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6th INTERNATIONAL RURAL TOURISM CONGRESS

RURALNI TURIZAM: ODRŽIV, DIGITALAN, UKLJUČIV
RURAL TOURISM: SUSTAINABLE, DIGITAL, INCLUSIVE

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FOREWORD

Rural tourism is a significant driver of the revitalization of natural and cultural resources and contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas through the preservation of local identity, traditions, and customs, traditional and ecological agricultural production, and the renewal of traditional activities. Current trends in the global tourism market marked by shifting consumer awareness, preferences, and motivations, along with increased concern for health, safety, nature-based experiences, open spaces, and uncrowded destinations and accommodations suggest that rural areas have the potential to gain even greater tourism value in the coming period.

The full valorization, restoration, and protection of tourism potential, along with the development of an integrated tourism product, are closely linked to the implementation of rural revitalization programs focused on the development and branding of rural tourism destinations.

During the 6th International Rural Tourism Congress, keynote lectures and panel discussions addressed key aspects of rural tourism development, including smart rural communities, agritourism, global sustainable tourism standards, and enogastronomy as an entrepreneurial opportunity. Special attention was given to the challenges and opportunities for young people in rural areas, as well as the role of diaspora and returnees in revitalizing rural communities. Presentations and discussions featured good practice examples from Croatia and abroad, highlighting opportunities for developing rural tourism products, integrating tourism and agriculture, and promoting sustainable resource management.

The Congress confirmed that rural tourism plays a crucial role in preserving local identity, stimulating economic development, and strengthening the resilience of rural communities. Furthermore, sustainable rural tourism has the potential to become a cornerstone of Croatia's future tourism development, as interest continues to grow in undiscovered and authentic destinations that offer contact with nature, an escape from the fast pace of daily life, and a genuine local experience. This proceedings volume, comprising 15 scientific and professional papers, is the result of the presentations and constructive discussions held during the Congress.

On behalf of the organizers, partners, and sponsors, we would like to thank all authors, presenters, and participants at the 6th 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.

Organisers

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CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF GRAPES FROM INDIGENOUS CULTIVARS OF THE KASTAV REGION

Original scientific paper

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Abstract:

Autochthonous products are an important part of the hospitality offer in rural tourism. One of them is Belica, a blended wine made from several grape varieties that include some indigenous varieties from the Kastav region: Brajkovac, Divjaka, Mejsko belo, Verdić and Jarbola. This study aims to analyze and compare the sugar content, titratable acidity, pH, and total phenolic content in the berries of the grape varieties grown in the Kastav region and thus contribute to a better understanding of these indigenous varieties. Grape samples from five cultivars were collected in mid-September in the town of Kastav. The samples were homogenized, and the total sugar content, titratable acidity, pH, and total phenolic content of the must were determined. One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there were significant differences between means, while post-hoc analysis was performed using Duncan's test ($p \leq 0.05$). The total sugar content was the highest in Brajkovac while the lowest was in Verdić grapes. The titratable acidity was the highest in Divjaka and the lowest in Verdić grapes, while the pH value was the lowest in Jarbola and the highest in Verdić. The total phenolic content was found to be the highest in the Jarbola grapes, while the lowest content was found in Divjaka. This study provided valuable insight into the chemical parameters of grapes from indigenous grape varieties grown in the Kastav region, which could benefit the production and quality of Belica wine.

Keywords:

Belica wine, indigenous cultivars, titratable acidity, total phenolic content, total sugars

1. Introduction

Autochthonous products are an important part of the hospitality offer in rural tourism. They can tell the story of a region's or nation's unique identity and be an important tourist attraction within a particular destination, aiding in its destination branding. Croatia has a large number of indigenous foods and beverages that attract tourists and can be one of the main reasons for visits in the post-season (Oliva and Paliaga 2012).

One of autochthonous products from the Kastav region is Belica, a wine made from a mixture of Mejsko belo, Verdić, Divjaka, Brajkovac, and Jarbola grape varieties. Belica wine has a long history in Kastav, as these varieties originate from the pre-phylloxera era. Mejsko belo, Divjaka, and Jarbola are unique varieties cultivated only in Croatia. Verdić is cultivated in Slovenia and Italy under the synonyms Teran bijeli, Glera, Prosecco, and Prosecco tondo (Pavlešić et al. 2022). The Brajkovac variety has a historical presence in the Kastav region, as it was mentioned back in the mid-19th century, but today it is only found sporadically in some older vineyards. Its varietal status, including its uniqueness and possible synonyms, has not yet been evaluated (Pavlešić et al. 2022; Žulj Mihaljević et al. 2020).

