits of rural tourism are important in the collective social recovery in progress and after the end of the pandemic crisis. Despite its many benefits, this type of tourism is insufficiently established in the Republic of Croatia.

The Republic of Croatia has a large share of the old population, so it is a potentially logical sequence of segmentations of one branch of tourism that would respond to the needs of the elderly population. In support of this, it is added that the elderly population was in the status of the most vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of 41 studies confirmed the negative implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life of elderly people in the form of elevated levels of anxiety, depression, poor sleep quality and physical inactivity during the period of isolation (Sepúlveda-Loyola et al., 2020). Therefore, rural tourism, which is a category of sustainable development, is essential to improve the quality of life of the people of this population, since in accordance with current trends, for many years this economic segment will be the answer to the many problems that will result from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main concept of rural tourism in the context of affirmation is sustainable development. Sustainable development is closely linked to the concept of integral - integral sustainability. It is complementary to the concept of ecological development and is primarily found in the report "Our Common Future" (Our Common Future, 1987). The author of the report was the World Commission on the Environment and Development of the United Nations, and the initial definition of the term marked it as "a development that meets the needs of today, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (Kantar 2016, 9). Organisations such as the IUCN<sup>1</sup> and UNEP<sup>2</sup> have very similarly approach the concept of sustainable and view it as „ development within the reception capacity of the Earth s ecosystem“, while the WWF defines the term as „ improving the quality of life, but within the framework of reception capacity of ecosystems“. Hans Holzinger (1999 according to Müller 2004, 42) points out that "sustainable development means a choice of lifestyle and management, to which all inhabitants of the Earth can be entitled without destroying the global ecosystem, which also provides future generations with the possibility of having untouched foundations for life."

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<sup>1</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Environmental Programme

These provisions clearly define sustainable development and its practical consequence, which is a change in the life-social direction. Sustainable development contains and affects several aspects: environmental, economic, social, political, and cultural. The European Union has published a Sustainable Development Strategy from which, in the context of rural tourism, it is possible to single out a definition that reads: "Sustainable development is based on a pattern of production and consumption that does not degrade natural resources, protects the environment and promotes equal distribution of goods (Kantar 2021, 10).

Kantar (2021, 17-18) emphasizes that today's need to travel in modern society is due to social trends - the need to travel has created modern society. Travel is necessary because people have the need to distance themselves from their own everyday life, in which they often feel bad. Tourism is considered a "social therapy" and acts as a factor that balances society and the economy. Sociologists, accordingly, have determined that man travels to eventually confirm that even at home it is not as negative as it originally seems based on the subjective impression. Tourism is a constant and returning migration of the inhabitants of cities of the developed world, and its significance is evident in the fact that to modern man travel offers balance and impetus to move on (Jafari et al. 2000, 31–37).

(Jafari et al. 2000) states that rural space is an essential resource for the development of rural tourism, based on the need of urban residents for peace and space and outdoor sports recreation. In doing so, it is necessary to include visits to national and nature parks and other heritage in rural areas, panoramic rides, enjoying the rural landscape and staying on tourist peasant farms. Looking at the above in the context of the modernization process, all this is combined into a tourism activity that has a positive economic sign.

Rural tourism is developing more intensively after the end of the war in Croatia in the context of the formation of continental tourism and the reconstruction of villages, but with uneven development based on regional and local factors. In recent years, rural areas in the Republic of Croatia have been affected by numerous socio-economic problems, and depopulation (rural exodus) is certainly the most dominant. It is in this context that rural tourism is imposed as a sustainable development solution. Croatia has a significant predisposition, according to Ninčević (2021, 1) taking advantage of rural tourism is especially stimulated by the fact that the Republic of Croatia is a member of the European Union, and it is possible to use the funds of investment funds. In addition to economic well-being, investments in tourism can preserve historical buildings and traditional values in rural areas (Jafari et al. 2000, 19)

The need for tourism derives from the saturation of everyday life, which occurs among the population that is part of the daily stressful urban everyday life. According to statistics from the World Tourist Board, as Pamuković points out (2016, according to Ninčević 2021), one in four European citizens will spend their holidays in a rural area. In addition, Croatia, according to various classifications, is predominantly a rural country, since such areas make up about 90% of its area. Furthermore, as much as 44% of the population is directly or indirectly related to agricultural processes (Demonja 2014). Although tourism as a concept and as an activity has changed throughout history, today it is important because it has an integrative effect on rural areas, according to Lukić (2002, according to Ninčević 2021:2).



Ninčević (2021, 4) points out that in Croatia rural tourism is not defined as a highly developed activity, and the causes of this should be sought in the dominance of promotion of coastal maritime areas when promoting destinations, as well as the fact that the village as a tourist entity has been neglected for years. This tourism existed in Croatia in the 50s of the 20th centuries, but after that the littoralization process brought tourism back to the Adriatic coast and the trend is still present today (Lukić 2002, according to Ninčević 2021).

The development of rural tourism with disruption began in the 90s of the 20th centuries, when the Ministry of Tourism launched numerous programs and strategies for its development. The development is associated with the promotion of rural tourism of continental Croatia, and later established itself as an essential factor in the development and revitalization of rural Croatia. All the above are additional reasons for promoting and affirming rural tourism.

#### **4. EPIDEMIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF HEALTH-RURAL TOURISM**

Čorak and Gjurašić (2021, 4) point out that tourism is the industry that has been most devastated by the global pandemic and given how big a role it plays in the economy of the Republic of Croatia, the interest of the public on the subject as well as the desire to return tourism to its normal functioning is clear. Krešić and Mikulić (2021: according to Čorak and Gjurašić 2021) say that the global health crisis is an unprecedented event, pointing out that the economy, even tourism, will not "just like that" nor quickly find solutions to get out of the consequences. It is the global pandemic that can threaten the foundations of the tourism economy, considering that a large part of the discretionary income spent on tourism has been reduced. Some destinations were not available, and the elderly were in the status of the greatest health threat. Overall, tourism has been facing a distorted continuity in the past two years of increasing tourist supply and demand, which is a direct consequence and expected reaction of people to the uncontrolled and rapid spread of the new disease.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and epidemiological recommendations, which include social distancing, tourism in all types of destinations is expected to decline or stagnate. This phenomenon has not bypassed the destinations of protected natural areas, which represent a living space with reduced social interaction and a healthy environment. However, due to the limited movement, according to Marković-Vukadin and associates (2021, 19, according to Čorak and Gjurašić 2021) of foreign and domestic tourists and visitors, the potential of these protected areas could not be fully exploited. It is in these times that people have developed a stronger need to stay in the natural environment due to periods of permanent isolation and social distancing.

Tourism is an interdisciplinary area and is always associated with branches such as economy, law, transport, environment, and spatial planning. However, in the moments of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis was given to the category that has been neglected so far, which is health security. Research has shown in support of this that in countries where there is a well-organized public health system established on humane

principles, there the pandemic is better monitored and as much as it is kept under control (Sigala 2020). These implications in social discourse are important aspects for choosing a destination during periods of health epidemiological threat. Rural tourism is intensively used by the elderly, and they were also the most vulnerable at individual stages of the pandemic.

Tourism is increasingly dependent on health conditions in a particular country or region, through the monitoring of public health data. Therefore, the choice of travel, in addition to the classic motifs, is currently associated with the issue of health safety and becomes an important element when choosing a destination. It is the implementation of health security in tourism that is related to the health system, both at the local and regional and national level (Sigala 2020). Based on the above data, the need to affirm rural tourism has been postulated with respect to the context of health safety.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The collective consciousness is shaken, which represents an additional potential for change. Security culture has more significance than in the pre-pandemic era. This feature is the new guidelines for additional affirmations of tourist activities. The continuous aging of the population, which is an active process throughout Europe, represents an economic, public political and health need in the Republic of Croatia. Through the affirmation of rural tourism, the Republic of Croatia encompasses aspects of mental rehabilitation, maintains the theory of role change in old age, supports active and healthy aging and possible positive repercussions on the development of rural areas. After a period of threatened social cohabitation, it is necessary to provide tourists with a safe health culture and positive multisensory stimuli. Numerous positive repercussions of health and rural tourism are the main reason for affirmation in the context of everyday social events.

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**SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE  
CONTEXT OF THE AFFIRMATION OF RURAL-HEALTH TOURISM**

**Željko Mudri**  
**Antea Marinović**  
**Marija Margetić**

**Abstract**

Health tourism is defined as a tourism whose original goal is to preserve and improve health, as well as to improve the quality of life overall. In doing so, it is a health and tourist destination that primarily offers users health, preventive, curative, or rehabilitation services. The tourist experience is primarily a multi-sensory experience because it includes all five of human's senses. Rural tourism can offer an authentic experience during the provision of a health service and thus have a positive effect on human holism. In the context of the recent COVID-19 crisis, the research carried out points to the already existing and forthcoming implications for the mental and physical health of citizens, which include an increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and more frequent substance abuse. In addition to the impact on the micro-sociological aspects of society, the implications on the economic aspects are visible, which is why additional affirmation of the rural - health segment of tourism is needed. Health tourism in rural areas is underdeveloped and uncompetitive despite offering a unique blend of healthcare and service, a multi-sensory experience of the natural environment and the cultural and natural beauty of rural landscapes to various facilities such as Nordic walking, swimming, horseback riding, cycling and gastronomy. Consequently, it is implied to present a theoretical consideration of the positioning of health tourism in rural areas, thus being able to meet several prerequisites and aspects of demand derived from the specified selective type of tourism. Also considering the sociodemographic context, Croatia is in a trend of demographic ageing, which increases the share of the older population, which is more often in need of healthcare, thus confirming the sustainability of this concept. In this context, in addition to overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the permanent sustainable goal is to ensure the successful aging of the Croatian population.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, rural tourism, an ageing population, health tourism

**Željko Mudri**, mag. med. techn.

Asistent, doktorand

Fakultet za dentalnu medicinu i zdravstvo Osijek, Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište  
Cara Hadrijana 10e, 31 000 Zagreb; Ilica 242, 10 000, Zagreb

E-mail: zmudri@fdmz.hr

**Antea Marinović**, mag. rel. int.

Doktorand

Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište

Ilica 242, 10 000, Zagreb

E-mail: antea-marinovic@hotmail.com

**Marija Margetić**, mag. theol et relig.

Doktorand

Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište

Ilica 242, 10 000, Zagreb

E-mail: mmargetic@unicath.hr

## INTERPRETATION OF THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF THE RURAL AREA OF THE SAVA-SUTLA-KRAPINA VALLEY WITH THE PROJECT "ADVENT IN THE CASTLES OF THE ZAPREŠIĆ REGION"

**Danijel Barčan**

**Abstract:**

The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley is located in the area of the so-called South zagorje (Marijagoričko hills) near Zagreb, with the main city center in Zaprešić. The researched area includes seven municipalities and the City of Zaprešić, with valuable monuments of cultural and historical heritage with an emphasis on the castles Novi dvori, Lužnica, Januševac and Laduč. During the 19th century, the valley was the site of numerous summer houses of noble families and Croatian bans, among which the most famous is certainly the ban Josip Jelačić. The paper especially emphasizes plans for a new interpretation of the mentioned castles in the context of possible tourist valorization of the rural area of the valley through the excellent integration of castles in the "rural idyll". An important component of the work is the interpretive connection with other forms of tourism (gastronomic, wine, local, etc.) and cultural and historical heritage, where the emphasis is on "Novodvorska kuharica" (recipes from Jelačić's time), local dialect (*kajkavska ikavica*) and on Cheese roads. As part of the work, there is also a newly developed project "Advent in the Castles of the Zaprešić Region". The project<sup>1</sup> has received the support of two tourist boards and its implementation is now planned, which is presented in stages here.

**Keywords:**

Advent, castles, cultural and historical heritage, Sava-Sutla-Krapina Valley, Zaprešić

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley is located in the immediate vicinity of Zagreb, on its western side and in the last ten years it has recorded a stronger evaluation of its tourist potentials. The central place of this valley is the town of Zaprešić, but its surroundings are still extremely rural and the development of tourism is largely related to rural tourism, which is especially pronounced in the surrounding municipalities (TBSSVAH<sup>2</sup>, n.d.). The aim of this paper is to present past and present interpretations of the cultural and historical heritage of the valley through selected examples and to present a new project of interpretation of the historical castles of the valley as a part of the Advent. So far, the mostly untapped potential of the heritage of Croatian bans is being used as much as possible in the valley, where ban Jelačić and Levin Rauch had summer houses. In addition, for centuries the valley has been home to numerous noble families and historical figures (Goljački 2015). The purpose of this paper is to point out the importance of the interpretation of cultural and historical heritage for the future of this rural area. The time frame of this paper is based on recent interpretations of cultural and historical heritage over twenty years. The paper is an excellent example of cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> The project was developed as part of the course Heritage and tourism in rural areas at the Department of geography, under the mentorship of Assoc. Ph. D. Aleksandar Lukić.

<sup>2</sup> TBSSVAH- Tourist Board of Sava-Sutla Valley and Hills, TB-Tourist Board

between faculty and local tourist boards through mutually expressed support and cooperation.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATIONS, METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley is the name of the area whose backbone consists of the three rivers, i. e. the area of the confluence of the Sutla and Krapina into the Sava. The traditional name of this area is South zagorje, but the population does not identify with this name, but is more inclined to the name (Brdovečko or Marijagoričko) Prigorje (Klemenčić 2017). The second spatial term refers to the Zaprešić region where the valley area gravitates. In a narrower sense, heritage is usually divided into tangible and immovable tangible objects and intangible heritage. In this paper, the tangible immovable heritage is castles, while the intangible heritage is represented by "Novodvorska kuharica", *kajkavska ikavica* and Cheese roads. Heritage is associated with its interpretation, which means an education-based activity that reveals the meanings behind a particular place, its inhabitants and stories. Interpretation is used to decipher the meaning of the place they visit to visitors (tourists) (Lukić 2021).

Scientific research methods and procedures used in the preparation of this paper were methods of analysis, collection and interpretation of previous publications, strategies, plans and programs for tourism development in the Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley.

Previous research on the cultural and historical heritage of the valley is not numerous, and even more modest research on rural tourism in the study area, as it is still in development. The basic work of literature is certainly the "Monograph of Zaprešić", author Višnja Goljački from 2015, which describes in detail the history of the entire Zaprešić region and many aspects of the development of the entire area. The "Dictionary of the *kajkavska ikavica*" is from the same year, in which a group of authors presents this protected speech in detail. Jakša Borić and Bilušić Dumbović (2005) write about Novi dvori and works on their reconstruction, and Vrabec (1992) writes about the renovation of ban Jelačić's tomb. Hršak and Irić-Šironja (2015) dealt with the flora of the Lužnica castle park, Jurišić (1954) writes about the construction of the Januševac castle, and Bagarić (2013) writes about the construction of the Laduč castle. Sulkan-Altić (2007) writes about the history of the municipality of Brdovec and its immediate surroundings in the 18th and 19th centuries, while Klarić (1986) writes about the development of Zaprešić through the 20th century. Previous research on rural tourism in general is numerous and constantly growing, it is worth noting the book *Demonja* and Ružić (2010) which talks about the entire Croatian rural tourism, then Grgić (2017) talk about the revitalization of rural areas through tourism, and there are a number works on rural tourism in a certain Croatian or world region.

## **3. INTERPRETATION OF LOCAL RURAL GASTRONOMY, LOCAL SPEECH AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS**

The first selected example of interpretation of the cultural and historical heritage of the Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley refers to local gastronomy, ie the "Novodvorska kuharica" from 2001. The cookbook itself is a completely different form from standard cookbooks because it consists of six cookbooks by Hanika Skurjeni, the last cooker at the court of countess Anka Jelačić, who was the last heiress of the Novi dvori castle. The cookbook

is also a kind of diary of Hanika because it can contain notes on historical events from the beginning of the 20th century (Mirić and Vladović 2001). "Novodvorska Kuharica", also includes pictures of traditional dishes of the ban's court. The latest interpretation of "Novodvorska kuharica" began in 2020 when promotional videos of cooking Hanka's recipes were shot in the company of the famous host Doris Pinčić in the park of Novi dvori (TB of Zaprešić, n.d.). The culmination of the interpretation of the ban's gastronomy took place as part of the event "Banski gastro week" in which the restaurants of the surrounding municipalities participated, preparing dishes that were eaten by ban Josip Jelačić himself. "Novodvorska kuharica" is an excellent example of the development of local rural gastronomy because the cookbook also describes the origin of most of the ingredients in many dishes. Thus, for example, fish were caught in the nearby Sava, while Novi dvori itself had its own apiary, poultry, pigs, horses and cows. There is no doubt that "Novodvorska kuharica" contributes to the originality of the valley's food products because according to Lukić (2021) there are still natural conditions for growing raw materials in food production, the traditional way of processing raw materials is described and there is a way of serving them.

Another example of the interpretation of the valley's heritage is the protected local speech *kajkavska ikavica*, a local dialect from the lower part of the Sutla valley. With the arrival of the Ottomans in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 15th and 16th centuries, large migrations of the population took place and one of them was the migration from the Una valley and its surroundings to the lower Sulta valley (Kapović 2009). Speakers of the *čakavski* dialect mingled with speakers of the *kajkavski* and a unique combination of the two dialects is created, which is alive to this day. In 2008, the dialect was inscribed on the List of protected cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia as an intangible cultural asset (Kapović 2009). The greatest merit in the promotion of *kajkavska ikavica* belongs to the Association "Ivan Perkovac" from Šenkovec, which was founded in 2009 with the aim of preserving this speech. Through the years of its activity, the Association has contributed to the significant promotion of this local dialect and created a series of events, which attract many visitors to the wider area (Association "Ivan Perkovac", n.d.). In 2015, the members of the Association published the "Dictionary of the *kajkavska ikavica*", which is the first dictionary of a protected Croatian local speech. Based on this speech and the association's efforts, local events "Evenings of *kajkavska ikavica* in Marija Magdalena", "Harmička ocvarijada / čvarijada", "Kosci kosiju", etc. were launched (Association "Ivan Perkovac", n.d.). The interpretation of the local speech for the purpose of rural tourism has been present since the very beginning of its protection. Following the possible solutions to the problems of the Croatian dairy industry the small cheese factories of the Zagreb County and the City of Zagreb joined forces and founded the Cheese roads in 2015 (Cheese roads, n.d.). Within the researched area there are two stations of the roads, one is in Brdovec and the other is in Dubravica. The Zagreb County Association of small cheesemakers "Sirek" is the originator of this project, which enabled the branding of cheeses from the Zagreb area, which have been sold in Zagreb markets for centuries and are now becoming recognizable products of this area (Cheese Roads, n. d.). The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley has several cheese dairies in its area, but only two are included in this project with an indication of the inclusion of others in the future. As part of the Cheese roads, visitors can come in person to buy cheese at the manufacturer's doorstep and talk to them about production. If offered, they can visit the entire farm and experience other tourist services on offer (Cheese Roads, n.d.). The importance of this

project is important primarily for family farms, which can thus upgrade to their primary agricultural activity and other services that many family farms reluctantly accept.

#### **4. PROJECT “ADVENT IN THE CASTLES OF THE ZAPREŠIĆ REGION”**

As part of the course Heritage and tourism in rural areas under the mentorship of assoc. Ph. d. Aleksandar Lukić project "Advent in the castles of the Zaprešić region" was made. The project itself aims at a number of goals and policies that are all advocated by the European Commission and the local tourism community. In this paper, the castles that participated in the project will be presented first, and then the potential plan for the realization of the project through four phases. The project has received the support of tourist boards and its implementation is moving in accordance with the available financial possibilities.

##### **4.1. Presentation of the Castles**

The estate whose center is the Novi dvori castle itself was first mentioned in the 16th century and was owned by numerous Croatian noble families, such as the Zrinski, Čikulin and others (Goljački, 2015). However, the most famous inhabitant was ban Josip Jelačić and his wife Sofija, who changed the classicist architecture of the time with upgrades to the neo-gothic style (Borić and Dumbović 2005). Today's condition of the property is not as fabulous as in previous centuries, the City of Zaprešić is the full owner of the property and does as much as it can maintain, but financial resources are a limiting factor. With the help of EU Funds, documentation has been prepared for the complete renovation of the complex (TB of Zaprešić, n.d.). Today, the estate has a golf course, a prestigious restaurant, the Museum "Matija Skurjeni", Tourist information center, the range of city driving schools, several ruins, landscaped park etc. (Goljački 2015).

Another important castle in the project is the former residence of the Rauch family and its bans, the baroque castle Lužnica. This castle had only two owners in its three-century history, namely the Rauch family and the Order of the sisters of mercy, which are also the current owners (Goljački 2015). The Sisters of mercy used the castle as a place for retired sisters, and in the vicinity of the castle they developed exceptional agricultural production, which fed many Zagreb institutions during the 20th century (Hršak and Irić-Šironja 2015). Today, the castle has been completely renovated and serves a number of purposes, primarily for visits and organized events, such as various conferences (TB of Zaprešić, n. d.).

Januševac castle is an exceptional example of classicist architecture located in the Municipality of Brdovec along the main road D225 and is home to many barons and nobles of the 19th and early 20th century. Januševac castle was designed by Bartolomej Felbinger, and its unknown resident was count Edgar de Corberon, Jelačić's best friend and closest noble neighbor after the Rauch family (Jurišić 1954). The castle was destroyed during the Second World War and was later taken over by the Yugoslavian army, which wanted to demolish it, but in a personal letter Tito forbade the demolition and a three-decade reconstruction was initiated (Jurišić 1954). After the completion of



the renovation, the archives were moved into the castle and its ownership was taken over by the Croatian artists' association (TBSSVAH, n. d.).

For Laduč Castle there is the least historical information about its construction and owners. The most famous owners and one historically recorded are members of the noble family Vranyczany-Dobrinović. This historicist castle reached its peak of fame and beauty at the end of the 19th century during the strong activities of the Vranicani family in Croatia, and above all in Zagreb (Bagarić 2013). Adam Vranyczany was Jelačić's minister of finance, which shows that all the owners of the castles in the valley called each other and cooperated (Sulkan-Altić 2007). Today, the castle is a branch of the Children's home Zagreb, which is also the owner of the castle and is adequately cared for and the historical park of the castle is regularly maintained.

#### **4. 2. Project Implementation Plan - First and Second Phase**

The realization of the project is planned in four phases over four years. The first phase overlooks the development of the Advent offer in the castles Novi dvori and Lužnica in the area of the Tourist board of the city of Zaprešić. Given that there are already plans to include the Novi dvori in the Zaprešić Advent, this project is continuing on them. The new courtyards have great potential for the development of Advent tourism due to the long walks through the park, which allows the spread of the offer throughout the estate. Furthermore, the renovated Vršilnica allows for numerous concerts and other Advent events, while the Matija Skurjeni Museum provides numerous Christmas exhibitions, including exhibitions on the traditional Christmas celebrations in the Zaprešić region. The gastronomic offer is also not neglected, and the main role in it is played by the restaurant within the estate, which would prepare traditional dishes from "Novodvorska kuharica". Advent houses, whose optimal and planned number for the estate is around ten to twenty, would also offer traditional dishes from the Zaprešić region and sell home-made souvenirs, which can already be purchased at the Tourist information center. As part of the preparation of the gastronomic offer, the emphasis would be on domestic raw materials for dishes through cooperation with Cheese roads and local family farms, and local craftsmen and caterers would have an advantage when renting houses. Christmas decorations could fit in very nicely with the property and, with the play of lasers and lights, create fantastic displays on the white facade of the central castle of Novi dvori, the so-called a Christmas light show, the concept of which has already been used many times across Europe (e. g. the Cathedral of Assisi). Photograph points would be set up along the entire property in representative places (eg in the background Novi dvori, golf courses, Vršilnica, etc.) in order to expand the desired photographs through geographical marketing. One of the special roles would be played by members of the Association "Plemićka mladež (Noble Youth)", who have been reviving the life of the nobility from the 19th century for years. Selected members of the Association would be trained to lead Christmas tours of the estate, and through this role-playing would significantly enhance the impression of authenticity and originality of the tourist offer. This form of interpretation is the fastest growing in the world of tourism (Lukić 2021). Opposite the "Noble Youth" would be the character of the cooker Hanika, who would tell historical events from the perspective of a noble maid and would be a credible witness to the rural life.

Advent in Lužnica castle would tell a different story. As the owners of the castle are Sisters of Mercy, the entire Advent program would be significantly different and

harmonized with the owners. The emphasis of this part of Advent would be on the already existing event "Lužnica castle under candles" in which the whole castle is lit only with old candles and traditional Christmas songs are sung (Lužnica 2015). The event itself was of a one-day character, while with the development of the Advent event, he would try to expand to all four Advent weekends. Within the castle, visitors can also eat traditional dishes made with local ingredients made on the lands of the nuns. Furthermore, in this castle, one would go primarily to religious and spiritual content, through various spiritual renewals and preparations for Christmas. Unlike the more commercialized part of Advent at the Novi dvori, this one would be more intimate, more targeted to targeted visitors (practical Catholics), and yet accessible to everyone through a tour of the castle and park.

The first phase of the project would therefore require organizing Advent on the Novi dvori estate, which would be the biggest financial expense in the organization, but potentially the biggest profit for the City and the Tourist board due to the city's ownership of the castle. The estimated cost of this part of Advent would be around 300,000 kunas. Here it is important to mention the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of Advent, which would have to take place on the estate throughout December to make a profit and there should be a certain minimum consistency of visitors to keep houses open and organize any events. The second part of Advent, the one in Lužnica castle, would be more in the hands of its owners, while in agreement with the Tourist board the program of events over the weekend would be coordinated so that visitors could be clearly directed to certain places and relieve potential crowds during the weekend. Ultimately, an important factor of the first phase is the traffic accessibility of Advent itself, which must be clearly aligned with the target visitors. There are two factors of traffic accessibility of this phase, and these are parked places (there are a relatively sufficient number of them at both castles and they are free) and the availability of public transport. The biggest advantage of public transport is the renovated suburban railway and the bus ZET line 172, which regularly connects Zagreb and Zaprešić every 10 to 15 minutes (Goljački, 2015). At public transport stations, visitors should be greeted on weekends by Advent organizers, preferably in traditional costumes, in order to be recognizable and clearly provide visitors with uniqueness and accessibility. The second phase of Advent relies entirely on the first phase and it should only be an upgrade of the first, that is, what is not previously achieved in the first would try to do in the second year of organization. It is also necessary to mention the issue of marketing, which would be based on the theme of Advent in castles. On all promotional posters would be castles (decorated in the holiday spirit) with basic information about events at Advent. In the second phase, ban Jelačić (in the drawing technique) and the character of cooker Hanika with traditional products would be added to the promotional posters. The target slogan would be "Feel the Advent in ban's castles".

#### **4. 3. Implementation Plan of the Third and Fourth Phase of the Project**

The third phase of the project is the extension of the offer to the castles from the Tourist Board of Sava-Sutla valley and hills. This phase is the most demanding due to the ownership of the Association of Croatian artists over the Januševac castle and the foster home over the Laduč castle. The conceptual solution of phase three for the Januševac castle is the Advent of count Corberon, i.e. telling a story from the perspective of the count, as the main leader. This role would be performed by an educated cultural heritage interpreter, who may also come from local associations. Considering that the State

archives have their own material in the castle, only the exterior is available, in which a small Advent fair could be arranged in agreement with the owners. Due to the complexity of the organization and possible limitations regarding various events, Januševac castle would join the entire project only in mid-December, and there would be events in his yard for two to three weeks. Another option is to accommodate the fair itself (cottage) on a nearby promenade owned by the Municipality, which has been recently renovated and is close to the immediate infrastructure and has had some Christmas decorations for the last two years. Christmas lights would be placed on the castle itself and in its yard, and since the park does not exist, there would be no major expenditures for its Christmas decorating. The great advantage of the castle is its location near the Savski Marof railway station from which the castle can be reached on foot in ten minutes. Januševac Castle has almost endless fields in front of it, which gives it an exceptional rural charm and a great opportunity for branding the entire area. The organization of the Advent near Januševac would cost around 100,000 kunas, depending on the chosen solutions for the parking issue and the location of the houses. Possible profits would be realized through guided tours and the sale of local products and the payment of entrance fees to events.

A special story is presented by Advent in the Laduč castle, where one should be extremely careful with regard to the institution inside the castle. This part of the project would be organized by the management of the Children's home in cooperation with the Tourist board, where the greatest emphasis would be on certain forms of humanitarian events. The castle park is a place of possible Christmas lighting and the position of Advent houses, which would sell children's products and other local products. The emphasis here would be on Children's Advent, ie content intended for children, and the events would be primarily on Advent weekends in the early evening hours so as not to disturb the lives of the residents of the Children's home. The leader of this Advent would be the character of countess Tilda Vranyczany, who as a historical figure was a great humanitarian and donated a large part of her property to humanitarian causes, including this castle (Bagarić 2013). Her character would also be presented by an educated interpreter from the mentioned associations, and she would guide visitors through the park and welcome them. Due to the specificity of the location, a visit to this part of Advent would be possible only with a reservation, so as not to create crowds and excitement. In terms of accessibility, the castle is not close to public transport or rail, so an organized visit by bus or car would be preferred because there is ample parking in the castle yard, as well as places on nearby meadows owned by the municipality. The cost of Advent (approx. about 100,000 kunas) refers primarily to Christmas lighting, which is now minimal, and other ancillary costs of the organization. The potential profit is the largest from the guided tours of the performers and from the sale of products, which would go to the Children's home.

The third phase, therefore, would require the cooperation of the two tourist boards and the development of the integration and specificity of all four Advent locations. Within the third phase, targeted marketing would be developed through "Advent of ban Josip Jelačić", "Advent of the Sisters of mercy", "Advent of count Corberon" and "Children's Advent". The whole project would require a common marketing story, which in the lower stages would be divided into two according to the areas of the Tourist boards. Visitors would also be offered the opportunity to visit all four locations on weekends. This form of visit would be the most expensive because it would require the mentioned transport and tourist guidance, but also the most representative. Also, circular visits would regulate the potential crowds at the locations themselves. The target audience in the third phase

would still remain within the borders of Croatia, but this time with large marketing activities in the capital and Hrvatsko zagorje and on social networks. There is also the possibility of attracting visitors from nearby Slovenia. The third phase would offer visitors information about accommodation in the destinations and the surrounding area, and the greatest emphasis would be on weekend offers in the rural idyll of the valley. The fourth phase of the project is the culmination of "Advent in the Castles of the Zaprešić Region". This phase would rely on the third phase and would envisage summarizing the successes so far, ie the realization of possible components that were not achieved in the previous phases. This phase would provide the possibility of cooperation with nearby more developed tourist destinations, primarily with the Zagorje Riviera spa and Zagorje castles. One of the ideas is the branding of the entire valley as the "Valley of the Croatian bans". Nowhere in Croatia is there such a rural area where so many famous personalities of the 19th century lived and which literally has four relatively restored castles in a kind of alley along the state road 225 (Goljački 2015). In the fourth phase, great emphasis would be placed on marketing, because in the previous phases, basic infrastructure works were done, so a large part of the funds could be transferred to advertising. At this stage, the aim would be to break into foreign tourist markets, especially Central Europe, where a good marketing story can also be made with a very differentiated offer of the castles themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were major changes in the development of tourism, and probably the biggest winner was rural tourism, ie places that are not part of the mass of tourist visits. The rural area of the Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley has always mostly linked its tourist development to the town of Zaprešić, which is expected given the level of development of the town and the availability of funds. Recent tourist trends and projects (last ten years) through the interpretation of the heritage of the surrounding area are developing the tourist potential of a much wider scope. Demands for authenticity, originality, sustainability, diversity of content and experiences and other modern concepts have prompted numerous events based on *kajkavska ikavica*, agricultural tradition, interpretation of cultural heritage and other traditions.

As part of the interpretation of the cultural and historical heritage of the valley, the project "Advent in the castles of the Zaprešić region" was made, which provides new opportunities for valorization of the castles of Novi dvori, Lužnica, Januševac and Laduče. The main guiding thread of this project was the desire to create something that is original, and yet in accordance with a certain selective form of tourism, in this case in accordance with the tourism of events. The project was made in accordance with all current obstacles regarding the infrastructure, ownership structure and the potential of each castle, and its implementation is planned in four phases. The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley will certainly develop more strongly in terms of tourism in the future, because it has excellent traffic-geographical predispositions for that, and there is a will and desire for this development visible in both tourist communities from the valley.

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**INTERPRETATION OF THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF THE  
RURAL AREA OF THE SAVA-SUTLA-KRAPINA VALLEY WITH THE PROJECT  
"ADVENT IN THE CASTLES OF THE ZAPREŠIĆ REGION"**

**Danijel Barčan**

**Abstract:**

The Sava-Sutla-Krapina valley is located in the area of the so-called South zagorje (Marijagoričko hills) near Zagreb, with the main city center in Zaprešić. The researched area includes seven municipalities and the City of Zaprešić, with valuable monuments of cultural and historical heritage with an emphasis on the castles Novi dvori, Lužnica, Januševac and Laduč. During the 19th century, the valley was the site of numerous summer houses of noble families and Croatian bans, among which the most famous is certainly the ban Josip Jelačić. The paper especially emphasizes plans for a new interpretation of the mentioned castles in the context of possible tourist valorization of the rural area of the valley through the excellent integration of castles in the "rural idyll". An important component of the work is the interpretive connection with other forms of tourism (gastronomic, wine, local, etc.) and cultural and historical heritage, where the emphasis is on "Novodvorska kuharica" (recipes from Jelačić's time), local dialect (*kajkavska ikavica*) and on Cheese roads. As part of the work, there is also a newly developed project "Advent in the Castles of the Zaprešić Region". The project<sup>3</sup> has received the support of two tourist boards and its implementation is now planned, which is presented in stages here.

**Keywords:**

Advent, castles, cultural and historical heritage, Sava-Sutla-Krapina Valley, Zaprešić

**Danijel Barčan**

# HRVATSKA TOSKANA – NADVREMENSKA VIZIJA JOSIPA JURJA STROSSMAYERA UTEMELJITELJA HRVATSKE AKADEMIJE ZNANOSTI I UMJETNOSTI

**Ferdo Bašić**

## **Abstract**

Nešto kasnije u odnosu na austrijski dio Austrougarskog imperija pod utjecajem fiziokratske ekonomske škole na južnoslavenski prostor stižu povijesne promjene koje pismom o ukidanju kmetstva najavljuje ban Jelačić: osnutak Hrvatsko-slavonskog gospodarskog (poljoprivrednog) društva i širenje obrazovnih ustanova u poljoprivredi. Na valu tih promjena nastat će sintagma đakovačko-srijemskog biskupa J.J. Strossmayera „*Hrvatska Toskana*“, prema talijanskoj regiji u kojoj su prošlost i današnjica, spiritualno i svjetovno - tradicija/poljoprivreda/šumarstvo/ krajobraz, /gastro-vještine/arheološka i umjetnička baština povezane u skladnu gospodarsko-socijalnu cjelinu. *Dodamo li Strossmayerov odnos prema poljoprivredi, šumarstvu i težaku na oranici (vidi ispod naslova!) ta sintagma je ispred i iznad vremenska vizija održivog razvoja, sa snažnim odjekom do danas. Prva je to vizija održivog razvitka na slavenskom jugu, izrečena daleko prije Antropocena i nezamislivih, spektakularnih promjena u njemu!*

U prvim desetljećima, (sudeći prema aktualnim događajima koji su očito povijesna prekretnica) burnijeg stoljeća od prethodnog (svijet s početka nešto je drugo u odnosu na svijet na kraju pisanja ovog rada) Akademija je potvrdila dosljednost viziji svoga Utemeljitelja.

Predsjednik Akademije u drugom desetljeću 21. stoljeća akademik Kusić osnovao je *Odbor za zaštitu dobara od nacionalnog interesa* kojega predvodi akademik Neidhardt, a plod mu je epohalni izdavački pothvat naslova *Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva i kulturna dobra – zaštita i odgovorni razvoj*, iz kojega je 2016. predstavljen prvi dio dvoknjžja pod naslovom *Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva*<sup>1</sup>.

U radu je opisan povijesni razvoj poljoprivrede na hrvatskim prostorima od početka sedentarnog života u neolitik (Vinkovci, Vučedol) i antike do danas, a Zemljovidom ruralne baštine izvršena je podjela na tri cjeline: *Ruralna Panonija, Ruralno Gorje te Ruralno zaobalje Jadrana i otoka* s ruralnim oblastima, postavljen je temelj za izradu *Atlasa hrvatske ruralne baštine*.

I bez aktualnih zbivanja na svjetskoj sceni rad naglašava kako je održiva intenzifikacija hrvatske poljoprivrede prilog viziji Utemeljitelja i neprijeporni put razvoja u smjeru Hrvatske Toskane. Koncept je u potpunom suglasju s opredjeljenjem i mjerama EU usmjerenim ruralnom razvoju, u njemu sve ruralno, uključujući turizam ima svoje čvrsto mjesto. To je podjednako put osiguranja prijeko potrebne samodostatnosti u proizvodnji hrane po preporuci Rimske deklaracije Svjetskog skupa o hrani (Rim 1996), koja Hrvatsku kao potpisnika te deklaracije obvezuje.

**Ključne riječi:** Fiziokratska ekonomska škola, Hrvatska Toskana, Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Održivi razvitak, Rimska deklaracija, Zemljovid hrvatske ruralne baštine

## **1. UVOD – TEORIJSKE OSNOVE**

Fiziokratska ekonomska škola koju je osnovao Francois Quesnay (čitati: Fransoa Kenej) na tezi da „sva dobra na Zemlji dolaze iz tla“, kao proizvod fotosinteze ostala je u sjeni svjetske industrijalizacije i „proleterskog internacionalizma“. Promovirana „u novom ruhu“ kao održivi razvoj temeljen na trans naraštajnoj solidarnosti u postindustrijskom razdoblju, možebitno uz dodatak sintagme „Toscana“ ili „toskanski“ ima izgled biti prihvaćen.

<sup>1</sup> ...a potvrda joj je upravo ovih dana (veljača 2022) potpisana Rezolucija Z.

Nespornu znanstvenu istinu da su stvari iz kojih je građeno tijelo čovjeka proizvod fotosinteze porijeklom iz tla, najveći poeta među tloznanstvenicima Francis Hole (1989) iz Marylanda zapisao je: *mi smo ono što jedemo, tvarni dio Čovjeka je animirana masa vlažnog tla*, čemu u prilog govore i riječi oprostaja od pokojnika (Pardon 2014)<sup>2</sup>. Hrana s našeg tla šalje posebne poruke koje su i nas oblikovale. Teško je vjerovati da je hrana bez utjecaja na gene, mutacije i svijest *Homo sapiensa*, koji je svijet uveo u novu geološku epohu - *Antropocen*. Znanstvene metode danas ne mogu i utvrditi narav i vezu duhovnog i tvarnog, ali metode sutrašnjice moći će reći kada je, što, i s kojim posljedicama iz *spiritualnog – emocionalnog, utkano u gene Homo sapiensa i koji je dio toga porijeklom iz tla (svaki vulkan pepeo različitog sastava isporučuje u atmosferu-na tlo-hranu naš somatski dio), ili drugih izvora*.

Emocijski temelji za “prirodno“ u gene *Homo sapiensa* ugrađivani su od njegova nastanka – prije oko 150 000 godina, budi ih pomicanje u travi kao podsvjesni strah od gmizavaca. Za razliku, emocije za „ruralno“ ugrađuju se tek od sedentarnog života, dakle 10-ak tisuća godina, slabašne su, zapretane u podsvjesnoj intimi, iz kojih se bude primjerice na miris tek pečenog kruha, gdje god bili - na tramvajskoj postaji ili na ladanju u seoskoj idili.

Prilog „promišljanju na temu“ je misao koju „privrženik prostoru“ iz krila Akademije, akademik Nikola Bašić (2017) iskazuje riječima što ih svatko od nas sudionika Kongresu može primijeniti na svoju zemlju: *Hrvati sigurno nisu jedini narod koji u svojoj predaji čuva lijepu priču o tome kako ih je, u razdiobi zemlje među narodima, stjecajem čudnih okolnosti, dopala baš ona zemaljska particela koju je Bog bio ostavio za sebe*. Mi Hrvati mogli bi reći da smo imali neke vrste sreću, jer nas je (od iskona po Juriću 2011) zapala „zemaljska particela“ u Rimskom carstvu, s poljoprivredom, preuzetom iz obližnjeg „plodnog polumjeseca“ kao ishodišta prve poljoprivrede – pitomog bilja i udomaćenih životinja, na rubu Sredozemlja<sup>3</sup>.