All five researched varieties are white grapes varieties, vigorous to very vigorous, with medium to large clusters, high yield, and moderate sugars and acids content. In 'Green Book: Indigenous Grapevine Varieties of Croatia,' the authors place Mejsko belo, Divjaka, and Verdić in the category of critically endangered varieties, while Jarbola is in the category of endangered varieties (Maletić et al. 2018; Stupić et al. 2017).

Sugars, acids, pH, and phenolic content are important parameters of grapes that affect the quality of wine. The sugar content has a key role since it determines the alcohol content of the wine. Alcohol shapes sensory perception by influencing aroma detection, interacting with tannins and aroma compounds, and contributing to the body and viscosity of wine (Jordão et al. 2015). Acids and pH have a significant impact on sensory perception and directly influence the overall organoleptic characteristics of wine (Chidi et al 2018) and contribute to the preservation of wine aroma and flavor (Payan et al. 2023). High or extremely low acid levels in grapes can negatively affect the wine, as excessive tartness and low acidity lead to the production of unbalanced and flat wines (Lampř and Žaloudek 2018). Phenolic compounds are mainly present in the skin and seeds of grape berries and are extracted into white wine during the cold maceration process. They enhance bitterness and astringency, intensifying the perceived viscosity of the wine. Although present in lower concentrations in white wines compared to red wines, they significantly contribute to the wine's appearance, antioxidant capacity, and sensory characteristics (Clarke et al. 2023).

This study aims to analyze and compare the sugar content, titratable acidity, pH, and total phenolic content of the grape berries of varieties grown in the Kastav region and thus contribute to a better understanding of these indigenous varieties.

2. Materials and methods

Grape samples of five cultivars: Brajkovac, Divjaka, Mejsko belo, Verdić, and Jarbola were collected in mid-September 2022 within the administrative area of the town of Kastav. As the producer did not have all the varieties in one vineyard, samples were collected in three different locations approximately 200 m apart (45.3696 N 14.3501 E, 45.3688 N, 14.3521 E and 45.3714 N 14.3541 E, respectively). The vineyards were situated on flat terrain, with vine rows oriented northwest-southeast. For each variety, samples were taken from two grapevine rows, with berries picked individually from clusters located on various parts of the vines. Berries were picked from different parts of the clusters: top, middle, and bottom.

The samples were homogenized, and five replicate measurements were taken from each sample to determine the sugar content, titratable acidity, and pH of the must. The sugar content of the must was measured using an MA871 Refractometer (Milwaukee Instruments, Romania) and expressed in °Brix. The pH of the must was determined using pH 80+ DHS pH meter (XS Instruments, Italy). Titratable acidity was determined by neutralization of acids with 0,1 M NaOH and expressed as g/L tartaric acid equivalents. The total phenolic content in the grape skin was determined by extraction in methanol for one hour using an ultrasonic bath, and then determined spectrophotometrically with the GENESYS 50 UV-Vis spectrophotometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc., USA) using the Folin-Ciocalteu reagent at a wavelength of 765 nm and expressed as gallic acid equivalents per fresh weight (mg GAE/100 g FW), according to Peršić (2019). Total phenolic content was measured in three replicates for each sample.

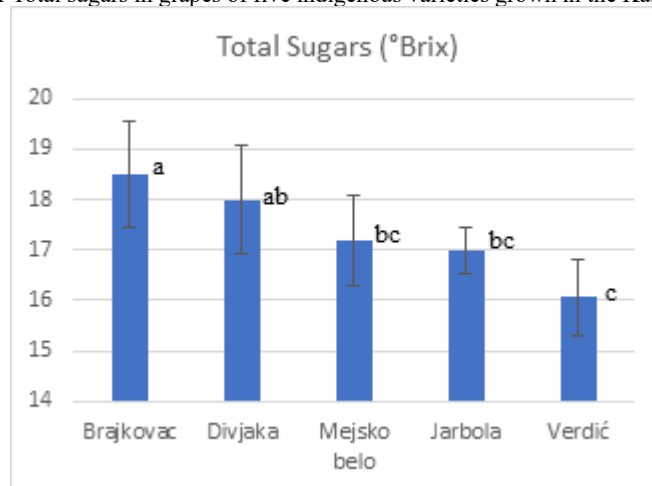
The data collected were analyzed using R software, version 4.1.2. To determine if there were significant differences between the means, one-way ANOVA was used. In the post-hoc analysis, Duncan's test for multiple comparisons was applied to calculate significant differences between the means at the significance threshold of $p \leq 0.05$.