Nije od manjeg značaja za povijest što smo dio povijesti dijelili s Habsburškom monarhijom, koja je nadahnuta učenjem fiziokratske ekonomske škole svoj napredak i razvoj prepoznala u poljoprivredi i šumarstvu. Zagovarajući te vrijednosti oblikovala je onodobno selo, uvela zemljišne knjige, donijela zakon o šumama, dakle „K&K-ovski“ precizno uredila poljoprivredu, šumarstvo i sve „ruralno“. To je izvor povijesnih promjena, koje u Hrvatskoj počinju 1848. pismom bana J. Jelačića o ukidanju kmetstva, nastavljaju se osnutkom Hrvatsko-slavonsko-gospodarskog (poljoprivrednog) društva -1841. (biskup Haulik, ban Jelačić i drugi onovremeni crkveni i svjetovni dostojanstvenici), koje na jugu Europe promovira vrijednosti poljoprivrede i ruralnog života. Već 1845. osniva Gospodarski zavod na Ksaveru u Zagrebu i osposobljava seoske mladiće u vrtlarstvu, voćarstvu, pčelarstvu i svilarstvu; 1853. pokreće zamisao, koju ostvaruje bečki dvor, otvarajući 1860. Kraljevsko gospodarsko i šumarsko učilište u Križevcima, kao žarište intelektualnog života Hrvatske, lučonoša obrazovanja seoskih gospodara i voditelja vrsnih posjeda obitelji uglednika (Savoyski, Zrinski, Odiscalchi, Elz, Drašković, Pejačević, Oršić,

<sup>2</sup> Knjiga postanka III poglavlje: Sjeti se, spomeni i zapamti Čovječe! Prah si i u prah ćeš se vratiti... zapis stariji od spoznaja znanosti!

<sup>3</sup> O vrijednosnom sustavu koji je onodobno vladao rječito govori podatak kako je Dioklecijan zbog uzgoja kupusa odbio krunu Rimskog carstva, a opstat će do naših dana, sudeći po riječima akademika M. Mirkovića koji je *cilu noć plaka za kozon* (vidi kasnije)!



Janković, Vraniczany...), promičući moderna dostignuća poljoprivrede svoga doba. Na koncu, podružnica Hrvatsko-slavonskog gospodarskog društva Osijek 1916. osniva Agrikulturno-kemijski zavod, danas Poljoprivredni institut Osijek.

U drugoj zajedničkoj državi, premda uređenijoj od prve, selo je sustavno marginalizirano, biti seljak poimano je kao životni neuspjeh, a bogat seljak (kulak) u tamnijoj, srećom kraćoj epohi te države, obilježen je kao neprijatelj, pa su radnici sa sela „proleter-skoj revoluciji“ pristupali kao krivci „u pognutu položaju“<sup>4</sup>.

Stanje će se značajno popraviti tek kada na krilima obrazovanja i znanosti, sa stručnjacima školovanim u mreži naših učilišta, fakulteta i znanstvenih instituta poljoprivrede i selo povuku opći napredak društva.

Agresija na Hrvatsku i rat koji je uslijedio prekinuo je taj napredak, poslijeratni nadležni donositelji odluka okrenuli se uvozu, a posljedice Covida 19 i događaji započeti u Ukrajini kojima je prekinut lanac proizvodnje i distribucije hrane ukazuju na vlastitu proizvodnju hrane kao jedino ispravan put, na koji smo bez rezultata ukazivali.

*S tim u skladu, a imajući u vidu da je ovo pitanje šire naravi, držimo kako bi ovaj Kongres mogao biti poticaj opredjeljenju sudionika za povratak gospodarske politike koja za primarni cilj postavlja samodostatnost u proizvodnji hrane, sukladno s Rimskom deklaracijom Svjetskog skupa o hrani (World food summit-Rim 1996).*

Dosljedno na crti svoga Utemeljitelja, na prvim koracima mlade države 1994. Hrvatska akademija znanosti umjetnosti organizira programski znanstveni skup naslova *Poljoprivreda i proizvodnja hrane u novom europskom okruženju* i nedvojbeno jasno, upozorava nadležne donositelje odluka i javnost (citat):

*Treba učiniti napore da se popravi status poljoprivrede u Hrvatskoj, što uključuje i nužnost da se o poljoprivredi i svim pitanjima vezanim za tu oblast gospodarstva ne odlučuje bez struke. Samo tada će se moći provoditi sustavna agrarna politika i znati odgovornost za njenu provedbu* (završetak citata)– (akademik Maceljčki 1994). – apel je ostao bez odjeka!

Nažalost, premda potkrijepljeno uvjerljivim argumentima iz pera kompetentnih, za iste zamisli zauzetih uglednika i njihovih udruga, jednako je prošlo upozorenje na moguće posljedice, izrečeno 2017 na 650 stranica knjige „*Boj za živo selo*“, premda se ostvaruje, u težim okolnostima „globalnog preslagivanja“, koje nisu bile ni u primisli autora toga svakog uvažavanja vrijednog štiva (Salaj i Kovač 2017).

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<sup>4</sup> Brzo je zaboravljeno kako su jedinice vojske nosile ime seljačkog prvaka S. Radića. Valja reći kako to nije umanjilo glas ljudi sa sela i vezanih za selo, koji kako reče veliki Tin Ujević *poznaju poetičnost bijede, to skriveno izvorište vizija, sanjarija i aristokratskih titraja duha. Selo se javlja djelima Relkovića, Kozarca, narodnog tribuna gandijevskog otpora nepravdi prema selu Stjepana Radića, akademika Mije Mirkovića*, a „grč neimaštine“ uriječio je Kranjčević - težaku, koji je dovelao s otoka (zdvojna pogleda na neprodano u kajicu i novčić na žuljevitu dlanu – “zaradu”): *Nu ne boj se starče, doć' će bolji dani... tebe će otkupiti i taj novčić mali, krvopija tvojih ni sva Blaga svijeta!*

## 2. MATERIJAL I METODE RADA

Zemljovid hrvatske ruralne baštine izrađen je na podlozi rezultata istraživanja ekipe prvaka struke toga vremena, okupljenih na četverogodišnjem projektu Vijeća za istraživanje u poljoprivredi (VIP) *Regionalizacija hrvatske poljoprivrede*, u kojemu su korištene provjerene metode terenskog i laboratorijskog rada. Za podatke o tlu osim vlastitih izvora (Bašić 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, Bašić, Herceg 2010,) korišteni su podatci koje je priredio Bogunović, o klimi Mesić, „humanim resursima“ u poljoprivredi Božić, eroziji tla Kisić. Plodnost tla i sustave uzgoja bilja obradili su Jurić i Žugec, potrebe melioracija tala i vode za natapanje Romić (Bašić et al. 2001; Bašić 2014). Svoje bogato znanje i iskustvo Mirošević je uložio u *Izložbu zapisa o vinogradima i vinu na tlu Hrvatske* (2002), *Ampelografski atlas* (2003) i *Atlas hrvatskog vinogradarstva i vinarstva* (2009). Vinu, kao „tekućoj duši“ ruralnog turizma posvetio je „bisere svoga urječja“: *Vinorodnom domovinom* (2003), *Vinogradarski poliptih („kradljivac fotona“ M. Hlača)* i monografijama o biserima u toj niski: *Princ s Principovca – Iločki traminac, Kutjevačka graševina, Vrbnička žlahtina i Pelješki Dingač*.

Uz rečene naslove, za obradu građe koja se odnosi na viziju Utemeljitelja Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti korišteni su vlastiti radovi iz vremena *World food summita* u Rimu 1996. (*Hrvatska poljoprivreda na raskrižju*) do danas (Bašić i sur. 1996. 1999.) te radovi različitih autora u zbornicima znanstvenih skupova Akademije.

Svoj prilog razvitku poljoprivrede i sela moderne Hrvatske Akademija je davala od osamostaljenja Hrvatske, najprije - okruglim stolom na ruševinama Petrinje, zatim u pripremi za prijem Hrvatske u EU vrsno organiziranim savjetovanjima održanim u *Zagrebu* (Maceljki 1994, Stipetić 1994, Maleš, Maceljki 2000, Matić et al. 2015, Bašić, Tomić 2014, Bašić 2016), *Osijeku* (Tomić et al. 2013, 2015) *Vinkovcima* (Tomić et al. 2018), *Splitu* (Anić et al. 2013). Značajan prilog ponudi ruralnog turizma zaobalja i otoka može se iščitati iz monografije S. Srećeca (2020) Taksonomija, ekologija i upotreba rogača (*Ceratonia siliqua*) i lovora (*Laurus nobilis*) u izdanju HAZU. Slijedi zatim skup *Održivi razvoj poljoprivrede i turizma u kontekstu klimatskih promjena*, u Poreču na kojemu je predstavljen i obrazložen koncept naziva *Održiva intenzifikacija poljoprivrede*. Nimalo slučajno, predstavljen je upravo u Istri, koja „odbacuje staro ruho“ i iz nje se nazire raskoš i razigranost Toskane (Tomić et al. 2020). Posljednji skup, naslovljen upravo na tu temu, znakovita naslova: *Budućnost ruralnog prostora u Slavoniji i Baranji* organizirao je Razred za prirodne znanosti i Zavod Akademije u Požegi u suradnji s Agrobiotehničkim fakultetom Sveučilišta Josip Juraj Strossmayer u Osijeku (Jakšić i Jakobović 2021).

Izbor podataka za ovaj rad iz tog obilja obavio je autor, prijatelj ruralnog, koji je brao „sa stabala matica obrazovanja“ u Iloku i Zagrebu, a usmeno i knjigom širio „učilištima životvornih znanosti (*life sciences*)“: Zagreb, Križevci, Split, Mostar, Sarajevo, zagovaratelj „vrijednosti fotosinteze“, tla, oranice i orača od Iloka do Konavala!

## 3. POVIJESNI PREGLED

Sve ruralno neodvojivo je od poljoprivrede i tla - iz nje potječe proces fotosinteze iz kojega nastaje raste hrana, piće, vlakna, goriva... a tlu se vraćaju zemni ostaci tih procesa.

Sažme li se 150 000 godina od pojave *Homo sapiens* u jedan sat, prihvaćanje poljoprivrede i širenje *Geom* traje 4,5 minute, dugo je zemljoradnja tek izvor opstanka, a samo 1,5 minutu traje kao gospodarska grana, od kojih sekundu-dvije postaje potrošač fosilne energije i „optuženik“ za klimatske promjene, a termin iz naslova Kongresa - „ruralni turizam“ traje niti dvije sekunde!

### 3.1. Početci naseljavanja i razvoj do 20. stoljeća

Prvi tragovi *Homo sapiens* na području Hrvatske nađeni su u pećini Šandalja (tal. San Danielle) nedaleko Vulture u zapadnoj Istri i na Hušnjakovu brdu kod Krapine. Sežu u paleolitik (>35 000 g.pr.K.), kada je Istra bila uzvišenje u sjeverno-jadranskoj stepi (punoj divljači), a more južnije od Zadra (Jurić 2011). Sedentarni način života u neolitiku počinje pisati „*never ended story – knjigu o poljoprivredi*“, a vrijeme i naraštaji je pune novim sadržajima.

Ključno otkriće koje mijenja i usmjerava povijest, je otkriće kruha. Od tada do danas, već 6 000 godina vatra (ognjište) širi jedinstven miris kruha koji okuplja obitelj i drži je u središtu života (Jacob H.E.1957).

Tragovi najvećeg i najstarijeg prapovijesnog naselja na tlu Hrvatske otkriveni su u Vinokovcima, na lijevoj obali Bosuta, na telu (umjetnom brežuljku) zvanom Tržnica, datirani su na 8 300 godina ili 6 300 godina pr.K. To neolitsko naselje je suvremenik Jerihona – prvog grada na svijetu, a izgradili su ga poljoprivrednici pridošli uz Dunav iz bliskoistočnog izvorišta poljoprivrede između Sirije, Palestine, Eufrata i Tigrisa (Defilipis 2002, Durman 2006). Središte i najbogatije nalazište fascinantne vučedolske kulture je Vučedol kod Vukovara, na terasi uz Dunav. Prvi europski kalendar, vučedolska golubica i čizmica, serijska proizvodnja metalnih sjekira, (2 600 g.pr.K) i pribora za lijevanje kova su materijalni dokazi vučedolske kulture.

*Zvuči nestvarno, da su ljevači već tada, prije skoro 5 000 godina na stolu imali kalendar. Vučedol je neprijeporno civilizacijski skok, koji Europu postavlja u ravan s prvim kultura Egipta, Mezopotamije i Kine.*

Naši pretci (autohtoni ili doseljeni), *ratuju sa zatečenim* predilirskim i romanskim življem. *Sukobi* su u Istri najblaži, jer su se „naši“ kao stočari, spuštajući se s Čićarije sa svojim stadima prema priobalnoj Istri postupno stapali s domicilnim življem. U središnjoj Dalmaciji s izgrađenim gradovima sukobi su dugotrajni, uz razaranja (Salona) i bijeg zatečenog življa na otoke. *Naši pretci* ovdje prihvaćaju maslinu, smokvu, rogač, vinovu lozu i kulturu vina, a kozu i magarca za domaće životinje. Posebna praksa koja mijenja prirodni krajobraz (*landscape*) Sredozemlja na području Dalmacije i otoka je ograđivanje površine za uzgoj bilja i ispašu stoke kamenom ogradom zvanom „suhoziđe“ (gromače), koje u kršu ostavlja trag kao *Anthroscape* – antropogeni krajobraz, vidljiv i iz svemira.

Odsluženi rimski vojskovođe, kao obrazovani ljudi toga vremena, dobivaju povlastice na korištenje zemljišta, na svoje posjede prenose dostignuća rimske poljoprivrede, u knjižnice donose djela rimskih pisaca o poljoprivredi, a ne manje značajno prihvaćaju i šire vrijednosni sustav u kojemu je uzgoj kupusa više od carske krune.

Starogradsko polje na otoku Hvaru je 7. hrvatski zaštićeni kulturni krajobraz na UNESCO popisu svjetske baštine, najbolje sačuvani katastar na Sredozemlju, u kojem antička Grčka ostavlja sustav putova, terasa i parcela.

*Čini se nestvarno da se Rimsko carstvo hranilo kruhom od pšenice uzgojene u Egiptu, a u 2. st. poslije Krista cijela sjeverna Afrika od Tunisa do Tangera bila veliko, valovito, rimsko pšenično polje. Rimu je pošlo za rukom od stotina tisuća nomada stvoriti seljake, a „pustinjske vukove“ Berbere „skinuti s konja“ i u ruke im dati plug, (Jacob H.E. 1957). Dodajemo; žešći i žilaviji otpor „plugu“ pružit će hrvatska plemena.*

Rimski imperij se raspada na brojne državnice i feude, feudalac postaje gospodar i zaštitnik svoga zemljišta i imanja s pripadajućim kmetovima. Kao sudionik ratnih pohoda feudalac iz svijeta donosi nova znanja, sorte povrća i voća, vještine uzgoja bilja i kulinarska umijeća<sup>5</sup>. Feudalni velikaši nisu bili samo izrabljivači, kao što čitamo iz školskih udžbenika. Za usadivanje „ratničkog duha“ podanicima, nužnog za novačenje ratnika za obranu doma, vjere... pouzdan put je pozivanje na pripadnost feudu, vjeri i domovini, dakle vjero- i domo- ljublje<sup>6</sup>, što će Harambašić opjevati: *gdje slobode sad su dani što ih Hrvat cijenit zna, gdje su Zrinski, Frankopani, gdje su ona lava dva.*

Naviklim na prisilu, Hrvatima ne pada teško zakon Karla Velikog, koji uvodi tzv. *feudalno tropolje: jedna trećina atara „na odmoru-ugaru“*, namijenjena ispaši stoke cijelog sela, s dozvolom slobodne ispaše po strništu, poslije žetve žitarica dakle na cijelom ataru. To unapređuje Hrvatima kao izvornim nomadima priraslo stočarstvo i selo.

Koncem feudalnog razdoblja nastat će rodovske zadruge (Jurić 2016), a za potrebe stoke objekti povremenog konačenja članova zadruga uz stoku, (danas ruralnog turizma) *stanovi* u Slavoniji (Jurić 2016), *salaši* u Srijemu (Rukavina 2012) a *konaki* u Podravini od Legrada do Pitomače (Feletar 2017).

Povijesna promjena je otkriće Amerike i širenje „američkih kultura“ po našim poljima (kukuruz, krumpir, duhan, paprika). Nastaje poseban plodored *Staro slavonsko tropolje; Pšenica* (za kruh) – *Kukuruz* (hrana za obitelj i krma za kravu, svinje, perad i konja kao vučnu silu i ponos Slavonca) – *Grahorica* (voluminozna krma za stoku). Za uništavanje korova naslijeđenih iz feudalnog razdoblja, (koje Slavonija do danas nije riješila), služila je konoplja, industrijska kultura i izvoz dekana Filozofskog fakulteta, Križevčanina čije ime danas nosi središnji trg Križevaca Franje pl. Markovića iz 1866, Ivan pl. Zajc ih je ovjekovječio u operi Nikola Šubić Zrinjski. Povijest će se s tim tek poigrati: najprije dodatak koji skrnavi poklič; stroga zabrana s uzništvom; povratak „bez dodatka“ u pokliču branitelja Vukovara; a posljednje - „ne“, pod paskom „vazda budnih“ čuvara čistoće.

<sup>5</sup> Sačuvana, bogata knjižnica moćne plemićke obitelji Zrinski iz 1660. godine ima kuharicu s preko 250 recepta (Varga 2016).

<sup>6</sup> ...*U boj, u boj! Za kralja, rod i dom! Mač iz toka, bane, nek dušman zna kako mreimo mi!*... riječi su pjesme akademika, rektora Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, prvog dekana Filozofskog fakulteta, Križevčanina čije ime danas nosi središnji trg Križevaca Franje pl. Markovića iz 1866, Ivan pl. Zajc ih je ovjekovječio u operi Nikola Šubić Zrinjski. Povijest će se s tim tek poigrati: najprije dodatak koji skrnavi poklič; stroga zabrana s uzništvom; povratak „bez dodatka“ u pokliču branitelja Vukovara; a posljednje - „ne“, pod paskom „vazda budnih“ čuvara čistoće.

tla i uravnoteženo kruženje tvari i energije u agroekosustavu. Zahvaljujući krmi iz vlastitog uzgoja i napretku genetike i selekcije, stočarstvo doživljava procvat, a *Hrvatska se našla među najvećim izvoznicama stoke u onodobnoj Europi, dugo držeći taj položaj, da bi primjerice baby-beef izvozila i u prebogatu talijansku Toscanu!*

Početak kraja tog doba najavljuju strojevi, traktor potiskuje konja i grahoricu, njeno mjesto zauzimaju soja i uljana repica, sintetička vlakna i herbicidi istiskuju konoplju i lan, mineralna gnojiva stajski gnoj, epilog: *umjesto arkadije i „blagovanja s dušom“ prizemljenje, konzumacija hrane i fast food!*

### 3.2. Odlučno za razvoj hrvatskog identiteta - 19. stoljeće

Diljem Europe selo je stoljećima ishodište siromaštva, bolesti, nestašica, zaostalosti, praznovjerja, progona i spaljivanja vještica, koji traje do Marije Terezije i Josip II. Najteža je posljedica umiranje od gladi, duboko urezano u svijest svih naroda koji su o njoj znali, ali su bili nemoćni da bi se mogli oduprijeti<sup>7</sup>.

Ključni za povijest Hrvatske, selo i „ruralno“, su događaji iz 19. stoljeća. Otac nacije - Dr. Ante Starčević osmišljava državno-pravne okvire nacionalnog identiteta, čvrste, dugoročne temelje i ciljeve hrvatske nacije rezolutnim riječima: *Ni pod Beč, ni pod Peštu ni pod Beograd već za slobodnu i samostalnu Hrvatsku*. Provedba tih zamisli zahtijeva i druge velikane na putu oblikovanja identiteta i nacionalnom sazrijevanju. Tu ulogu povijest udjeljuje nešto starijem od njega polazniku istog Kraljevskog učilišta u Pešti, J.J. Strossmayer, koji će mu zbog razlika u stajalištima postati politički suparnik. Osim toga ih trajno odvaja kritika klera zbog „služenja tuđincima, krivice za zaostalost masa i zloupotrebu različitosti vjera i jezika za širenje nacionalnog razdora“<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Od posljednjeg Gladomora, kada je u danas ratnim požarom zahvaćenoj žitnici Europe-Ukrajini gladu pomoreno 7-10 milijuna Ukrajinaca nije prošlo niti 100 godina. U kuće pomorenih dovode Ruse i „slučajno“ ih raspoređuju tako da njihovim izjašnjavanjem ishodište samostalnost Donbasa i Luganska izgleda logično opredjeljenje manjine. Sličnost „rukopisa“ agrarnih reformi poslije oba svjetska rata, kada od Osijeka do Virovitice naselja ratnih gubitnika dobivaju imena „zaslužnih za Hrvatsku“: Karađorđevo, Obilićevo, Aleksandrovac..., puka je slučajnost!

<sup>8</sup> Slika o Strossmayeru u neupućenoj javnosti, nastala je dobrim dijelom zahvaljujući Krleži. U Krležijani (1994) stoji: *U Krležinu pristupu Strossmayeru ima i previše krutog ironiziranja i podsmijeha, da bi se radilo samo o lijevim shemama ili moraliziranju o oportunistima. Za Krležu je Toskana laž i privid: »Toskansko jugoslavensko Strossmayera i Račkoga, taj kabinetski iluzionizam neznatne elite bio je protkan temama prikladnim za duhovitu konverzaciju po đakovačkim biskupskim salonima, ali Čulinec, Dubrava, Granešina, Moslavina ili Strizivojna Vrpolje sa Banovom Jarugom o tim gospodskim i biskupskim konverzacijama nisu imali, nažalost, ni pojma (Krleža hotimice prešućuje da bi „od Čulinca do Banove jaruge“ primjereniji bio fiziokratizam za kojega se zalagao Strossmayer, a da se moglo birati između Krležinih „oktobarskih -izama“ i Toscanu siguran sam u ishod! op.a....). Biskupova Toskana dio je neuspjeha hrvatske elite. »Strossmayer sanja o Toskani, o Jedinstvu Crkava«, ... (»Legendarni taj Baja [Pašić] sluša razmišljajući o tom Austrokroatu [Supilo] [...]: a šta mu je opet to [...] da oni ne bi bili da nas pokatoliče, kao onaj Švaba Štroco iz Đakova«*. U predgovoru katalogu Galerije slika JAZU Krleža će priznati da je »jedan dio narodnoga novca i vratio (komu pobogu, i komu bi ga i kamo odnio da nije „vratio“?...op.a)«, ali će Krležu prema Utemeljitelju Akademije i modernog sveučilišta zadržati odnos „ispod uljudnosti“ (op.a). U Baladama Petrice Kerempuha u pjesmi "Planetarijom" piše: *"Dok biskup Štroco v tenji đakovečke geste, pod toplem krovom biskupske sijeste, gladnog muža hrani z 'nagarbanom Toskanom', pod črlenom lampom, pod Khuenom banom, v gunguli, s cigarom i z mađarskem duhanom, pod črlenom lampom Rada, Zakona i Reda, Stari se punta i Stari pluje na biskupsku žlicu duševnog sladoleda', s kojom biskup Muža nahraniti gleda. Stara, posteklela korenika se ne da!"*. Držim kako s ovim vremenskim odmakom treba reći kako je Krleži bilo ispod časti biti ne „u ravni s Utemeljiteljem Akademije“ već veći i od njega i od Akademije! Dok je on slavio brkatog hazjajina (koji je zacrtavao granice kojim horde

Na kulturnom planu Strossmayer se zauzimao da hrvatski narod ide u korak s ostalim kulturno razvijenim narodima Europe, ističući važnost institucionalizacije znanosti i umjetnosti, koji su jamcima osiguranja stabilnoga slobodnog društva. U tu svrhu novčano je podupirao brojne prosvjetiteljske i kulturne djelatnosti u južno-slavenskim zemljama. *Sveučilište i Akademiju naziva „uzvišenim korporacijama“ i „zjenicom oka u glavi naroda našega“.*

Iz sučeljenja s agresivnom mađarizacijom, germanizacijom i ambicijama onodobne Srbije J.J. Strossmayer izlaz vidi u austroslavizmu i ćirilmetodskom pristupu, što oslikava riječju: *Narodna je knjiga i glavni plod duha svakoga naroda i glavno pomicalo njegova razvitka, pače u nesnosnim prilikama jedino sidro, koje ga čuva od propasti“.*

Kao upravitelj biskupskog imanja, za sječu hrastovine biskupskih šuma naseljavanjem drvosječa iz Slovačke i hrvatskih krajeva Strossmayer podiže naselja Josipovac i Jurjevo. Novcem od sječe pokrenuo je gradnju palače Akademije na Zrinjvcu u stilu firentinske renesanse, započetu u kolovozu 1877, a završenu u ljeto 1880. Konačno, 9. studenoga 1884. pod svoj krov Akademija prima najveći poklon svoga pokrovitelja: 256 umjetnina, najviše slika (ukupno 235), a u njegovoj nazočnosti u palači Akademije otvorena *Strossmayerova galerija*<sup>9</sup>.

Iz Strossmayerovih promišljanja iznjedreno je ime danas Hrvatske, a onodobno Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. Ostatak je zapisan oprez koji je pratio odluku o tom nazivu i promišljanja o državnom ustrojstvu<sup>10</sup>.

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njegovih baštinka danas haraju Ukrajinom) nije čuo da je hrvatsko selo „od Čulinca do Banove Jaruge“ gladovalo i patilo „pod tekovinama revolucije“ koje on slavi. Kao bespogovorni autoritet svoga vremena u obrazovnom sustavu Krleža tolerira Vuka Karadžića (poznatog po definiciji Hrvata: „*braća Srbi katoličke vere, koji sebe nazivaju Hrvatima*“) kao „velikog prosvjetitelja“, i to iznad Strossmayera, o kojemu smo učili tek kao kao o dakovačkom biskupu „potpaljivao vatru poniženja“ za Hrvate. S druge strane, koliko mjere ima u obilježavanju različitih pobjeda „diktature proletarijata“, a ignoriranju Dana ukidanja kmetstva, koji se u glasilima spominje pod „dogodilo se na današnji dan“, ako i to. Do jučer se za pjesmu najavitelju napretka banu Jelačiću - simbolu ukidanja kmetstva i hrvatskom Gandhiju Stjepanu Radiću od momaka „natopljenih“ grla na šokačkim šorovima dobivala bezuvjetna zatvorska kazna! Zabilježeno je kako Strossmayer na koncilu u Vatikanu osporava dogmu o nepogrešivosti Pape, slično se od Krleže prema svom „papi“ do njegova „odlaska preko Romanije“ (zalud) očekivalo, ali nije propustio velikom biskupu maliciozno prišiti „toskansko jugoslavenstvo“, kao da je jugoslavenstvo započeto i okončano u krvi Hrvata, bilo fenomen koji Krleži nije bio poznat. *Sapiens sap!*

<sup>9</sup> Događaj bilježe svi udžbenici povijesti i čitanke, ali nadležni idu na ruku „vizionarima“ koji su u za njih „zlatnim vremenima“ prema Zakonu o udruženom radu osnovali OOUR i u njega kao vlasništvo unijeli Strossmayerove umjetnine, s prozirnom namjerom da u pogodno vrijeme Akademiju od njih razvlasti. *Za njih i aktualnu ministricu kulture danas je vrijeme da se „Kardeljeva baština“ stavi iznad volje Strossmayera...uz potporu „ispod istog šinjela“ s mirisom ocvale orjune novinara J. P. iz „Jutarnje budilice, u stvari, lista“.*

<sup>10</sup> U pismu Serafinu Vannutelliju, papinskom nunciju u Beču od 2. prosinca 1885. godine biskup Strossmayer objašnjava viđenje onodobnih geopolitičkih prestrojavanja i svoju viziju balkanske federacije pod Habsburškom vladavinom: *„Mađari već dva i više desetljeća posebno nastoje da srpski narod u Hrvatskoj i izvan Hrvatske za svoje ciljeve pridobiju i učine ih svojim nakanama posve odanim. Iskorištavaju u tu svrhu taštinu Srba koji smatraju da su ispred svih drugih pozvani da, uskrisivši carstvo svoga cara Dušana, jedini na Balkanskom poluotoku zavladaju... Mađarskim probojnicima i nakanama odgovara da nadraže slavenski narod protiv slavenskog naroda te da Srbe nagovore da, s jedne strane, Hrvatska bude opljačkana i bačena u ropstvo; da se s druge strane, Bugare satru i učine nepomičnima, pa da oni uglavnom jedini vladaju i negdanje Dušanovo carstvo obnove.... Ja sam dabome najčvršće uvjeren da je na Balkanskom poluotoku jedino moguće, a po Bogu i moralnom zakonu valjano, imati bratsku federaciju raznih naroda, među kojim će narodima dakako Slaveni igrati glavnu ulogu... Ponavljam iz svega svog srca: Hrvatska, kakva je vazda bila i kakva će vazda ostati, pravi je Božji dar uzvišenoj vladarskoj kući i svemu carstvu da na Balkanskom poluotoku obdrži prvo*

### 3.3. Poljoprivreda i „ruralno“ u 20. stoljeću

...Ma daleki cesar austrijski i veliki car od Jermarije nisu ni slutiti mogli ča misli jedan mali čovik ki cilu noć proplačē za kozon...poslije vijesti koju mu je donijela majka, da je koza krepala... zapis iz životopisa ...

Akademik Mijo Mirković –

Mate Balota

Težak, ribar, mornar, akademik, pjesnik, prvi Rakljan ki je napisal 50 knjig, piše na nadgrobnoj ploči u Rakljanu

Najveći, beskompromisni hrvatski borac za selo, seljaka i poljoprivredu u 20. st. je gandijevski nastrojen narodni tribun i utemeljitelj Seljačke stranke dr. Stjepan Radić<sup>11</sup>. U prijelomnim povijesnim vremenima 1940 akademik M. Mirković upućuje poruku vlastima: *Mjere unapređenja agrara trebaju se temeljiti na poznavanju stanja i mogućnosti, imajući na umu da svaka kultura pa i svako gospodarstvo ima posebnosti o kojima se treba voditi računa.*

Poslije neuspjele „ere zadrugarstva“ prema američkom napatku i modelu osnivaju se javna imanja – poljoprivredni kombinati, servisirani stručnjacima i znanstvenicima školovanim u našim znanstveno-nastavnim ustanovama dolazi do primjene rezultata istraživanja u mreži naših znanstvenih instituta i fakulteta specijalizacijom naših stručnjaka u SAD i primjenjuju se suvremene kemijske i biološke metode i sredstava. Dolazi do ekspanzije poljoprivrede i općeg napretka poljoprivrede i sela. Takav razvoj prekida agresija iz koje Hrvatska izlazi s raseljenim življem i razorenom poljoprivredom, uništenim stočnim fondom našto se nastavlja „privatizacija“ podjednako razornog učinka, čiji odjeci još traju pa je preuranjeno davati konačnu ocjenu<sup>12</sup>.

*mjesto... da bi tome uzvišenom cilju Hrvatska mogla odgovoriti, treba prije svega da se na slobodu izvuče ispod stranog odlučivanja, tiranije i vlasti, te da se sebi samoj, to jest svojoj cjelovitosti, slobodi i snazi vrati. Meni se čini da je skrajnji čas da se jednoj Hrvatskoj pomogne... danas mogu, kako se čini, počeci njena popravka i njezine snage biti ono, čega se Austrijsko Carstvo iz dana u dan sve većma trebati da svoju moćnu jakost i djelotvornost posvuda iskaže. U tom pogledu pitanje Hrvatske podnipošto nije, kako tvrde Mađari, samo nutarnje pitanje Ugarske, nego je pitanje cijeloga Carstva i uzvišene dinastije." Slobodu hrvatskoga naroda vidi u slozi s drugim narodima koji jednako složno i bratski s hrvatskim narodom „misle“, odnosno, koji hrvatski narod ne smatraju svojim slugom!*

<sup>11</sup> U predgovoru naslova: Hrvatski mirotvorni i indijski nenasilni pokret S. Radić piše (citao): *Naš hrvatski, seljački pacifizam i do sada je bio nesalomljiv, od sad će biti još nepobjediviji Naši seljački prvaci osobito će dobro upamtiti Gandijevu temeljnu poruku: Kukavština je veće zlo od nasilja, kukavica je gori od tiranina: protivnik sam svakoj sili, ali volim trgnuti mač nego li kao rob pasti na koljena pred tiraninom.*

<sup>12</sup> U privatizaciju poljoprivrednog zemljišta pošlo se „grlom u jagode“ bez raščlambe posljedica i razradene strategije razvitka, koja bi taj proces usmjerila na racionalno korištenje zatečenih resursa; plodnog i uredenog zemljišta, znanja sposobnih i iskusnih stručnjaka, strojeva, opreme i objekata, riječju, bez trunke pretjeravanja nemjerljivo vrijednog hrvatskog nacionalnog blaga! Brzim postupkom uništeni su kombinati, sotonizirani znanstvenici i učilišta koja su ih servisirali i oslanja na koncept „na uvozu temeljenog gospodarstva“. Zemljištem dijela kombinata danas upravlja kapital čiju potporu imaju agresori na Ukrajinu; jedemo uvezenu hranu, neoznačenog porijekla, sa rizicima koji još nisu sagledivi. *U Toscani, i u osrednjem restoranu i mesnici možete naručiti narezak od mesa poznatog vlasnika, u čijemu je svinjcu, pašnjaku, masliniku uzgojena svinja čije meso kupujete. Obitelj mesara sa djecom za vikend obilazi „svoje svinje“ što se tove za njegovu mesnicu, djeca ih časte keksima, i slasticama i uče se ruralnim vrijednostima i ljubavi za životinju. U nas, u robnom centru ne znate ni državu iz koje potječe odmrznuto meso! Privatizacijom nastala imanja novopečenih poljoprivrednika, koji su bez struke i znanja, potpuno nespremni dočekali konkurenciju s tržišta EU. Vlasnici obilaze „svoja“ imanja i očekuju da im kanale čisti država, kad je već dala zemljište, a profit iz poljoprivrede ulažu u novije terence, nekretnine ili podizanje životnog standarda. Država se tomu priključuje konceptom: *izvoz poljoprivrednika (i pražnjenje Slavonije), a uvoz hrane! Nemoćni pred viđenim, gandijevski poljoprivrednici**

### 3.4. 21. stoljeće i prinos HAZU viziji Hrvatske Toscanne

Na provedbi vizije svoga Utemeljitelja, Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti djeluje od osnutka do danas. U njoj su djelovali veliki umovi hrvatske znanosti u poljoprivredi i šumarstvu (Kišpatić, Tavčar, Gračanin, Ogrizek, Maceljki, Mihalić, M. Anić, Klepac, Prpić, Vidaković, Matić). Akademija je osnovala Znanstveni odbor za turizam i prostor koji se nedavno posebnom deklaracijom (N. Bašić 2021) obratio javnosti. U okviru Razreda za prirodne znanosti djeluju Znanstveno vijeće za zaštitu prirode, sa sekcijama za tlo, vodu, klimu, biološku raznolikost, gospodarenje otpadom, Znanstveno vijeće za poljoprivredu i šumarstvo Odbor za zaštitu Jadrana, preko kojih je organizirala brojne skupove za kontinentalnu i sredozemnu Hrvatsku. Izdvajamo okrugli stol Odsjeka za ekonomska istraživanja (akademik G. Družić) iz 2014. u suradnji sa Sveučilištem u Zagrebu sa zbornikom naslova *Razvojni potencijali hrvatskog gospodarstva, u kojemu su posebna tema razvojni potencijali hrvatske poljoprivrede (Bašić i Tomić 2014)*. Nekompetentnost onodobnih najbolje oslikava odnos prema ruralnom<sup>13</sup>.

Od izdavačkih pothvata izdvajamo kako je onodobni predsjednik akademik Kusić utemeljio je *Odbor za zaštitu dobara od nacionalnog interesa HAZU*, kojega vodi predsjednik akademik Neidhardt (članovi – akademici: M. Zelić; M. Ježić; G. Družić; M. Juračić, A.W. Baletić; L. Klasinc i prof.dr. B. Skoko) pokrenuo izdavački pothvat *Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva i kulturna dobra – zaštita i odgovorni razvoj*, a 2016 je predstavljen I dio - Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva, s iscrpnim opisom stanja te nacionalne riznice.

## 4. RURALNA BAŠTINA HRVATSKE

Sl.1 prikazuje Zemljovid ruralne baštine, kao temeljni dokument Atlasa hrvatske ruralne baštine za čiju se izradu zalažemo u okviru multidisciplinarnog projekta. U svom punom sadržaju taj atlas treba obuhvatiti i sadržaje drugih tematskih atlasa i zemljovida važnih za ruralni prostor i ponudu ruralnog turizma: ampelografski atlas, atlas vinogradarstva i vinarstva; endemskog bilja ruralne oblasti; arheoloških nalazišta; molitvenih i sakralnih objekata; ugostiteljske ponude, o čemu će odlučivati eksperti više struka okupljeni u tom multidisciplinarnom projektu.

Kako se vidi, osnovne jedinice zemljovida su ruralne oblasti: Istočna, Središnja i Zapadna u RURALNOJ PANONIJI, Pretplaninska i Planinska u RURALNOM GORJU, te Sjeverna, Središnja i Južna oblast HRVATSKOG ZAOBALJA I OTOKA JADRANA.

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„tješeni“ pompozno najavljenim povećanjem poticaja, resignirano čitaju 22...treću verziju Zakona o poljoprivrednom zemljištu, na čija rješenja nemaju ni pravo žalbe! Kadija tuži-kadija sudi?!

<sup>13</sup> U vrijeme pretpisutnih pregovora s EU, koja je ruralni razvitak deklarirala kao jedan od tri stupa svoje politike u agraru, tisak, napose Globus iz pera svog novinarskog prvaka, zagovornika ruralnog razvoja profesora Agronomskog fakulteta...manirovom „brkatog hazjajina“ cinično izlaže ruglu, kao „doktora grincajga“, ali odbija objaviti prigovor na taj članak... Jedno od „biserja“ što ih neštedimice emitira Ministarstvo poljoprivrede je narudžba Studije ruralnog razvitka Hrvatske od tvrtke iz Brisbanea – ispostava London, s iskustvom u afričkim zemljama !!!... a onda od Agronomskog fakulteta zatraži „dopunu“, napose referencama ljudi koji su to trebali, znaju i mogu raditi.... Sve su to djela „korisnih idiota“, kojima su zdušnu potporu u uzurpaciji poljoprivrednog zemljišta davale „strukture“ koje „iz sivila“ još upravljaju DORH-om!... nema zastare!



Inače se u praksi ruralnog turizma izraz Toscana koristi za promidžbu ruralnih vrijednosti u Panoniji, Zaobalju i Istri, koja je dostignućima i izgledom bliska Toscani.

#### 4.1. Ruralna Panonija

Slika 1. Mapa Ruralne baštine Hrvatske

Prikazana na sl. 2, ruralna Panonija proteže se od istočne granice na Dunavu kroz panonsku ravan i peri panonsko brežje do zapadne granice s Republikom Slovenijom. Za-



jedničko obilježje Istočne i Središnje Panonije je geološka građa – les i njegovi derivati-isprani les i fluvio-glacijalnim utjecajima izmijenjene pleistocenske ilovače s tipičnim mramoriranjem.

Za razliku od istočne i središnje, zapadna – (peri panonska) Panonija građena je od tercijarnih, sedimenata, istaloženih na dnu plitkog Panonskog mora, jezerima Balaton, Neusiedler) ritovima

Izvor: autor

(Tompojevci, Tovarnik), poslije povlačenja ostataka panonskog mora kroz đerdapski tjesnac. U ta, nekada savršeno ravna dna, korita su usjekli brojni vodotoci koji su na istoku presahli ili usahnjuju u suho doline (Drljanski potok u Iloku, usjeci Šaregrad i Mohovo) a prema zapadu najprije „lijene slavonske rijeke“ Vuka, Bosut, Spačva, Karašica „življe“ Orpljava, Ilova, Pakra, Lonja, Česma, a na koncu najduža rijeka, koja izvor i ušće ima u Hrvatskoj – Bednja.

Panonija je povjesno od prediliraskih vremena išla iz ruke u ruku moćnih gospodara, od Huna, Avara, Rima, Franačke države, Osmanlija, što je dakako ostavilo trag na svekolikoj baštini. Književna baština Hrvata bogata je opisom prirodnih ljepota i socijalno-gospodarskih previranja na slavonskom selu. U novoj hrvatskoj književnosti najproduhovitije je Slavoniju opisala naša (upraviteljica Centra HAZU u Vinkovcima) dr. Anica Bilić opisavši je rječju arkadija (prema pokrajini na Peloponezu) kao utopijski prostor koji ne postoji u izvanknjiževnoj zbilji - idealni krajobraz prirode s vječnim proljećem, idiličnim životom pastira i pastirica u skladu s prirodom, prirodni i ruralni krajolik, mjesto boravka bez briga i problema gdje vladaju mir, sreća i ljubav. Takav prostor sreće i blagostanja je ruralni prostor nasuprot je užurbanom urbanom životu. Od 1762.

godine kada je Matija Antun Relković objavio spjev *Satir iliti divji čovik* sa začetnim invokativnim stihom *Slavonijo, zemljo plemenita* počesto reprezentira kao arkadijski proctor (Bilić 2022).