3. Results and discussion

The total sugar content of the grapes ranged from 16.06 ± 0.75 in Verdić to 18.50 ± 1.05 °Brix in Brajkovac, showing a statistically significant variation ($p \leq 0.05$) (Figure 1). The Brajkovac variety had the greatest influence on the alcohol content of Belica wine in the observed year. In research by Pavlešić et al. (2022) the total sugar content in these varieties ranged from 13.8 in Divjaka to 17.4 °Brix in Mejsko belo and Verdić, while in 2016 research by Stupić et al. (2017) found it ranged from 16.13 °Brix (66 °Oe) in Divjaka and Verdić to 20.33 °Brix (84 °Oe) in Brajkovac.

As the sugar content in grapes is impacted by several factors, such as yield, temperature, sunlight, and viticultural practices (Jordão et al. 2015; Lampíř and Žaloudek 2018; Pavlešić et al. 2022; Smart 1987;) it can vary considerably in different vintages. Our results confirm that these varieties have a moderate sugar content. These sugar levels, however, may not be sufficient for the production of quality wines. Additional viticultural practices, like yield reduction could increase the sugar content (Stupić et al. 2017).

Figure 1 Total sugars in grapes of five indigenous varieties grown in the Kastav region



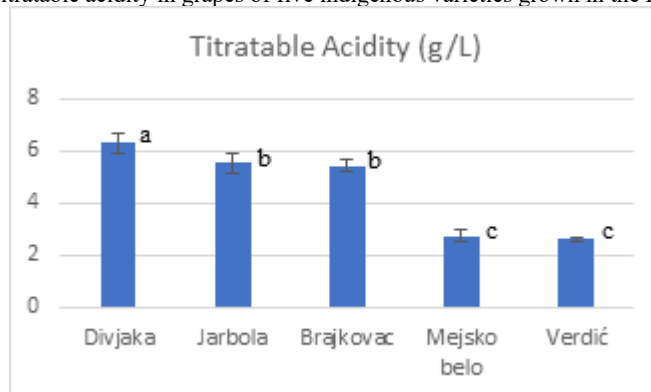
The different letters denote statistical differences according to Duncan's test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Source: Authors

The titratable acidity showed significant variation ($p \leq 0.05$) across varieties. Divjaka grapes had the highest acidity (6.30 ± 0.40 g/L), while Mejsko belo and Verđić grapes had the lowest acidity (2.74 ± 0.25 and 2.61 ± 0.06 g/L, respectively). Titratable acidity in Brajkovac (5.44 ± 0.21 g/L) and Jarbola (5.52 ± 0.35 g/L) grapes was not statistically different (Figure 2). Similar results were obtained by Pavlešić et al. (2022) in 2017, where Divjaka grapes also had the highest acidity (8.5 g/L), while Mejsko belo had the lowest (3.51 g/L). In research conducted in 2016 by Stupić et al. (2017) on the same varieties. Jarbola grapes had the highest (9.12 g/L), while Mejsko belo had lowest (5.6 g/L) acidity.

The same as sugars, the content of acids in grapes is impacted by several environmental and viticultural practices (Preiner et al. 2013). Therefore, multi-year research would be needed to confirm the observed results. Our results suggest that the Divjaka variety made the greatest contribution to the acidity of the wine in the observed year. The low content of acids in Mejsko belo and Verđić grapes may be unfavorable from the technological aspect of winemaking, as it is likely that corrective measures will be needed during vinification (Pavlešić et al. 2022). However, an analysis of individual acids would be necessary to draw definitive conclusions.

Figure 2 Titratable acidity in grapes of five indigenous varieties grown in the Kastav region

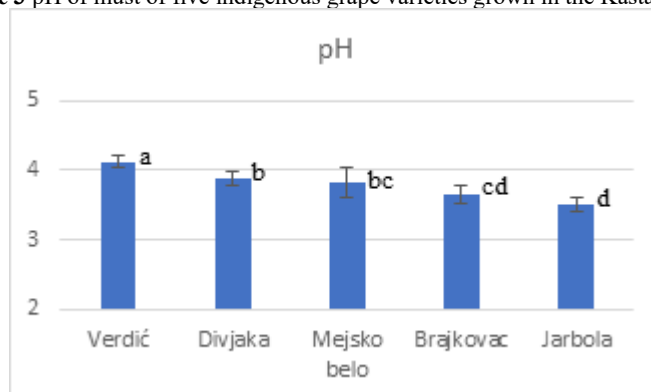


The different letters denote statistical differences according to Duncan's test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Source: Authors

The pH values in the musts ranged from 3.51 ± 0.09 to 4.12 ± 0.09 , showing a statistically significant variation ($p \leq 0.05$). The lowest pH was determined in the must of Jarbola, and the highest in the must of Verdić. No statistically significant differences were observed between Brajkovac, Divjaka, and Mejsko belo. The pH of must is influenced not only by the total content of acids but also by the ratio of different acids present. Tartaric acid is a significantly stronger acid than malic acid. Therefore, at similar levels of total acidity, a lower tartaric/malic acid ratio may result in a higher pH (Kodur 2011). The highest pH value in the must of Verdić is expected considering its lowest content of acids.