Slika 2. Ruralna Panonija



Izvor: Autor

#### 4.1.1. Ruralna oblast Istočna Panonija

Ruralna oblast Istočna Panonija je živopisna ravan („što je šire – duša il ravnica“), omeđena s tri rijeke iz hrvatske himne; Drava, Dunav i Sava, a protkana koritima „lijenih“ rijeka (Bosut, Spačva, Vuka), iz koje se izdižu obronci Fruške gore (251 m.n.v.) i Baranjsko brdo (244 m.n.v.). Uz Dunav se napose u Baranji nalaze brojni ritovi, a na ušću Drave u Dunav najvrjedniji biser - Park prirode *Kopački rit* zauzima 10 500 ha<sup>14</sup>. Počinje u našem najistočnijem gradu na obali Dunava, gradu loze i vina – ponosu hrvatskog (ruralnog) turizma Iloku – *Dubrovniku sjevera* s tornjem iznad Dunava, idući uzvodno u Šarengradu prelazi rijeku Dunav i tvori jedinstven ekosustav u EU *Šarengradska ada*, slijedi Grad – Prometej, simbol snage i hrvatskog otpora Vukovar.

<sup>14</sup> Za obogaćivanje ponude ruralnog turizma budućnosti i istraživanje posebnosti močvarnih ekosustava Dunava bilo bi vrijedno pokrenuti povezivanje Kopačkog i drugih baranjskih ritova, Vukovarske, Šarengradske i Iločke ade i ritova na vukovarskoj lesnoj terasi u *Rezervat akvatičnih ekosustava Hrvatskog Podunavlja, slično međunarodnoj zaštiti Podravine*.

Oblast je bogata hrvatska žitnica, s tlima najveće plodnosti i tradicionalno intenzivnim ratarenjem i urbanim središtima Osijek, Vinkovci Županija i Đakovo, okruženim „zele-nim morem“ oranica, u kojemu su na svjetski poznatim gospodarstvima – PIK Belje i VUPIK, kao i u vrijeme poznatih prvotnih vlasnika, od Eugena Savojskog, Odescalchija i Eltza do danas, postizavani svjetski vrijedni rezultati! Slavonija je opjevana u brojnim djelima hrvatskih književnika, čija djela i junake od zaborava otima „dama lijepe riječi Slavonije“, opet iz krila Akademije, naša Vinkovčanka Anica Bilić (2012, 2018), a bi-sere Srijema toplo je opisao Rukavina (2001).

Naglasimo još, da prinos obnovi poljoprivrede Zapadnog Srijema po povratku Iločana uz zdušnu potporu prof. Miroševića, vrsnog poznavatelja „eno-viti vrijednosti Iloka“, daje Agronomski fakultet (Bašić et al. 1999).

*Istočna Panonija oslikava odnos prema natapanju u nas. Nedostatak i nepravilan raspored oborina smanjuje prinos svih kultura koje se tu uzgajaju, dok beskrajne količine vode teku Dunavom... «naravno» - u nepovrat! Temeljem podataka s početka stoljeća u prosječnoj godini natapanjem trebalo dodati do 1 600 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god vode. U sušnim godinama, a nekoliko posljednjih su učestale, te potrebe su veće, a gospodarska opravdanost ulaganja neupitna.*

Poslastica ruralnog turizma su četiri vinogorja: Srijem, Baranja, Erdut i Đakovo, od kojih svaki *terroir* ima “svoju priču”, posebnosti, tradiciju i mjesto na tržištu vina. Najpoznatije vino ove oblasti je Iločki traminac – princ sa Principovca, poznat engleskom kraljevskom dvoru! Nepcu namjernika za ugođaj na stolu ponude ruralnog turizma ove oblasti treba vladati meso i prerađevine svinje, uz njega riba i meso divljači, dok su graditeljska posebnost objekti (podrumi) u lesu, krov od trske, hrastovina ... dakako uz priču, a njih ima na pretek<sup>15</sup>.

#### **4.1.2. Ruralna oblast Središnja Panonija**

Ruralna oblast Središnja Panonija obuhvaća Brodsko-posavsku, Požeško-slavonsku i Virovitičko-podravsku županiju, odnosno dio zapadne Slavonije, Podravine i središnje Hrvatske, Međurečne gore i središnje Posavine. Iz ravnice se izdiže slavonsko sredogorje, koje daje pečat krajobrazu, povećava biološku raznolikost i različitost ruralne ponude. Tu je smješten i dio parka prirode Papuk (33 600 ha), a u središtu *Zlatna dolina - Valis aurea*.

Na povišenim položajima i nagibima povoljni su uvjeti za uzgoj voća i vinove loze. Prema zapadu postupno se povećava zastupljenost stočarstva i površina pod ribnjacima, uz opskrbu vodom iz vodotoka pa zbog toga zaštita vode od onečišćenja u gospodarenju u poljoprivredi ima poseban značaj.

Oba ključna hidromelioracijska zahvata – odvodnja i natapanje imaju svoje mjesto na području oblasti. *Naša procjena govori o potrebi odvodnje cijevnom drenažom površine od 203.000 ha hidromorfnih tala. Sva tla pogodna za obradu, dakle 303 318 ha pogodna su i za natapanje, 88 731 ha bez ograničenja, a na ostalim površinama treba prethodno*

<sup>15</sup>...o cigli: kulu oko Iloka (Cuccium) uz franjevački samostan, gradilo je 42 000 ljudi ciglom “iz ruke u ruku” iz 42 km udaljenog Sirmiuma!

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*regulirati višak vode hidro i agrotehničkim zahvatima. Za optimalan uzgoj kultura u prosječnim klimatskim uvjetima natapanjem treba osigurati oko 1 000 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god.*

Na sjevernom dijelu javljaju se žarišta eolske erozije na eolskim pijescima Podravine, oko Virovitice i Pitomače. Prirodne posebnosti Podravine nadahnuto opisuju radovi Podravini i njezinu prirodnom blagu privrženog Kranjčeva (1997), koji piše o „mirisu tek uzoranog tla i tlu u kojemu vidi početak, kraj ... i sve između“<sup>16</sup>. Novija su na tu temu vrlo dokumentirana djela Petrića (2012), Cika (2016) i akademika Feletara (2017).

U ovoj oblasti su smještena vinogorja, poznata ljubiteljima dobre kapi i izvan granica: Slavovski Brod, Kutjevo-Požega, Pakrac, Feričanci-Orahovica i Virovitica – Slatina. Smještena su na obroncima slavonskog gorja i Bilogore – Međurečke gore, sa sortama za vrhunska vina; Graševina, Pinot bijeli i sivi, Chardonnay bijeli, Sauvignon, a od crnih Pinot crni i Frankovka, koja daje pamtljivo vino.

#### **4.1.3. Ruralna oblast Zapadna Panonija**

Ruralna oblast Zapadna Panonija pokriva zapadni, peri panonski dio, Zagrebačku, Koprivničko-križevačku, Bjelovarsko – bilogorsku, i sjeverni dio Sisačko – moslavačke županije, Krapinsko-zagorsku, Varaždinsku i Međimursku županiju. U oblasti se nalazi veći dio hrvatske populacije s gustoćom naseljenosti od čak 142 osobe po km<sup>2</sup>. U oblasti je smješten i glavni grad Zagreb, najveći dio hrvatske industrije, sva vrjednija nalazišta nafte i sva nalazišta plina. Svi radovi od bušenja do crpljenja i transporta uzrokuju oštećenja tla, napose rafinacija plina i transport podzemnim cjevovodima, tako da je oblast ispresijecana mrežom cjevovoda.

Obilježje je izuzetna raznolikost impresivnih krajobraza, zeleno humlje i gorje, od zapadnih obronaka Papuka, preko Međurečke gore - Bilogore, Kalnik, Medvednica, Moslavačka gora, Vukomeričke gorice i Samoborsko - Žumberačko gorje. Rječito govori podatak o ogromnoj površini od preko 110 000 ha zaštićenih područja. Osim zapadnog dijela Papuka, u oblasti se nalaze parkovi prirode Lonjsko polje (50 650 ha), s poznatim, tradicionalnim uzgojem konja, svinja i goveda na prirodnim pašnjacima, park prirode Žumberak i Samoborsko gorje, koji se prostiru na 33 300 ha, i Medvednica na 22 826 ha površine.

Za stabilan i siguran uzgoj svih kultura ulaganje u hidrotehničke melioracije siguran je i pouzdan, a vrlo izgledan i put i preduvjet. *Na ovoj oblasti potrebno je izvršiti detaljnu odvodnju hidromorfniha tala na površini od 185 000 ha, a izvedba agromelioracijskih zahvata na dvostruko većoj površini. Za optimalan rast i razvoj usjeva u prosječnim klimatskim uvjetima za natapanje treba osigurati 850m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god., a natapanje ima opravdanja u uzgoju povrtnih kultura u ljetnim rokovima sjetve/sadnje na plitkim i teksturno lakšim tlima – fluvijativnim tlima u dolini Save.*

U ovoj ruralnoj oblasti nalaze se vinogorja: *Plešivica, Vukomeričke gorice, Zagreb, Dugo Selo – Vrbovec, Moslavina, Kalnik, Koprivnica, Bjelovar, Daruvar, Međimurje,*

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<sup>16</sup> ...a slikar naive Večenaj o podravskoj zemlji: *kad je orjem previše mi je blata, kad je slikam fali mi još zlata!!!*

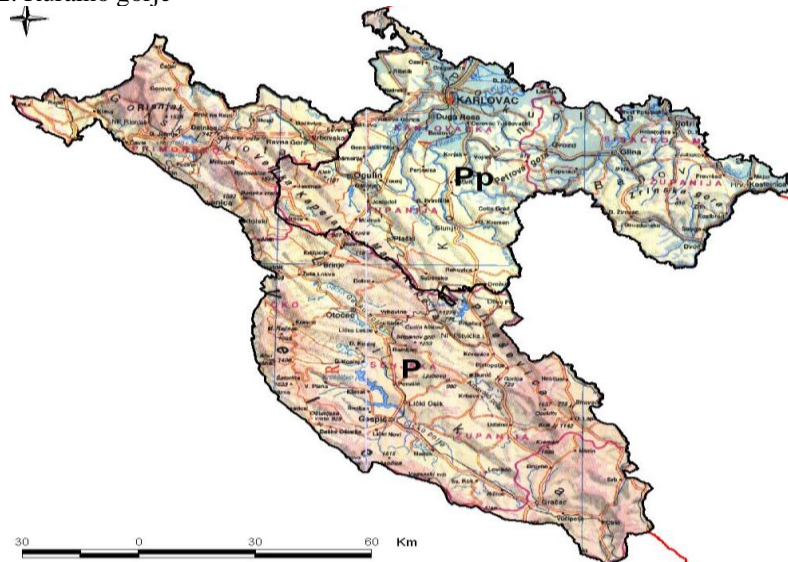
*Varaždin i Hrvatsko Zagorje. Zajedničko im je obilježje veliki broj starih, udomaćenih sorata vinove loze; među kojima su autohtone bijele Kraljevina, Škrlet, Stara belina, Moslavac, Lipovina i Mirkovača, a crne sorte (Kadarka, Frankovka, Črnine). Danas dominira Graševina, slijede je Pinot bijeli i sivi, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Rizvanac, Traminac crveni i mirisni, Rizling rajnski. Od crnih kultivara zastupljen je Portugizac, Pinot crni, Zweigelt crni i dr. Znatno bolje stanje je u vinogorju Varaždin, gdje posljednjih godina došlo do značajne promjene u korist kvalitetnih suvremenih kultivara za vina dobre i visoke kakvoće. U vinogorju Međimurje koje je jedno od vrhunskih najviše je zastupljena Graševina, Moslavac, Pinot, Chardonnay, Traminac crveni i mirisni, Sauvignon bijeli, Muškati žuti.*

Pozitivne promjene tradicionalnog sortimenta sve su češće i u drugim vinogorjima, a još važnijim držimo promjene u suvremenijoj preradi i čuvanju vina, pa ona suvereno vladaju stolovima ruralnog turizma. S obzirom na blizinu velikih potrošačkih središta na području ove oblasti postoje uvjeti za ekspanziju svih sustava gospodarenja – od intenzivne poljoprivrede na veleposjedima nizinskog dijela, do ekološke poljoprivrede na brojnom humlju. Rezultati polučeni u unapređenju poljoprivrede Grada Zagreba i Zagrebačke županije u kratkom vremenu djelovanja nekolicine stručnjaka – agronoma, veterinaru, šumara, upravo su impresivni, i najrječitije govore o velikim potencijalima koji još uvijek nisu iskorišteni, ali i ukazuju na put kojim treba poći.

Neki Fluvisoli, Pseudoglej i Lesivirano tlo ove oblasti imaju visoku aktivnu i potencijalnu kiselost pa zahtijevaju vapnjenje. Valja reći da tu postoje prirodni izvori vapnenog materijala, dobre kakvoće, kao što su kamenolomi u Ljubešćici, Varaždinskom kraju i Lepoglavi, što otvara široke mogućnosti primjene i afirmacije ovog vrijednog, a gospodarski prihvatljivog zahvata. Vlastita iskustva s vapnjenjem kiselih tala ove oblasti u uzgoju svih ratarskih kultura, uključujući šećernu repu, kao vrlo zahtjevnu kulturu, više su nego afirmativna.

Postoje dobri uvjeti za razvoj svih sustava gospodarenja, no dominirat će tradicionalna, održiva sa stokom i ekološka poljoprivreda. Zbog velikog broja vikend – posjeda, ogromne površine koju koriste respekta je vrijedna brojna skupina „vikend ili hobi-poljoprivrednika“. Ta, inače obrazovana skupina koju povezuje ljubav prema bilju zaslužuje daleko svakovrsnu potporu. Posebnu pozornost valja posvetiti zaštiti tla od erozije. U tu svrhu iz prakse se mora isključiti obrada i usmjerenost redova trajnih nasada – vinograda i voćnjaka niz padinu, a zatim i golo tlo u međurednom prostoru. Djelotvorna zaštita od erozije može se postići samo zatavljanjem međurasnog prostora nasada.

Slika 2. Ruralno gorje



Izvor: Autor

#### 4.1.4. Pretplaninska ruralna oblast

Pretplaninska ruralna oblast prirodni je prijelaz između Panonske nizine i masiva dinarskog gorja. Pokriva dio Like, Banovine i Korduna, cijelu Karlovačku i «prekosavski» dio Sisačko moslavačke županije. Krajobrazno se u njoj ističu dvije iz naše daleke i bliže povijesti značajne gore - Zrinska i Petrova, čija je baština vrlo atraktivna za ponudu ruralnog turizama. Krajem protječu atraktivne „krške ljepotice“ – Dobra, Mrežnica, Koprana i Kupa.

Račun bilance vode u tlu pokazuje prosječni godišnji višak 470 - 970 mm, dok je manjak u sušnim godinama do 1 350m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god., što su visoke vrijednosti, suša nerijetko uništava cijeli prinos na plitkim tlima, koja dominiraju u oblasti. Istodobno, u vlažnijim godinama višak vode prelazi 1 200 mm.

Naš je izračun kako za ambiciozniji razvoj poljoprivrede treba računati na detaljnu odvodnju cijevnom drenažom na ukupnoj površini od oko 35 000 ha hidromorfni tala oblasti. S obzirom na kemijske značajke agrotehničke melioracije tala (vapnjnje) potrebne su na imponantnoj površini od čak 110.000 ha.

Oblast je naš tradicionalno poznat stočarski kraj, napose područje Banovine, nekodobno, prije „ere uvoza“ povezano s tvornicom „Gavrilović“. Poslije potresa na crti svoga poslanja Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti u suradnji sa Sveučilištem u Zagrebu - Agronomski i RGN fakultet, Akademijom poljoprivrednih znanosti izradili su studiju obnove i razvoja poljoprivrede i ruralnog prostora Banovine, kao svoj prinos ugroženom pučanstvu. Valja reći, kapaciteti za razvoj stočarstva, napose za pašnjački uzgoj goveda, ovaca i koza, zatim za uzgoj divljači SU izuzetno veliki, a ova oblast treba, čeka, i

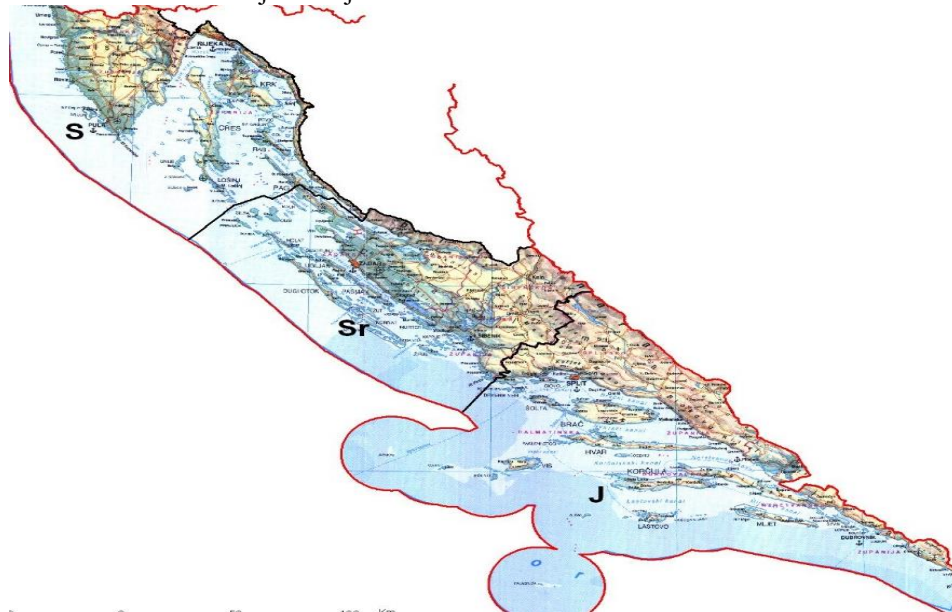


zaslužuje ulaganja i poduzetničke poteze u tom smjeru. Pozornost zaslužuje autohtoni proizvod tounjski sir i pčelarstvo s izuzetnom pčelinjom pašom i vrhunskim medom kestena. Rezultati naših istraživanja tala za potrebe uzgoja komponenti za tvornicu dječje hrane, jako visokih zahtjeva pokazala su da su tla ove podregije izuzetno čista i pogodna za uzgoj povrća vrhunske kakvoće.

#### 4.1.5. Planinska ruralna oblast

Planinska ruralna oblast obuhvaća područje Gorskog kotara i Like, sjeverni – kontinentalni dio Primorsko goranske i Ličko - senjske županije. Izuzetnoj ljepoti prinose jedinstvena, zaštitom UNESCO-a obuhvaćena Plitvička jezera, te najljepša hrvatska planina Velebit. Uz baštinu UNESCO-a Plitvička jezera (29 400 ha) od zaštićenih područja tu je Nacionalni park Risnjak (6 400 ha) i Sjeverni Velebit (10 000 ha), te strogi rezervat prirode Bijele i Samarske stijene (1 175 ha). Osim toga, oblast obiluje prekrasnim vodotocima s čistom vodom bogatom ihtiofaunom – Gacka, Lika, Lokvarsko jezero, Gušić polje, izuzetne prirodne ljepote i važan dio ruralne ponude. Za uzgoj bilja su lokaliteti Gacko i Ličko krško polje.

Slika 4. Ruralno zaobalje i otočje Jadrana



Izvor: Autor

#### 4.1.6. Oblast Sjevernojadranskog ruralnog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Krk, Cres, Lošinj, Rab)

Oblast Sjevernojadranskog ruralnog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Krk, Cres, Lošinj, Rab) obuhvaća Istru, bilom Velebita se proteže do Starigrada kod Zadra, obuhvaćajući Istarsku županiju, a zatim i rubne, odnosno otočne dijelove Primorsko goranske i Ličko senjske županije.

Područje Istre i Kvarnerskih otoka je vrlo raznovrsno i krajobrazno atraktivno i već je u ravni s „talijanskom Toscanom“. Ova oblast iscrpno je opisana u radu povodom obljetnice Instituta za poljoprivredu i turizam, koji opslužuje poljoprivredu i turizam, ne samo u ovoj oblasti (Tomić et al 2020). Tu se nalazi više zaštićenih područja, koja utječu na smjer gospodarenja, napose širenje ekološkog uzgoja bilja i stoke: parkovi prirode Učka (14 600 ha); Sjeverni Velebit (10 000 ha), Telaščica (6 706 ha); strogi rezervat prirode Hajdučki i Rožanski kukovi (1 220 ha) u sjevernom Velebitu, te blistava „niska u ogrlici Toscanne“ nacionalni park Brijuni (3 635 ha).

Najrasprostranjeniji tip tla oblasti je Crvenica - terra rossa (69 481 ha), slijedi Smeđe na vapnencu (59 325 ha) i Vapnenačko dolomitna crnica (30 367 ha), dok ostali tipovi tala imaju manju zastupljenost. Tvorba tla na vapnencu je jako spor proces, stoga što su vapnenci jako čisti i sadrže manje od 5% netopivog ostatka iz kojega tlo nastaje.

Za tvorbu sloja crvenice tla debljine 100 cm potrebno je oko dva milijuna godina. Ima vrlo povoljne fizikalne, kemijske i biološke značajke i visoku plodnost pa ne čudi što je dobila atribuciju «černozem sredozemlja».

Za uzgoj bilja neophodno je natapanje. *Računamo kako ukupna površina tala za odvodnju ne prelazi 1 000 ha. Daleko su veće i značajnije površine koje zahtijevaju natapanje, praktički sva oranična tla, oko 90 000 ha površine.*

Ulaganje u infrastrukturu i opremu za natapanje, koje bi omogućile natapanje crvenica i smeđih tala na vapnencu Istre, zatim tala Vinodolske kotline, Vrbničkog polja na Krku, tala središnjeg dijela Cresa, tala Suska, Uniya i dr., imaju puno gospodarsko opravdanje kao pravi put demografske i svakovrsne druge obnove ovih krajeva, a ruralnom turizmu bi dale nove poticaje i sadržaje. Na cijelom području oblasti stočarstvo ima dugu tradiciju. U Istra je bila poznata po kozi i podolcu, a otoci Cres, Krk, Plavnik po izuzetno pogodnim uvjetima za ovčarstvo. Usprkos svemu, daleko ispod mogućnosti, a pogotovo ispod potreba je pokrivenost UG stoke, sa stalnim trendom pada. Svi poljoprivredni proizvodi u ponudi ruralnom turizmu s ove podregije – voće (maslina, smokva, trešnja, lješnjak, breskva), sir, meso janjadi, grožđe, vino i povrće imaju izuzetnu, priznatu kakvoću.

*Natapanje je najvažniji zahvat koji je podjedno i preduvjet intenzifikacije u svim sustavima gospodarenja, a za te potrebe u prosječnim uvjetima treba osigurati do 2 400 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god. vode. No, u pojedinim godinama odstupanja od prosjeka mogu biti značajna. Za natapanje se mogu koristiti raspoložive površinske i podzemne vode, a uputno je izraditi veće i manje višenamjenske akumulacije. Kakvoća površinskih voda uglavnom je zadovoljavajuća, osim u blizini ušća rijeka u more, a podzemne vode u priobalnom dijelu mogu biti zaslanjene ili/i alkalizirane zbog prodora morske vode, kao što je primjerice slučaj s tlima u dolini rijeke Mirne, gdje slana voda za visoke plime prodire duboko u kontinent do Ponteportona.*

U «vinskom atlasu» ove oblasti se nalaze poznata vinogorja: Zapadna, Istočna i Središnja Istra, Rijeka i Kvarner. Sortiment se jako razlikuje po vinogorjima i pojedinim uzgojnim staništima. Od bijelih sorata u vinogorju Istra prevladava Malvazija istarska, slijedi Chardonnay, Pinot, Trebbiano toscano i Muškati momjanski. Od crnih kultivarata zastupljen je



Merlot, Cabernet sauvignon, Cabernet franc, Teran, Hrvatica, i druge. U vinogorju Rijeka i Kvarner na Krku vlada Žlahtina bijela, Bašćanac crni, Brajdica crna i dr, na Susku Trojišćina crvena, Krizol bijeli, Sušćan crni, i u manjoj mjeri Pljeskunaca bijela, Sauvignon bijeli, a na Pagu poznat je Gegić bijeli.

Gospodarski osmišljeno valja davati potporu tradicionalnoj - održivoj poljoprivredi i seoskom turizmu, koji na ovom području doživljava do jučer nezamislivu ekspanziju i potvrđuje se kao *Toscana u nastajanju!*

#### **4.1.7. Oblast Srednjojadranskog ruralnog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Pag, Ugljan, Pašman, Dugi)**

Oblast Srednjojadranskog ruralnog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Pag, Ugljan, Pašman, Dugi) obuhvaća središnji dio priobalja Jadrana, područje Zadra sa zaleđem – Ravnim Kotarima i pripadajućim otočjem, te područje šibenske županije. Područje je razmjerno nisko, građeno od *raznovrsnih vapnenaca, pretežno kredne starosti*, na kojima se kao dominantni tip javlja smeđe tlo na vapnencu, manje je crvenice, na mekim vapnencima se javlja rendzina, a na povišenijim reljefskim pozicijama vapnenačko dolomitna crnica i kamenjar ili gola stijena.

U kršku ploču svoja živopisna korita usjekle su krške ljepotice s vodom vrhunske kakvoće – Zrmanja, Čikola i Krka, čija dolina predstavlja nacionalni park, u kojemu je gospodarenje ograničeno. Iscrpno smo ga pojasnili u radu publiciranom u monografiji Promina (Tomić, Bašić, 2020). Krka formira niz vodopada, ima više proširenja, od kojih je najveće Prokljansko jezero, a na samomu ušću prekrasne živopisne vodopade sa sedrenim barijerama. Na podregiji se nalazi biser prirode, naše najveće slatkovodno jezero – Vransko jezero.

Površina oblasti je 570 946 ha, ili 10,1 % površine Hrvatske, a nastanjena je s 267 171 žitelja, gotovo upola manje nego na sjevernoj oblasti, ali pučanstvo raspolaže s tri puta više poljoprivredne površine po glavi – 1,53 ha.

Ova oblast tradicionalno ima naprednu poljoprivredu, napose uzgoj vinove loze, voćarstvo i uzgoj povrća, odnosno razvijeno stočarstvo. Tu prirodno raste, ili se uzgaja i mogao bi poslužiti za promociju prirodni insekticid buhač<sup>17</sup>. A zadarska tržnica zasigurno je jedna od najbogatijih i živopisnijih u cijelom sredozemlju, simbol bogatstva i raskoši ponude hrane vrhunske kakvoće, uzgojene praktički u uvjetima zaštite prirode<sup>18</sup>. U domovinskom ratu je bila izložena teškim razaranjima, progonima hrvatskog pučanstva, a u poratnom razdoblju povratak pučanstva tekao je i teče jako sporo. Gospodarski su propala izvrsno organizirana i stručno vođena bivša društvena poljoprivredna poduzeća iz Zadra i Vrane, premda je neprijeporno da je okosnica gospodarskog oporavka ovog područja upravo poljoprivreda, a napose stočarstvo koje je ratom praktički uništeno.

<sup>17</sup> Sadnice buhača pod nazivom *Dalmatian pyrethrum* mogu se nabaviti u Los Angelesu za suzbijanje štetnika u ekološkoj poljoprivredi! Tamo se o buhaču zna više nego u njegovoj domovini! Za razliku od dama Rima, ljepotice Dalmacije iz doba antike nisu se „čohale“, jer ih je od buha prije DDT-a štitio buhač. Njemu zahvaljujući, kuga nije pustošila ovim krajevima.

<sup>18</sup> Šteta je što se to nedovoljno ističe!

Najzastupljenije tlo u pedosferi ove oblasti je smeđe na vapnencu i dolomitu (94 890 ha), slijedi crvenica (49 951), vapnenačko dolomitna crnica (48 064 ha), a velika zastupljenost antropogenih tala od čak 32 041 ha i 4 397 ha hidromelioriranog tla rječito govori o značaju poljoprivrede i ruralnog turizma u ovoj oblasti.

*Držimo da sustave odvodnje treba obnoviti, u krškim poljima osigurati stabilan vodni režim tala suzbijanjem poplava, zatim i na novih oko 3 000 ha planirati detaljnu odvodnju. No, daleko veći značaj i potreba odnosi se na natapanje. Malo je primjera tako visokih potreba, jednako visokih očekivanih učinaka, raspoložive vode izuzetne kakvoće, a tako malo, rekli bi bez pretjeravanja nedopustivo malo ulaganja u sustave za natapanje. Siguran uzgoj povrća sijanog u kasnoproletnim ili rano ljetnim mjesecima u ovoj oblasti moguća je samo uz natapanje. Vodna bilanca pokazuje da bi se izgradnjom višenamjenskih akumulacija vode ne samo suzbile poplave, stabilizirao kaotičan i nepovoljan vodni režim, već bi se obogatio krajobraz i osigurala stabilna i sigurna opskrba usjeva i nasada kvalitetnom vodom. Na području ove oblasti u budućnosti treba planirati ulaganja koja bi osigurala natapanje na 60 000 ha. Za optimalan rast i razvoj uobičajenih kultura u priobalnoj zoni u prosječnim klimatskim uvjetima treba dodatno osigurati oko 3 000 m<sup>3</sup> vode po ha/god. Posebno značaj pridajemo izgradnji višenamjenskih akumulacija u krškim poljima, na kopnu i otocima.*

U oblasti je izdvojeno nekoliko vinogorja: Zadar, Benkovac, Šibenik, Drniš i Knin, sa sličnim sortama; od udomaćenih crnih najzastupljenija je Plavina, potom Lasina i Gustopenjica, a od introduciranih Carignon, Grenoche, Syrah, i dr. Od starih bijelih sorata vodeća je Maraština, a introducirane su Ugni blanc, Grenoche i dr.

*Svi sustavi gospodarenja u oblasti imaju realne izgleda za neviđen razvoj i svima valja davati potporu. Na intenzivnu poljoprivredu, napose uzgoj povrća svakako valja računati u Vranskom bazenu, kojemu valja vratiti stari sjaj, put intenzivnom uzgoju vinove loze i voća valja otvoriti na području Zadra i zadarskog zaleđa.*

#### **4.1.8. Oblast Južnojadranskog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Brač, Hvar, Vis, Korčula, Lastovo, Mljet, Elafiti)**

Oblast Južnojadranskog zaobalja s pripadajućim otocima (Brač, Hvar, Vis, Korčula, Lastovo, Mljet, Elafiti) obuhvaća Splitsko – dalmatinsku i Dubrovačko – neretvansku županiju, dakle ostatak priobalnog dijela do Dubrovnika-Konavala i državne granice, s pripadajućim otočjem. Iz brojnih bisera prirode izdvajamo ponos vrtne arhitekture Arboretum Trsteno, na 23 ha najstariji spomenik vrtne arhitekture u Hrvatskoj i jedini arboretum na jadranskoj obali, a kojim vrhunski stručno upravlja akademik Anić iz Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti.

Područje oblasti građeno je pretežito od *vapnenaca i dolomita*, na kojima prevladava goli krš, odnosno smeđa tla na vapnencu i crvenice, s izuzetkom doline Neretve i plodnih krških polja, na kopnu i otocima, gdje se javljaju aluvijalna i koluvijalna tla. Dolina Neretve posebna je prirodna cjelina – „biser ruralne oblasti južno zaobalje“ – močvarno stanište, sa zatresćenim odnosno tresetnim tlima, koja su odvodnjom privedena kulturi.

Dolina Neretve kao najznačajnije poljoprivredno područje ove oblasti uz bogatstvo vodom ima i najvećih problema s kakvoćom vode.

Golemi su, nemjerljivi potencijali naše otočke poljoprivrede, o kojima se nedovoljno zna i koji se premalo vrednuju, premda su primjerice Korčula, Hvar, Brač, Pelješac naša znamenita uzgojna područja vinove loze.

*Na dijelu površina hidromelioriranih tala, ukupne površine 7 488 ha sustavi su zapušteni i izvan djelovanja, na jednomu dijelu je došlo do salinizacije. Stoga bi obnavljanje, dopuna i popravak sustava trebalo izvršiti na površini od barem 2 000 ha. Osim toga, valja regulirati vodu u plavljenim krškim poljima, urediti tla Imotskog i Vrgoračkog polja, i izvršiti detaljnu odvodnju na površini koju procjenjujemo na 15 000 ha. No, daleko veći značaj i gospodarske učinke valja očekivati od zahvata natapanja zašto treba osigurati dovoljnu količinu vode, izgraditi akumulacije, nabaviti odgovarajuću infrastrukturu, napraviti i opremu za natapanje površine koju procjenjujemo na 150 000 ha. Za uzgoj povrća za natapanje treba osigurati preko 4 500 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/god. vode.*

Kakvoća voda u vodotocima uglavnom je zadovoljavajuća, osim ušća rijeka u more. U ovoj oblasti nalaze se naša poznata vinogorja: Split, Sinj, Makarska, Imotski, Vrgorac, Neretva, Dubrovnik-Mljet, Pelješac, Korčula, Lastovo, Vis, Hvar<sup>19</sup>, Brač i Šolta. glavni smjer ulaganja je stvaranje uvjeta za uzgoj povrća i južnog voća, na prvom mjestu masline i mandarine, uključujući odvodnju i natapanje u Konavlima.

## 5. ZAKLJUČCI

*Stalnim pravednim vrednovanjem društvenih pojava Akademija postupno vodi do prihvaćanja novih društvenih mjerila i vrijednosnih sustava te tako djeluje kao korektiv društvenih zbivanja...*

akademik Zvonko Kusić 2017....

A-

Raščlamba razvitka poljoprivrede i ruralnog iz vrela Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti od osamostaljenja Hrvatske do danas, izložena u prethodnom tekstu, s ciljem koji je riječima ispisanim ispod naslova označio akademik Kusić, upućuje na zaključke:

1. Sintagmom „Hrvatska Toscana“ utemeljitelj Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, đakovačko – srijemski biskup J.J. Strossmayer je sredinom 19. st. označio viziju poželjnog razvitka južnoslavenskih prostora koja način života “pod svojim nebom” vidi kao spoj prošlosti i današnjice, spiritualnog i svjetovnog - u skladnu gospodarski, socijalno i okolišno održivu cjelinu.
2. Vizija predstavlja „fiziokratizam u novom ruhu“ - održivi razvitak u koji je utkana solidarnost sadašnjeg, s prošlim i budućim naraštajima, klimatski je neutralan i sukladan s deklariranim opredjeljenjem EU za 21.stoljeće.

<sup>19</sup> Postoji li sadržajna poruka svim ruralnim i inim turistima od one moga produhovljenog prijatelja široke, meke duše, vinskog viteza Mr.sc. Andre Tomića: *Vino se pije na ure – ne na litre!* Tko bi išta dodao, osim: Bože daj nam ura i širok stol... litre ne brojimo!!!

3. Globalne socijalno gospodarske i političke okolnosti idu u prilog izjašnjenju sudionika Kongresa za samodostatnost u proizvodnji hrane, po Rimskoj deklaraciji Svjetskog skupa o hrani (World food summit)– Rim 1996., s osloncem na koncept socijalno, gospodarski i okolišno održive intenzifikacije poljoprivrede.
4. Predlaže se izrada Atlasa ruralnog prostora Hrvatske, a u prilog tomu izrađen je Zemljovid hrvatske ruralne baštine i ukratko opisane posebnosti izdvojenih ruralnih oblasti.
5. Vremenski odmak od izricanja ocjena koje Utemeljitelja Akademije smještaju na „sivu/crnu stranu povijesti“ dostatna je za preispitivanje tih ocjena, njihovih nositelja i stavljanje na pravo mjesto.

*Ako Venecija, po legendi počiva na velebitskoj hrastovini, to moderna hrvatska kultura, bez ikakve sumnje, leži na Strossmayerovim slavonskim dubovima.*  
Ivo Frangeš  
1987.  
*Rad je najmilija molitva Bogu, i ja ne znam ljepšega i Bogu ugodnijeg prizora, nego kada težak na njivi svojoj oči u nebo upre ter iz sve duše zavapi: Bože! Blagoslovi trud i posao moj!*  
J.J. Strossmayer 1860.

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**HRVATSKA TOSKANA – NADVREMENSKA VIZIJA JOSIPA JURJA STROSSMAYERA  
UTEMELJITELJA HRVATSKE AKADEMIJE ZNANOSTI I UMJETNOSTI**

**Ferdo Bašić**

**Abstract**

Nešto kasnije u odnosu na austrijski dio Austrougarskog imperija pod utjecajem fiziokratske ekonomske škole na južnoslavenski prostor stižu povijesne promjene koje pismom o ukidanju kmetstva najavljuje ban Jelačić: osnutak Hrvatsko-slavonskog gospodarskog (poljoprivrednog) društva i širenje obrazovnih ustanova u poljoprivredi. Na valu tih promjena nastat će sintagma đakovačko-srijemskog biskupa J.J. Strossmayera „*Hrvatska Toskana*“, prema talijanskoj regiji u kojoj su prošlost i današnjica, spiritualno i svjetovno - tradicija/poljoprivreda/šumarstvo/ krajobraz, /gastrovještine/arheološka i umjetnička baština povezane u skladnu gospodarsko-socijalnu cjelinu. *Dodamo li Strossmayerov odnos prema poljoprivredi, šumarstvu i težaku na oranici (vidi ispod naslova!) ta sintagma je ispred i iznad vremenska vizija održivog razvoja, sa snažnim odjekom do danas. Prva je to vizija održivog razvitka na slavenskom jugu, izrečena daleko prije Antropocena i nezamislivih, spektakularnih promjena u njemu!*

U prvim desetljećima, (sudeći prema aktualnim događajima koji su očito povijesna prekretnica) burnijeg stoljeća od prethodnog (svijet s početka nešto je drugo u odnosu na svijet na kraju pisanja ovog rada) Akademija je potvrdila dosljednost viziji svoga Utemeljitelja.

Predsjednik Akademije u drugom desetljeća 21. stoljeća *akademik Kusić* osnovao je *Odbor za zaštitu dobara od nacionalnog interesa* kojega predvodi akademik Neidhardt, a plod mu je epohalni izdavački pothvat naslova *Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva i kulturna dobra – zaštita i odgovorni razvoj*, iz kojega je 2016. predstavljen prvi dio dvoknjižja pod naslovom *Hrvatska prirodna bogatstva*.

U radu je opisan povijesni razvoj poljoprivrede na hrvatskim prostorima od početka sedentarnog života u neolitiku (Vinkovci, Vučedol) i antike do danas, a Zemljovidom ruralne baštine izvršena je podjela na tri cjeline: *Ruralna Panonija, Ruralno Gorje te Ruralno zaobalje Jadrana i otoka s ruralnim oblastima*, postavljen je temelj za izradu *Atlasa hrvatske ruralne baštine*.

I bez aktualnih zbivanja na svjetskoj sceni rad naglašava kako je održiva intenzifikacija hrvatske poljoprivrede prilog viziji Utemeljitelja i neprijeporni put razvoja u smjeru Hrvatske Toscanne. Koncept je u potpunom suglasju s opredjeljenjem i mjerama EU usmjerenim ruralnom razvoju, u njemu sve ruralno, uključujući turizam ima svoje čvrsto mjesto. To je podjedno put osiguranja prijeko potrebne samodostatnosti u proizvodnji hrane po preporuci Rimske deklaracije Svjetskog skupa o hrani (Rim 1996), koja Hrvatsku kao potpisnika te deklaracije obvezuje.

**ključne riječi:** Fiziokratska ekonomska škola, Hrvatska Toskana, Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Održivi razvitak, Rimska deklaracija, Zemljovid hrvatske ruralne baštine

**Ferdo Bašić**

Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti – Razred za prirodne znanosti

E.mail: fbasic@hazu.hr



# FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS AS A KEY COMPETENCE FOR TOURIST GUIDES

Maja Resner, Ksenija Stojaković, Ivan Olina

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to research the importance of foreign language knowledge and skills for tourist guides and to examine their experiences related to taking the professional exam for tourist guides in relation to their foreign language skills. Research data was obtained through an online questionnaire survey which contained questions about their experience as tourist guides, self-assessed foreign language skills and attitudes to knowledge of foreign languages needed by this profession. The second part of the research is based on a questionnaire survey answered by representatives of tourist boards from the continental part of Croatia, in which they assessed their needs for services of tourist guides and attitudes on foreign language skills as a prerequisite for guiding tours in continental Croatia. Findings of the research can be used as a starting point for further and more comprehensive research and in creating additional professional training courses for tourist guides, with an emphasis on foreign language skills.

**Keywords:** foreign languages, language skills, tourist guides

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, tourism and tourism-related activities play a significant role in the economy of many countries, including Croatia. As a country which is highly dependent on the income from tourism which contributes significantly to the country's GDP, with a percentage as high as 19.4% in touristically highly successful 2019 (Rašić, 2020), it is of crucial importance for all stakeholders in the tourism industry to achieve a high level of professionalism in their field of work in order to be more competitive on the ever-changing tourism market. Being a successful tourist guide involves a variety of different skills and competences, including formal knowledge of the history and culture of the area for which one is accredited to guide, well-developed communicative and organisational skills, intercultural competences, and fluency in at least one foreign language. This is also important for Croatian tourist guides, who can be considered 'ambassadors' of the destination and Croatia in general, since they are often the first contact of the tourist at a certain location, providing the visitors not only with the different general and historical facts about the place they visit, but also with the feel for the area, the local population and the people who used to inhabit it, and the rich cultural heritage of the destination. In the first part of this paper, theoretical framework on tourist guides is presented alongside the legal framework for this profession in Croatia. The second part focuses on the research made into the importance and attitudes of both tourist guides and representatives of local tourism boards in relation to foreign languages and language skills needed in this profession. The research was conducted through two separate questionnaire surveys answered by tourist guides (N=40) and representatives of tourist boards (N=26) respectively. As opposed to previous research examining intercultural and communicative skills of tourist guides in general, this paper focuses on the need to be proficient in foreign languages, above all English and German, which is the main prerequisite in this profession. This is of crucial relevance for a small country such as Croatia, whose language is spoken solely by its inhabitants and is not widely understood

either in Europe as the main source of inbound tourism for Croatia, nor in the rest of the world. In the final part of the paper, conclusions are drawn about the necessity of additional education for tourist guides in relation to foreign languages and the importance of foreign language knowledge in this profession.