Figure 3 pH of must of five indigenous grape varieties grown in the Kastav region



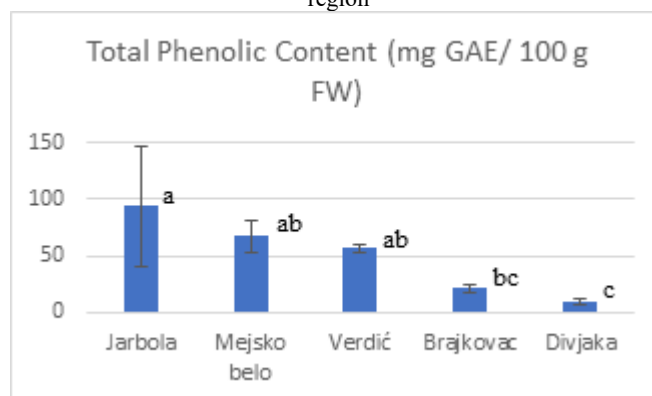
The different letters denote statistical differences according to Duncan's test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Source: Authors

The total phenolic content in grape skin varied considerably ($p \leq 0.05$) among the varieties. Jarbola grape skin displayed the highest phenolic content (93.94 ± 53.46 mg/100 g FW), while Divjaka grape skin had the lowest (9.01 ± 2.31 mg/100g FW). There was no statistically significant difference in total phenolic content between Mejsko belo (67.31 ± 14.17 mg/100 g FW) and Verdić (56.49 ± 3.72 mg/100 g FW) grape skin (Figure 4). The phenolic content in grapes is determined by variety, but it is also influenced by

viticultural practices and environmental conditions. The skin and seeds of white grape varieties show a very similar qualitative and quantitative composition of non-anthocyanin polyphenols to that of red grape varieties (Clarke et al. 2023; Rodríguez Montealegre et al. 2006). While the phenolic content has a lesser impact in white wines than in red, Jarbola could affect the texture and flavor of Belica wine, especially if maceration is applied during vinification.

Figure 4 Total phenolic content in grape skin of five indigenous varieties grown in the Kastav region



The different letters denote statistical differences according to Duncan's test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Source: Authors

4. Conclusions

There are significant differences in the chemical composition of grapes from indigenous varieties grown in the Kastav region. In the observed year, the Brajkovac grapes had the highest sugar content, while Divjaka grapes had the highest titratable acidity. The total phenolic content was the highest in the Jarbola grape skins. Further studies should monitor more chemical parameters of these varieties over different vintages to improve the accuracy of the results. Additionally, the dynamic changes in these parameters during grape ripening should be monitored to determine the optimal harvest time for Belica wine production. As the observed chemical compositions of the five grape varieties show significant differences, it would be beneficial to identify the ideal blending ratio to optimize the final characteristics of Belica wine.

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GARDEN ORACHE - WEED OR CULTIVATED ALTERNATIVE VEGETABLE?

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Abstract:

Agroecological conditions are directly influenced by climate change, increasing the cultivation risk. Wild plants exhibit genetically heterogeneous structures, possessing higher ecological potential and a diversity of responses to environmental stimuli. The variable cultivation conditions and challenging-to-predict cultivation scenarios justify considerations for introducing more robust, better-adapted indigenous plant species into cultivation, which thrive in nature without direct human influence. Garden orache is seen as species with potential. Gathered from nature or from cultivation garden orache enrich the diversity of offerings in markets and expand the range of indigenous specialties in rural areas. The objective of this research was to test the possibilities of cultivating green and red variety of garden orache (*Atriplex hortensis* L. var. *hortensis* and *Atriplex hortensis* L. var. *rubra*) in the region of Istria, Republic of Croatia. The research determined that the green garden orache is significantly superior in cultivation compared to the red variety, which exhibits lower yield and produces fewer seeds. While the red variety formed significantly taller plants, the size of fully formed, functional leaves was larger in the green variety. The cumulative aerial fresh biomass yield, obtained through multiple harvests throughout the vegetation period in the green variety was 1.14 kg plant⁻¹, significantly higher than 0.56 kg plant⁻¹ in the red variety. The green variety had a significantly higher average fresh root mass (149.30 g plant⁻¹) and seed yield (122.29 g plant⁻¹) compared to the red variety (83.06 g plant⁻¹ root mass, 9.22 g plant⁻¹ seed yield). To fully understand the plant's nutritional and functional potential, further research should encompass chemical characteristics, antioxidant capacity, phenolic content, and pigment analysis.

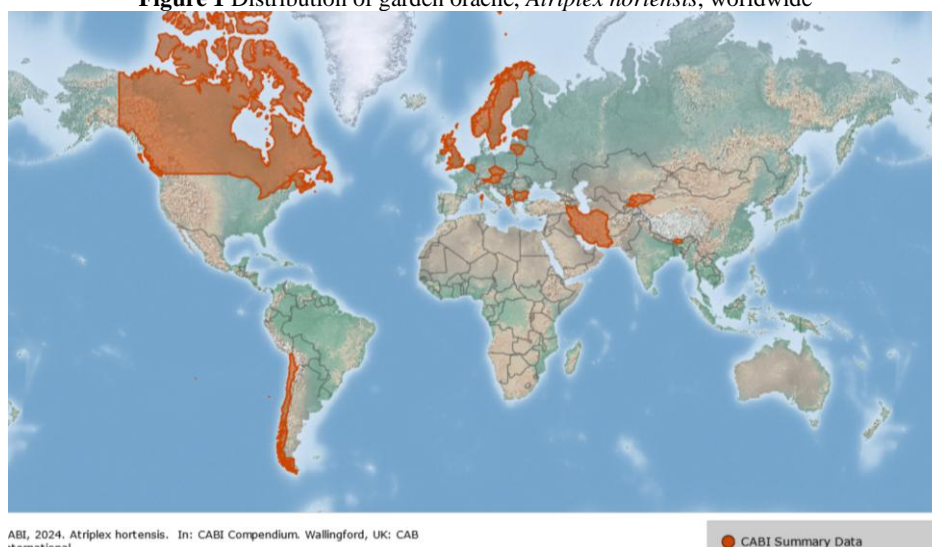
Keywords:

Atriplex hortensis L. var. *hortensis*, *A. hortensis* var. *rubra*, cultivation, morphometric parameters, seed

1. Introduction

Out of a total of 300,000 known plant species, about 12,000 or 4.0% are edible, and only about 200 are used in human nutrition (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101000622>). According to the Croatian Encyclopedia (<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/pepeljuga>), the genus *Atriplex* is considered as cosmopolitan and invasive, represented with approximately 150 species; among them are annual species and perennials, of which only 8 species grow in Croatia. In natural populations, the genus *Atriplex* is found as weed in ruderal flora and on coastal muddy substrates. It is believed that the garden orache (*Atriplex hortensis* L.) originates from Asia. Orache has been used in nutrition since ancient times. As early as 1933, Johansson mentioned three types of garden orache that differ in leaf color: green, white, and red. In the red types, the color disappears during cooking. The white variety has the lightest leaves and is most commonly used in food, the red variety is used for ornamental purposes, and the green orache is the most persistent and resistant in cultivation. Today, garden orache is a widely spread species (Figure 1). In the past, garden orache was cultivated in the Euro-Mediterranean region but was later supplanted and suppressed by spinach cultivation (<https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/ATXHO>).

Figure 1 Distribution of garden orache, *Atriplex hortensis*, worldwide



ABI, 2024. *Atriplex hortensis*. In: CABI Compendium. Wallingford, UK: CAB International.

Source: CABI, 2024

In the Republic of Croatia, orache is found both; in cultivation and as a wild plant in abandoned habitats of warmer regions, but there are no reliable official statistical records on the extent of garden orache cultivation (Arsenović 2011). Official statistics on orache cultivation in Europe are not available too, but cultivation areas are known in central parts of Europe, the north, the British Isles, and the Balkan Peninsula. Garden orache (*Atriplex hortensis* var. *hortensis*) is an annual halophytic species, with a C3 photosynthesis metabolism, that accumulates nitrates and sodium in saline soils

(Calone et al. 2021), as well as significant amounts of oxalates (Noonan and Savage 1999).

In cultivation, it is similar to spinach but tolerates high temperatures much better. According to Welbaum (2015), garden orache is resistant to heat and drought, requires a sunny position for cultivation, and tolerates soil salinity and alkalinity within a wide pH range of 5-8.2. The same author considers orache as a plant of the future, orache tolerates annual rainfall from 300 to 1400 mm. The potential and significance of such crops in the newly emerging agroecological conditions influenced by climate change are on the rise (Dudaš and Čelić 2012).