## 2. ON TOURIST GUIDES IN CROATIA

In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, 2005, 690), a guide is broadly defined as 'a person who shows other people the way to a place, especially somebody employed to show tourists around interesting places'. The World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (2003) defines a tourist guide as "a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area for which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority." The role of a tourist guide is more precisely defined by Article 26 of the Croatian Act on the Provision of Tourism Services (2021) which states that a tourist guide is "a natural person (...) who guides and provides verbal information to tourists concerning the natural beauties and rarities, cultural-historical monuments, works of art, ethnographic and other sites, historical events, famous persons, legends about various events and people, economic and political events." Gržinić and Kostić Bobanović (2020), according to Boyle, Arnott (2004) highlight that the main role of the tourist guide is to turn the experience of the tourist into pleasure, while making information accessible in a fun, but also culturally acceptable way. In their research, the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication of tour guides as the main factor impacting the satisfaction of visitors in the Istria County area was highlighted. Their findings proved that tourists considered their tourist guides to be excellent at presenting both cultural and natural heritage in very good English, and that they presented their ideas clearly, chose their words carefully, avoided slang and used appropriate grammar and clear pronunciation (Gržinić and Kostić Bobanović, 2020). In their paper on challenges in education of tour guides in Slovenia, Gorenak and Gorenak cite Škerbinc who claims that obtaining a licence of a tour guide is only the beginning of learning in the profession, since it only satisfies the minimum conditions enforced by the law. Good tour guides must strive for continuation of the learning process and have years of practice in the field, but also possess some inherent competencies needed in this profession (Gorenak and Gorenak 2012, according to Škerbinc 2008). This idea of permanent education is also accentuated by Gregorić et. al. (2017) who researched the experience and attitudes of tourist guides in relation to lifelong learning and readiness of tourist guides to further perfect their skills. The research presented in this paper was sparked by the education seminar conducted for potential tourist guides at Virovitica University of Applied Sciences in 2021, during which candidates expressed some uncertainties related to their readiness to start working as tourist guides upon completion of the education programme, especially in relation to their foreign language skills. Although English might be considered the *lingua franca* in today's world, given the fact that an estimated 1.5 billion of both native and non-native speakers around the world speak it regularly, according to Pearson Global Report from 2020, when it comes to tourism market in Croatia, other languages should be taken into consideration as well. This is particularly important for German language, since the majority of tourists who

visit Croatia arrive from countries in which German is the native tongue. According to the yearly report of the Croatian Ministry of Tourism (2021, 26), the highest number of inbound tourists in pre-COVID 2019 and 2020 were from Germany, followed by Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Hungary, France, and the USA. Consequently, it can be concluded that for Croatian tourism workers, and especially tourist guides, who have to be competent in at least one foreign language to be able to guide tours with foreign visitors, it is essential to be fluent in other foreign languages besides English, above all German. According to an interview given by Ms Kristina Nuić Prka, President of the Croatia Tourist Guides Association in 2020<sup>1</sup>, there are approximately 5500 tourist guides in Croatia, a number which is difficult to estimate since this occupation is only an additional business activity for some, while it is the only source of income for the others, and there is no official registry or document providing the exact number of Croatian tourist guides, even when considering those guides for whom this activity is the main source of income. Tourist guides may provide the services of tourist guides as traders/craftsmen or companies. All of them have to prove their knowledge of at least one foreign language when taking the professional exam for tourist guides. In the following subchapter, legal framework and key regulations pertaining to obtaining a licence to officially become a tourist guide are presented.

### **2.1. Legal framework for tourist guides in Croatia**

The activity of tourist guides in Croatia is regulated by the Croatian Act on the Provision of Tourism Services of 2021 and the Ordinance on the professional exam for tourist guides and the examination program for tourist escorts of 2008. To become a licensed tourist guide in Croatia, one has to attend an education programme, i.e., preparation seminar organised by a higher education institution, and pass the required exam programme before an examining committee. For each of the 20 Croatian counties and the City of Zagreb, a separate exam must be passed, with the exception of the foreign language part, which needs to be passed only once for a given language. According to Article 8, Paragraph 3 of the Ordinance on the professional exam for tourist guides and the examination program for tourist escorts, candidates holding either a university diploma in foreign languages or an internationally acknowledged language certificate stating their foreign language knowledge are exempt from taking the part of the exam which tests their language skills (Official Gazette 50/08). The Croatian Act on the Provision of Tourism Services also determines that EU citizens can become guides in Croatia, provided their knowledge of Croatian is at an adequate level. The content of the seminar and the number of classes needed are determined by the Ordinance, which also stipulates that there are not any foreign language classes to be held, although each candidate must provide a written translation of the seminar paper as a proof of foreign language knowledge, as well as do the practical part of the exam, i.e., simulation of tour guiding, in both Croatian and at least one foreign language of candidate's choice. Lovrentjev investigated whether any of the higher education institutions had made any changes or additions to the prescribed curriculum for the tourist guides education and preparation for the exam and found that none did, which also included not providing any form of education which involved foreign language classes (Lovrentjev, 2014). This paper was partially inspired by a recently held tourist guide preparation seminar and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://privredni.hr/turisticki-vodici-su-vazni-ali-su-podcijenjeni>

examination held at Virovitica University of Applied Sciences during which some participants expressed apprehensiveness about passing the language part of the exam without any formal preparation.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

For purposes of this paper, research was conducted during February and March 2022 in form of two separate online questionnaires designed specifically for the purposes of this research, which were sent to e-mail addresses of tourist guides and tourism boards located in the continental part of Croatia. As previously mentioned, a formal registry of tourist guides in Croatia does not exist, so contact information on tourist guides who were sent the questionnaire was obtained through examining web pages of continental tourism boards on both county and city level, and by contacting Croatian Tourist Guides Association and several other tourist guides associations based in the continental part of Croatia. Each questionnaire consisted of 12 questions related to tourist guides, with the one answered by tourist guides focusing on their experience and attitudes towards proficiency in foreign language necessary for tour guiding, while the one answered by tourism board representatives focused on their cooperation with tourist guides, the actual need for their services, and the perceived proficiency in foreign languages needed to communicate with foreign tourists visiting their area. Several travel agencies were also sent the second questionnaire, but there were no answers obtained from them. The questionnaires were anonymous and did not include any demographic questions, apart from the ones about the location since these data were not considered essential for the purposes of the survey. Separate survey questions are discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Questions used in surveys were of multiple choice, with some of them also allowing for individual answers, and Likert scale questions for answers which demanded estimates on language proficiency, or which were related to personal opinion of respondents. The continental part of Croatia was the target area for the research since no similar research has been conducted specifically for this area so far. It was presumed that, as this area of Croatia receives fewer foreign tourist annually than the coastal part (Ministry of Tourism, 2021), it would be easier for both tourist guides and tourism representatives to evaluate the importance of foreign language skills for guiding tours on the continent. A total of 40 tourist guides respondents completed the first survey, including both tourist guides who have recently completed their training and passed the professional exam, and guides who have been active in this profession for ten years or longer. The second questionnaire was sent to a total of 89 representatives of local and county-level tourism boards based in the continental part of Croatia whose contact was found on the official website of the Croatian National Tourist Board, and was answered by 26 respondents, i.e. nearly 30%. Since the focus of the research was not on the Adriatic part of Croatia, where tourism is developed to a much higher degree, which implies both a large number of tourism boards and tourist guides operating in this area, the sample is considered to be relevant. The results of the surveys are presented in the following chapter. Since there was a relatively small number of respondents in both surveyed groups, there are certain limitations concerning the relevance of the research, so more comprehensive research is desirable. It would also be recommendable to do a comparative study with respondents from the coastal part of Croatia where tourism is

developed much better, in order to compare the situation and thus gain a deeper insight into the actual number of active tourist guides in the whole of Croatia and the language proficiency of guides from the coastal counties who are presumably able to guide tours more frequently in their location due to the larger number of visitors. The City of Zagreb was not included in the survey either, since it also has a very high number of foreign visitors and professional tourist guides, similar to that of the coastal counties.

#### 4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

In order to provide a clearer picture of the needs of the tourism community in the continental part of Croatia, results of the survey completed by tourist board representatives are presented first, followed by the results obtained from the tourist guides.

##### 4.1. Answers of tourist boards – cooperation with tourist guides

As previously said, a total number of 26 respondents who were representatives of tourist boards from the continental part of Croatia answered the questionnaire. Table 1 provides information on the number of answers obtained from various tourist boards operating in continental counties. Answers were not obtained from representatives of all continental counties, so only those counties from which responses were obtained are included in the table below.

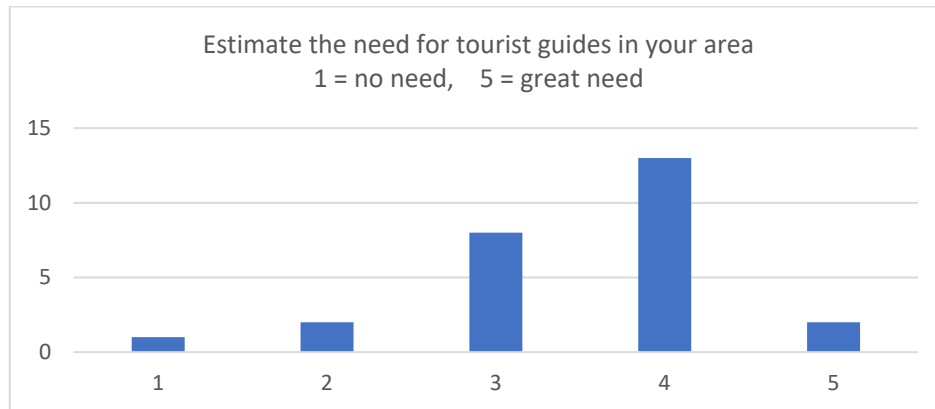
Table 1. Number of responses of tourist boards per county

County	Number of respondents
Krapina-Zagorje County	4
Zagreb County	4
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	3
Međimurje County	3
Osijek-Baranja County	3
Karlovac County	2
Sisak-Moslavina County	2
Virovitica-Podravina County	2
Vukovar-Srijem County	2
Koprivnica-Križevci County	1

Source: authors

The second question was related to the tourist boards' needs for services of tourist guides. This may happen when tourists do not visit a destination using the services of a tourist agency, but come either individually or in smaller groups which organise shorter excursions on their own, but seek help from the tourist board at the destination. As can be discerned from the graph, continental counties expressed a substantial need for tourist guides, with the highest number (13) of them expressing this need as quite high, or relatively high (eight respondents), two of them as very high, or not very high, respectively, whereas only one respondent claimed that this need does not exist.

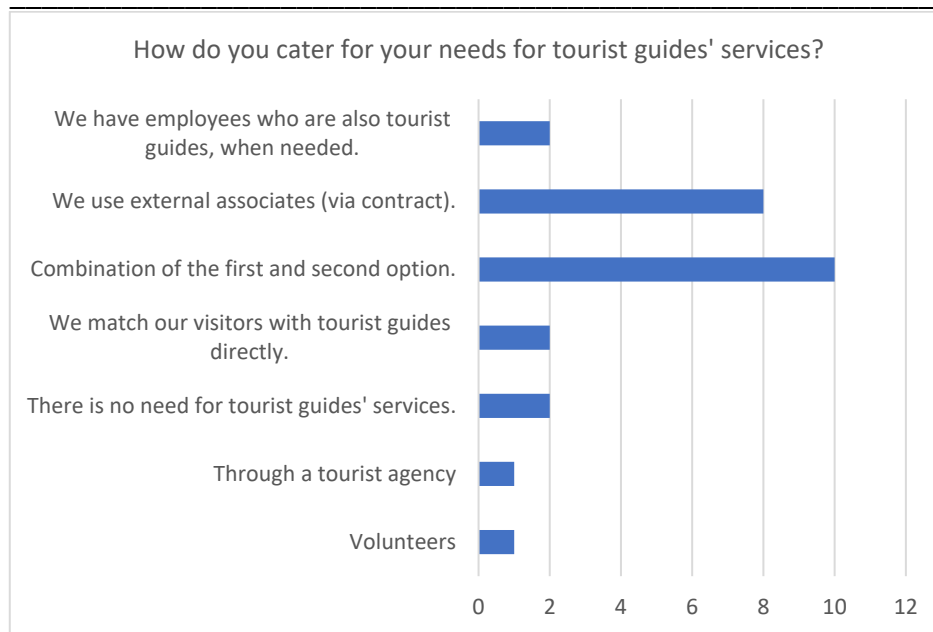
Graph 1. Estimation of need for services of tourist guides



Source: authors

When asked about the way they catered for their needs for services of tourist guides, tourist board representatives were offered four ready answers, but were also given an option for an open-ended answer. As can be seen from the graph below, the majority (38.5%) opted for a combination of the first and second answer, i.e., that they both use their employees who are licensed tourist guides when needed, and that they use external associates, i.e., tourist guides who are employed via a contract. A high number of respondents also claimed that they used services of external tourist guides (30.8%), and only two respondents replied that they did not have any need for tourist guides (7.7%). This leads to a conclusion that the majority of guided tours in continental part of Croatia, when not organised by tourist agencies, is facilitated by tourist boards, which is indicative of a good cooperation of tourist guides with local tourist boards. This claim can be corroborated by answers to the question about the quality of cooperation between tourist boards and local guides which was described as either extremely good or good, where both options were chosen by 11 respondents (42.3%) respectively, and only one respondent described it as poor (3.8%). Three respondents (11.5%) claimed that they could not estimate how good the cooperation was, presumably due to the lack of need for such services.

Graph 2. Ways of catering for needs for tourist guides' services



Source: Authors

#### 4.2. Answers of tourist boards – foreign language requirements

The second part of the questionnaire sent to representatives of tourist boards was related to foreign languages, including both questions on requirements for guides who speak different foreign languages, and the perception of the importance of foreign language knowledge and skills which should be displayed by the tourist guides in their line of work. The first two questions were related to the structure of visitors, i.e., the languages which are usually needed to guide tours in their area, and the estimate of the percentage of visitors coming from areas where different foreign languages are spoken. As anticipated, the greatest need was expressed for knowledge of English, where almost all respondents (96.2%) claimed it was the most useful and commonly needed option, which is not surprising, given that English language is considered to be *lingua franca* in today's society, and especially in the European area. Since respondents were given an option to choose more than one foreign language, the majority (76.9%) also expressed the need for tourist guides to be fluent in German, which can also be interpreted as expected, given the fact that tourist from German-speaking countries make the majority of foreign visitors to Croatia, with Germany and Austria being the top two countries in the number of tourist arrivals to Croatia for both 2019 and 2020 (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). Two languages that followed were Italian and Hungarian, with five answers (19.2%) each, and finally Czech and Polish were also mentioned by one respondent (3.8%) respectively. Although it was offered as option, French was not chosen as a desirable or necessary language by any of the respondents, which is in correlation with the data available from the yearly publication of Croatian Ministry of Tourism (2021) where French tourists only made 2.5% of total tourist arrivals to Croatia in 2020 and only a slightly higher percentage of 3.6% in 2019. When asked to state the area from which

most of their visitors came, the majority again chose the German-speaking area (38.5%) and English-speaking area (26.9%), but four respondents also chose Slovenia, although Slovenian language was not mentioned as an option in the previous question. One respondent provided an answer which included a combination of areas. The complete set of answers can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. From which language area do most of your visitors come from?

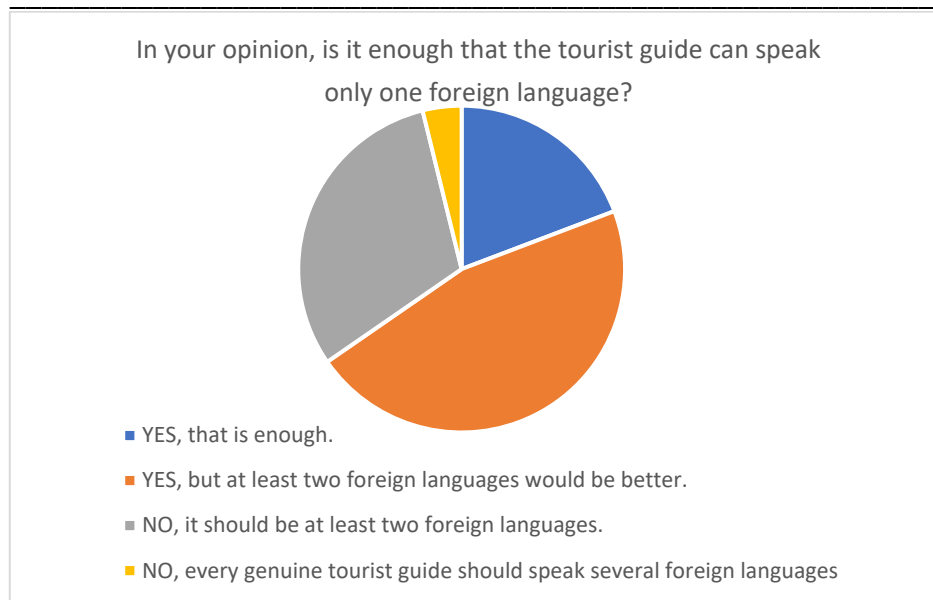
Language-speaking area	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
German	10	38.5%
English	7	26.9%
Slovenian	4	15.4%
Italian	2	7.7%
Hungarian	1	3.8%
Czech	1	3.8%
Slovenia, Austria and Germany	1	3.8%

Source: authors

The following question was related to the ability to speak more than one foreign language, as a necessary prerequisite for professional tourist guides. The question was stated as follows: ‘In your opinion, is it enough for a tourist guide to be able to speak only one foreign language, i.e., to be able to guide groups in only one foreign language (for example, English), apart from Croatian?’ The graph below is indicative of the opinion that tourism professionals strongly believe and expect tourist guides to be proficient in at least two foreign languages, if not more, with the total of over 80% of respondents opting for such a combination. When compared to the answers to previous question, it can be concluded that the ideal combination for continental Croatia might be the combination of English and German as a ‘golden standard’.

Graph 3. How many languages should a tourist guide ideally speak?

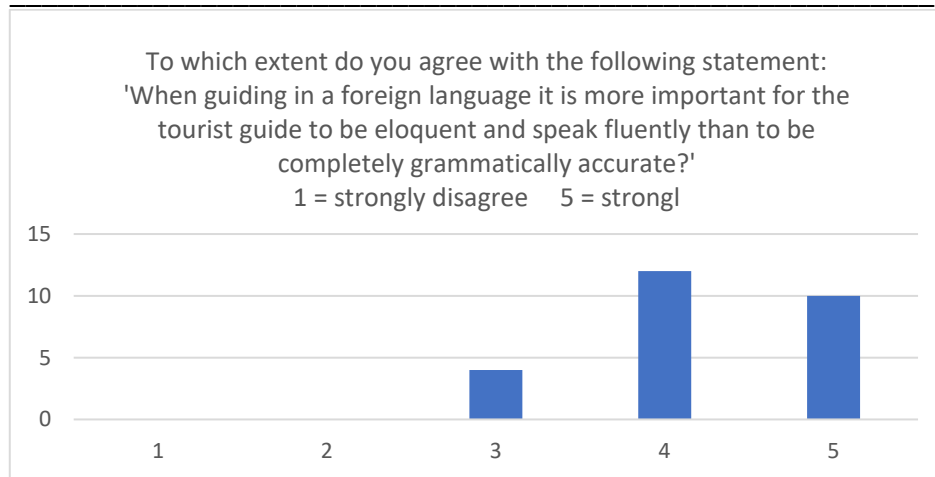




Source: authors

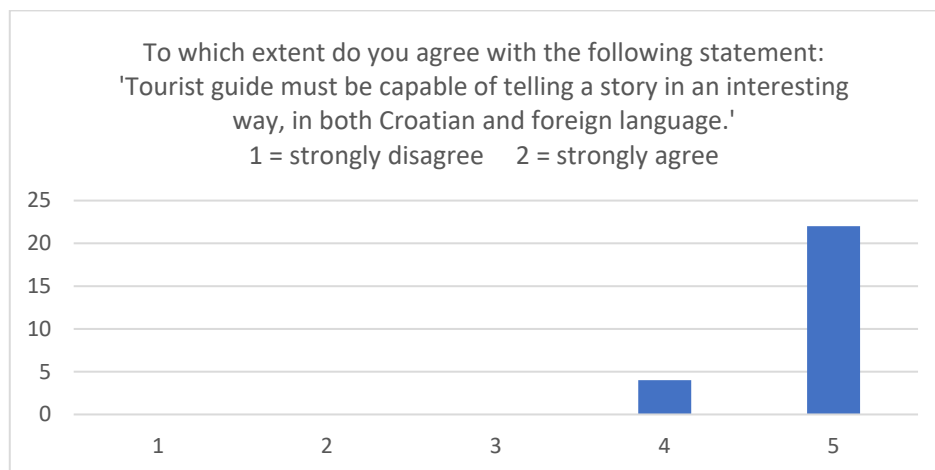
As previously mentioned, when taking the exam for the tourist guide qualification, candidates who have studied a foreign language at university and who hold either a university degree in this language or have an internationally acknowledged language certificate stating their foreign language knowledge need not take the part of the exam which tests their language skills. Question 9 inquired whether it was thought fair that such candidates were exempt from taking the language part of the exam and whether their diploma or certificate is a guarantee of their foreign language skills. 80.8% of respondents answered positively, believing the diploma to be a guarantee of knowledge of a foreign language at a satisfactory level, while five respondents (19.2%) believed that the tourist guide exam should be equal for all candidates, their qualifications notwithstanding. The following two graphs present answers to Likert-scale questions concerning the importance of fluency and storytelling ability of tourist guides, where both sets of answers are indicative of the need for high or very high foreign-language storytelling skills and eloquence, even if it includes some grammar inaccuracies, as is usually the case with any kind of communication.