A. hortensis L. is an annual, monoecious plant that produces two types of flowers. Seeds are small, brown or black, surrounded by a thin, pale-yellow membrane (Bassett et al., 1983). Arsenović (2011) describes the dimorphism of the fruits, specifying larger fruits (spherical shape, brown color, with a pronounced pointed beak) and smaller fruits (black color, spherical shape, with a rounded beak).

The seeds of garden orache are essential for its reproduction but it requires pretreatment due to their dormancy. Kovačić et al. (2019) identified the allelopathic effects of walnut leaf extract on the growth and development of young garden orache plants. Apart from their role in reproduction, garden orache seeds are also used in culinary applications.

According to Ormonde et al. (2024), garden orache is an underutilized species with high nutritional potential, and when leaves are incorporated into mixed salads, it enriches them with color and elevates their nutritional value with essential vitamins and minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and "smart molecules such as anthocyanins." Besides salads, garden orache can also be used in other specialties. Through literature and web research, fifteen different recipes with garden orache have been identified, including stews, side dishes, and the preparation of "sarma" with orache leaves. In addition to the leaves, garden orache seeds can be ground and used for making bread, in soups, or cooked as a side dish similar to rice or oatmeal.

According to Rinchen and Singh (2015), in 100 grams of fresh leaves garden orache contains 17g of protein, 3 grams of fat, 56 grams of total carbohydrates, 11 grams of dietary fiber, and 24 grams of ash. Nursu et al. (2020) determined that it contains 25.7% protein and 12.4% dietary fiber. In terms of ash composition, orache was found to contain up to 2000 mg of calcium (Ca), 150 mg of phosphorus (P), 10 mg of iron (Fe), 2 mg of copper (Cu), 500 mg of magnesium (Mg), 800 mg of potassium (K), and 10 mg of manganese (Mn) (Rinchen and Singh, 2015). According to Vickerman et al. (2002), garden orache is recognized as an exceptionally good source of selenium (Se). Van Niekerk et al. (2024) reported selenium levels in garden orache at 22.0 µgkg⁻¹. Garden orache is also considered an excellent source of carotenoids, specifically provitamin A, with 2 grams per 100 grams of fresh leaves. It has also been found to contain two water-soluble components from the flavonoid group, kaempferol and quercetin, which contribute to the antioxidant potential of this food. According to Uzelac et al. (2023), the flavonoid components quercetin and kaempferol show a strong positive correlation with the antioxidant capacity, with these flavonoids having the ability to reduce ROS (reactive oxygen species) in plants under stressful agroecological growing conditions (Agati et al. 2012). Red varieties of garden orache are enriched with pigments. Among the pigments

present in the water extract, Vila Roa (2018) identified three types of betacyanins and six types of anthocyanins, which further contribute to the antioxidant properties of garden orache.

Thanks to its content of beneficial bioactive components, primarily vitamins and minerals, flavonoid compounds, and pigments, garden orache is characterized by its antioxidant, diuretic, analgesic, and anticarcinogenic properties (Mardi et al. 2022). Additionally, garden orache is a good emetic and purgative. In folk medicine, garden orache is used to treat ailments of the urinary and respiratory systems, as well as digestive tract issues.

Less well-known is that orache is capable of accumulating higher quantities of heavy metals such as lead, nickel, zinc, and copper; garden orache is capable of phytoremediation of heavy metals in polluted agricultural or industrial areas (Vickerman et al. 2002; Rinchen and Singh 2015). Therefore, it is a good example of a plant species that can be used for soil remediation contaminated with heavy metals. On the other hand, special care must be taken when selecting the cultivation site of garden orache for food purposes.

By introducing garden orache into home gardens, agritourism farms, and agricultural farms specializing in leafy vegetable production, there is a significant contribution to enhancing species diversity in cultivation, expanding crop rotations, and promoting sustainability. Garden orache, along with spinach, Swiss chard, and beetroot, belongs to the botanical family Chenopodiaceae, subfamily Amaranthaceae. The majority of cultivated leafy vegetables in Croatia belong to the botanical families Asteraceae and Brassicaceae. In addition to agroecological benefits, incorporating garden orache into the final product "organic mixed salad" opens up opportunities for more profitable production of leafy vegetables. Market research results (Ormonde et al. 2024) have shown that prices of up to 29 EUR per kilogram can be achieved for organically certified mixed salad on the European market.

Research on the cultivation of green and red varieties of garden orache was conducted to determine the cultivation potential in the Istrian region near Poreč as part of the bachelor thesis (Uzelac 2018).

2. Materials and methods

Cultivation of green and red garden orache was conducted in an open field, and the plantation was established by planting seedlings (Figure 2). The field experiment was conducted in Vranići near Poreč, Istria, Republic of Croatia, on red soil.

Morphometric parameters such as plant height, leaf length, and total leaf yield of green and red varieties were monitored. At the end of the growing season, separate samples of roots and stems were collected to determine the total yield.

Figure 2 Cultivation of garden orache from seedlings



Source: Uzelac, 2018

Green and red garden orache were cultivated from seeds obtained from Biovrt in Čakovec. Seedling production started on March 30, 2018, with sowing in containers sized 12x7 cm (84 planting spots, each container measuring 54 x 31 x 4 cm, with a total volume of 50 cm³ per container and each individual pot 0.050 liters). Bio Plantella Start substrate was used for sowing. Germination was conducted under room temperature conditions around 20°C. The seeds were covered with a thin layer of substrate, well moistened, and additionally covered with transparent film to retain moisture and warmth.

The average height of green seedlings at transplantation into larger containers was 4.5 cm from 40 planting spots (50 x 33 x 6.3 cm, volume 82 cm³ per container and each individual planting spot 0.082 liters), while for red seedlings it was 2.5 cm. Klasmann TS 2 Standard substrate was used for the second transplantation. After about ten days, when the seedlings had developed four true leaves, they were transplanted outdoors. The outdoor planting was conducted on April 30, 2018. Each variant in the field trial was represented in four randomly arranged replications with 20 individual plants planted at a spacing of 15 x 50 cm. Organic pelletized fertilizer Plantella Organik was applied at a rate of 20 kg 100 m⁻² during the basic treatment.

During cultivation, morphometric parameters were monitored, including plant height, leaf length, root mass, aboveground yield, and seed yield per plant. Cultivation practices included hoeing, monitoring plant development phenophases, and continuous plant height measurements. Irrigation was not necessary.

Leaf harvesting began six weeks after planting (Figure 3), with a total of 8 harvests carried out on the following dates: May 15, May 23, May 31, June 13, June 20, June 28, July 9, and July 18. Seed harvesting occurred on August 20, 2018.

Figure 3 Leaves of green and red varieties after harvesting



Source: Uzelac, 2018

At the end of the vegetation period, the roots were collected, cleaned of soil, rinsed with water, and their weight was determined (Figure 4).

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23. Statistical analysis was performed utilizing One-Way ANOVA and t-test with a significance threshold of $p \leq 0.05$ and 0.01.

Figure 4 Roots of green and red varieties at the end of the vegetation



Source: Uzelac, 2018

3. Results and discussion

By conducting a field experiment with cultivating garden orache on red soil, essential data for assessing the potential of this species were collected over the cultivation period from April to July. The subsequent section presents the results of monitoring morphometric parameters, leaf yield, and seed yield of both green and red varieties of garden orache.

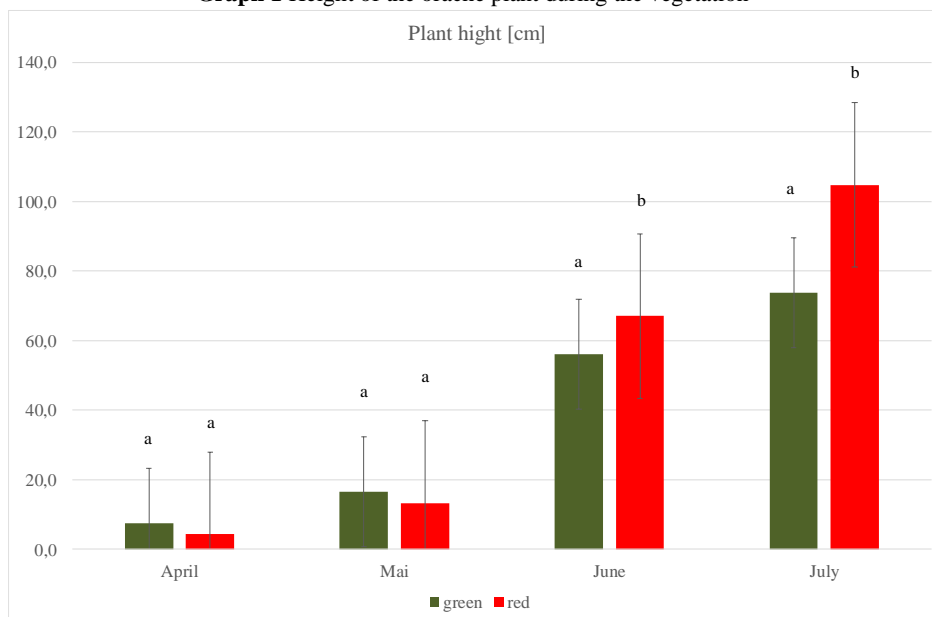
3.1. Growth of garden orache

The growth of garden orache was monitored based on *plant height*, leaf length, and root mass. The tallest height of garden orache was recorded in July, prior to the final leaf harvest. The average height of the green variety was 73.82 cm, while the red variety reached a height of 104.80 cm (Graph 1).