Graph 4. Answers to the question: Eloquence and fluency vs. grammatical accuracy



Source: authors

Graph 5. The importance of storytelling ability



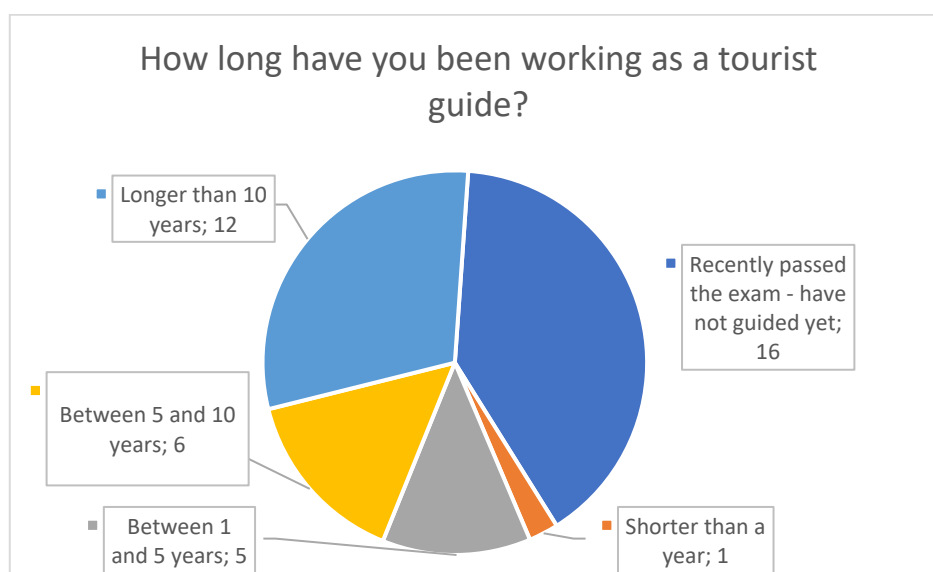
Source: authors

The final question for representatives of tourist boards was whether they had ever had any complaints from the visitors about tourist guides in relation to their insufficient or poor knowledge of a foreign language. As the majority, i.e., 76.9% of respondents answered negatively and only one respondent answered positively, with five respondents (19.2%) claiming to be unable to answer the question or not to know, it can be concluded that active tourist guides from the continental part of Croatia have sufficient language skills and are well-qualified to guide tours in a foreign language.

#### 4.3 Answers of tourist guides - experiences and foreign language proficiency

Out of 40 answers obtained from tourist guides, the answer to the first question was about their tour-guiding experience, i.e., how long they have been working as tourist guides. The graph below shows that the majority of respondents either has no experience in guiding since they had just completed education for tourist guides, or has long-term experience in guiding, which allows for more accurate answers concerning the reality of the profession.

Graph 6. Length of involvement in tour guiding



Source: authors

The second question was related to the county for which the tour guide had the licence to guide. As previously mentioned, tour guides have to pass a separate exam for each of the Croatian counties to be able to legally guide tours in them. Since the respondents were possibly certified to guide in multiple counties, they were given the opportunity to mark more than one county from the list containing names of all Croatian counties, which is shown in the table below.

Table 3. Counties for which respondents have passed the tourism guide exam

	County	Number and percentage of respondents with guiding licence for the county
1	Bjelovar-Bilogora County	7 (17.1%)
2	Brod-Posavina County	9 (22%)
3	Dubrovnik-Neretva County	0 (0%)
4	Istria County	1 (2.4%)
5	Karlovac County	0 (0%)
6	Koprivnica-Križevci County	6 (14.6%)
7	Krapina-Zagorje County	13 (31.7%)

8	Lika-Senj County	0 (0%)
9	Međimurje County	14 (34.1%)
10	Osijek-Baranja County	9 (22%)
11	Požega-Slavonia County	9 (22%)
12	Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	0 (0%)
13	Sisak-Moslavina County	0 (0%)
14	Split-Dalmatia County	1 (2.4%)
15	Šibenik-Knin County	0 (0%)
16	Varaždin County	13 (31.7%)
17	Virovitica-Podravina County	23 (57.5%)
18	Vukovar-Srijem County	9 (22%)
19	Zadar County	0 (0%)
20	Zagreb County	4 (9.8%)
21	City of Zagreb	4 (9.8%)

Source: authors

Respondents were also asked about the foreign languages in which they were certified to guide. In accordance with the demand and general foreign language learning trends in Croatia, the results have shown that the majority, i.e., 34 respondents (85%) are able to guide in English, followed by 11 (27.5%) of them who have passed the exam for German language. This is well-suited to current market needs, although other languages on the list are represented far less frequently, which might serve as an incentive for both tourist guides and representatives of tourism institutions to try to stimulate guides to learn other foreign languages to fill the gap in the market.

Table 4. Foreign languages for which respondents have passed the tourism guide exam

Foreign language	Number of respondents	Percentage
English	34	85%
German	11	27.5%
Italian	3	7.5%
French	2	5%
Czech	2	5%
Slovenian	1	2.5%
Russian	1	2.5%
Spanish	1	2.5%
none	1	2.5%

Source: authors

When asked about which part of the foreign language exam within the education for tourist guides was the most difficult for them, tourist guides gave following answers:

Table 5. The most difficult part of the foreign language exam

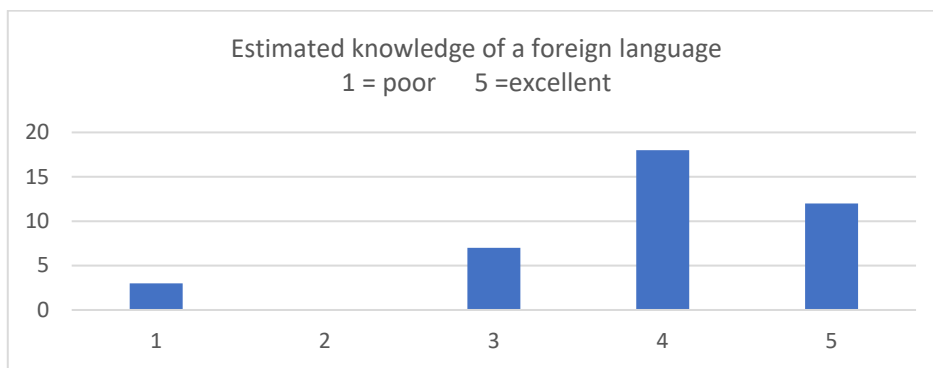
Oral part - simulation of guiding in a foreign language	17.5%
Written part - writing a seminar paper	7.5%
Both oral and written part in equal measure	20%

Passing this part of the tourist guide exam was not a problem for me	45%
As a foreign language teacher, I did not have to take this part of the exam	10%

Source: authors

The following two questions were measured by Likert scale, asking about the self-estimated knowledge of foreign language and difficulty of guiding in a foreign language, as opposed to guiding in mother tongue. The graph below depicts answers to the question to estimate their knowledge of a foreign language they were certified for, or the one they were most proficient in, if they are certified to guide in more than one language.

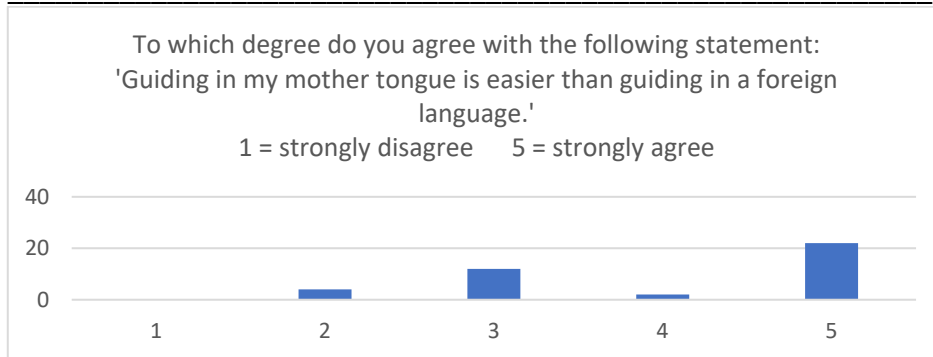
Graph 7. Estimated foreign language knowledge



Source: authors

Although most respondents would give themselves high or very high marks, there were some (7.5%) who expressed their uncertainty about their language skills, which might be considered a hindering factor for engaging in this profession and raises questions about the criteria used in the tourist guide examinations as well. However, almost all respondents found that solid knowledge of a foreign language is essential for tourist guide profession, with 33 respondents (82.5%) giving it the highest mark, four respondents (10%) estimating it as very important, two (5%) as neither important nor unimportant, and only one respondent giving it the mark 1, i.e. considering it to be unimportant. Graph 8 presents results of the estimated difficulty of guiding in a foreign language, as opposed to guiding in the mother tongue.

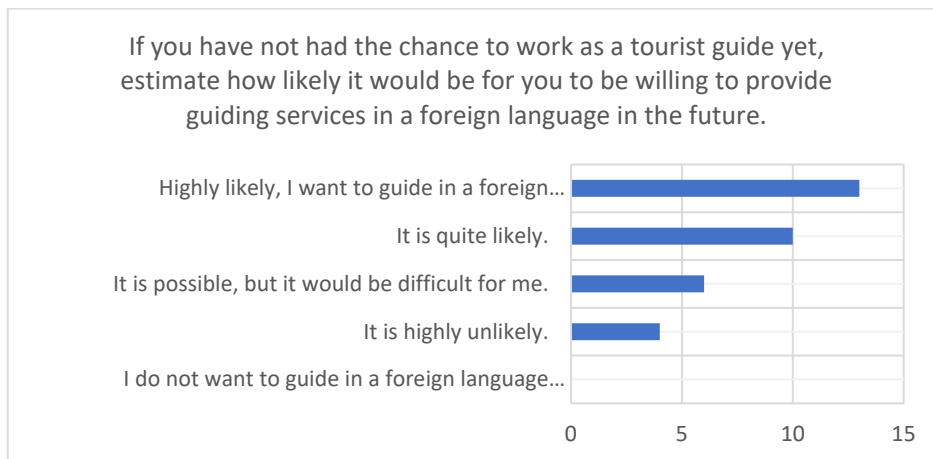
Graph 8. Difficulty of guiding in a foreign language vs. guiding in the mother tongue



Source: authors

These opinions were also reflected in the answers to the question about the complexity of preparation for guiding in a foreign language, where 67.5% respondents considered it to be more demanding than preparing to guide in the mother tongue, 30% found that it takes the same amount of preparation for guiding in both foreign language and the mother tongue, one person (2.5%) stated that they could not estimate it, and no-one claimed that preparation in a foreign language is easier than in the mother tongue. Since the questionnaires were also sent to respondents who have recently passed the exam and have not yet had the chance to actively engage in this profession, they were given the opportunity to estimate how likely it would be in the future for them to be willing to provide guiding services in a foreign language. Although there were four respondents who did not find this option very likely, the majority considered it to be highly likely and desirable, and not a single respondent answered that this option would be unacceptable, which is in contradiction with the self-evaluation of foreign language knowledge where three respondents evaluated their foreign language skills as poor.

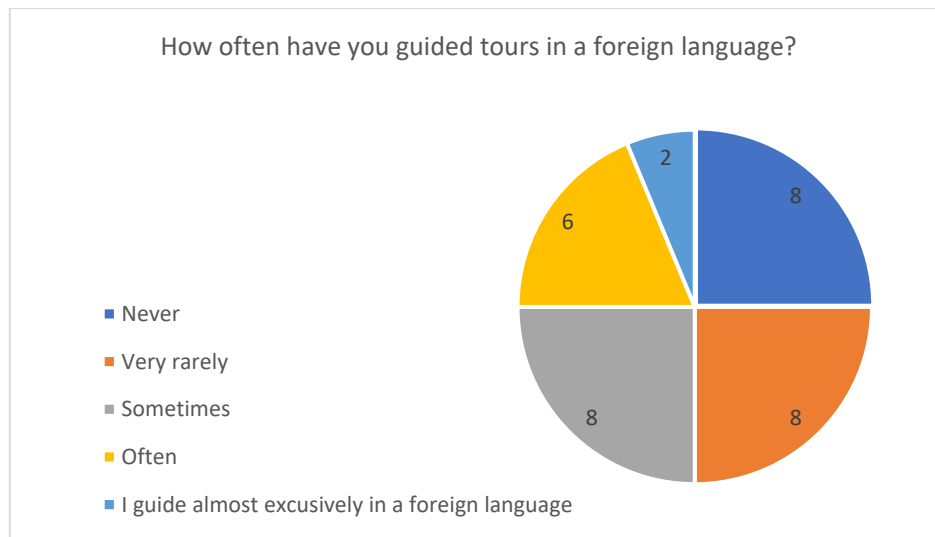
Graph 9. Likelihood of guiding in a foreign language in the future



Source: authors

The respondents who have had the chance to engage in tour guiding activities were asked to state how often they did so in a foreign language, which is shown in the graph below.

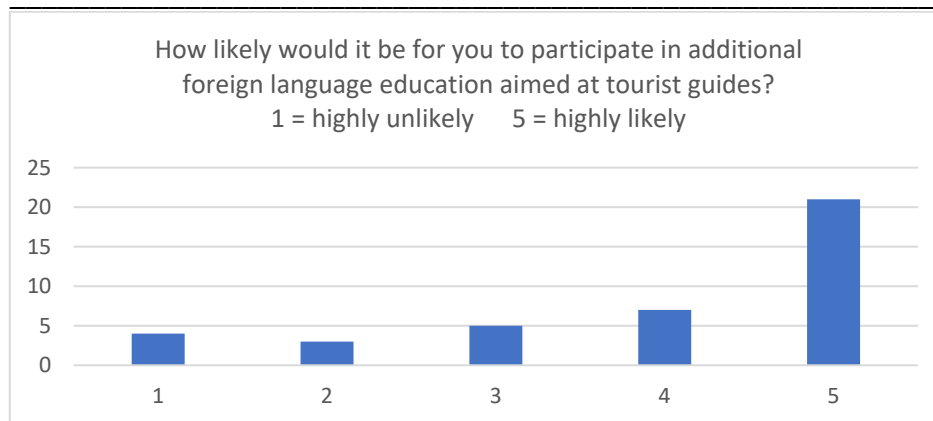
Graph 10. Guiding experience in a foreign language



Source: authors

Since there is no formally defined education in foreign languages for candidates who are preparing for the tourist guide exam although they are expected to demonstrate their foreign language skills in the exam itself, the last two questions examined willingness of tourist guides to participate in additional educational activities related to foreign language skills which would be tailored to the needs of tourist guides. The results might serve as an incentive and guidance to both tourist guides associations and higher education institutions providing training activities and tourist guides exams and preparation seminars. Graph 11 presents the level of willingness to participate in additional foreign language training, while Table 5 lists decisive factors for engaging in such activities.

Graph 11. Willingness to participate in additional foreign language training



Source: authors

Similar results were obtained by Gregorić et. al. in their research on lifelong education of tourist guides conducted on a larger sample of 106 tourist guides, where a quarter of respondents expressed their desire to further improve their knowledge of a foreign language (Gregorić et. al. 2017).

Table 6. Decisive factors for participation in additional language training

Which factors would be decisive for you to attend additional foreign language education for tourist guides (choose a maximum of three options)?	Number of respondents	Percentage
Free education	28	70%
Education in or near my place of residence	27	67.5%
Favourable time when the education is held	25	62.5%
Possibility of gaining a certificate	22	55%
Duration of education (number of classes)	10	25%
Teaching staff	5	12.5%

Source: authors

As can be deduced from the graph and table above, a large majority of both new and experienced tourist guides have expressed readiness to educate themselves further in relation to foreign languages. Providing such a form of additional education would be much easier to organise for English and German language, than for other foreign languages, since there is both a very limited number of participants available, as well as a potentially low number of teachers proficient in more rarely spoken foreign languages and the tour guiding profession itself. This means that it is highly likely that tourist guides will remain dependent on their own resources when it comes to perfecting their foreign language skills, although there is also great potential for further education language programmes for tourist guides for English and German, taking into consideration important factors which might influence the willingness of candidates to attend such training.



## 5. CONCLUSION

For a country as small as Croatia, knowledge of various foreign languages, above all English and German, is a necessity in the tourism sector, and is especially important when tourist guides are concerned. The aim of this paper was to examine the importance of foreign language knowledge and skills for tourist guides in the continental part of Croatia and to gain insight into their experiences related to taking the professional exam for tourist guides in relation to their foreign language skills, as well as their attitudes on the level of difficulty in guiding tours in a foreign language. Most of the respondents agreed that guiding in a foreign language is more difficult than guiding in the mother tongue, and that additional educational activities related to gaining higher level of competence in a foreign language would be highly desirable. Research data was obtained through two separate online questionnaire surveys which contained questions about the experience of tourist guides, their self-assessed foreign language skills and attitudes to knowledge of foreign languages needed by this profession. The second part of the research is based on a questionnaire survey answered by representatives of tourist boards from the continental part of Croatia, in which they assessed their needs for services of tourist guides and attitudes on foreign language skills as a prerequisite for guiding tours in continental Croatia. Obtained results were consistent with the global need to employ tourist guides who are proficient in both English as a universal means of communication, and at least one other foreign language, such as German, although the sample was relatively small. Findings of the research can be used as a starting point for further and more comprehensive research, but also as an incentive for creating additional professional training courses for tourist guides, with an emphasis on foreign language skills. This might also present a challenge for higher education institutions providing preparation seminars and conducting tourist guide exams when it comes to other, less widely spoken foreign languages.

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**FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS AS A KEY COMPETENCE FOR TOURIST GUIDES**

**Maja Resner, Ksenija Stojaković, Ivan Olina**

**Abstract**

The aim of this article is to research the importance of foreign language knowledge and skills for tourist guides and to examine their experiences related to taking the professional exam for tourist guides in relation to their foreign language skills. Research data was obtained through an online questionnaire survey which contained questions about their experience as tourist guides, self-assessed foreign language skills and attitudes to knowledge of foreign languages needed by this profession. The second part of the research is based on a questionnaire survey answered by representatives of tourist boards from the continental part of Croatia, in which they assessed their needs for services of tourist guides and attitudes on foreign language skills as a prerequisite for guiding tours in continental Croatia. Findings of the research can be used as a starting point for further and more comprehensive research and in creating additional professional training courses for tourist guides, with an emphasis on foreign language skills.

**Keywords:** foreign languages, language skills, tourist guides

**Maja Resner**

Veleučilište u Virovitici

E-mail: [maja.resner@vuv.hr](mailto:maja.resner@vuv.hr)

**Ksenija Stojaković**

Veleučilište Baltazar Zaprešić

E-mail: [kstojakovic@bak.hr](mailto:kstojakovic@bak.hr)

**Ivan Olina**

Veleučilište u Virovitici

E-mail: [ivan.olina@vuv.hr](mailto:ivan.olina@vuv.hr)

## REVIEWERS

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