The red variety exhibited significantly greater height during two monitoring periods, June and July, compared to the green variety. Research conducted at the Missouri Botanical Garden (2024) confirms substantial variability in plant height, ranging from 90 to 120 cm within *Atriplex hortensis* var. *rubra*. According to Welbaum (2014), heights can vary between 60 and 180 cm, while CABI Digital Library (2024) notes that deviations in plant height can be even greater, depending directly on growing conditions.

Since 1933, Johansson found an average stem height of 56.8 cm for green orache, noting that growing conditions, including x-radiation, impact the growth parameters of white, red, and yellow-leaved orache. Nursu et al. (2020) established the significant influence of growing conditions not only on the morphological characteristics but also on the content of phenolic compounds in garden orache cultivated in open fields and greenhouses. They confirmed notable height differences between green and purple varieties.

Graph 1 Height of the orache plant during the vegetation



Source: authors

In research conducted by Sai Kachout et al. (2009), investigating the impact of various NaCl concentrations on the growth of this halophytic species, significant differences in plant height were observed among plants cultivated in pots with different NaCl concentrations ranging from 0 to 15 g NaCl per liter of irrigation water. NaCl concentrations exceeding 5 gL⁻¹ in water notably inhibited growth compared to control plants irrigated with pure water. Total plant heights in this experiment ranged between 100 and 160 cm for green orache.

The leaf length of the green variety of garden orache ranged from 7.93 to 16.98 cm, and in four harvest periods, it was significantly greater compared to the leaf length of the red variety, which ranged from 6.53 to 12.66 cm (Table 1).

Table 1 Average leaf length per harvest for green and red varieties (cm)

harvest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
green	8.29a	14.29a	16.28a	16.98a	11.68a	8.18a	8.88a	7.93a
red	6.53a	9.34b	11.88b	12.66b	10.42a	8.47a	7.88a	8.16a

Source: authors

The size of the leaves depends on the plant's phenophase and the timing of harvesting. Larger leaves are achieved in later stages of development; however, the decision on the timing of harvest will depend on leaf texture and fiber content. Leaf harvesting typically occurs approximately 40 to 60 days after sowing, or when the plants reach a height of 10-15 cm if the entire plants are harvested.

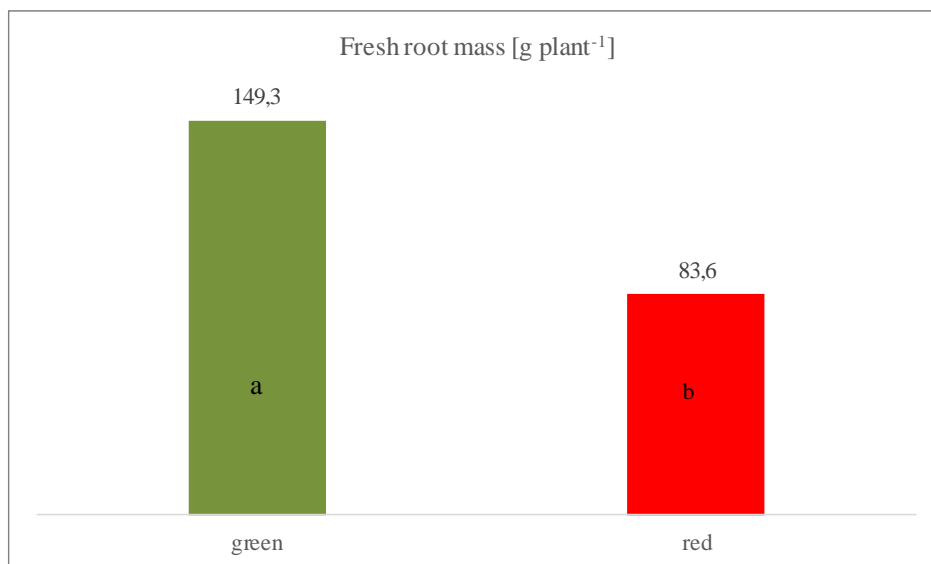
In the study by Sai Kachout et al. (2009), the total leaf area was monitored for green and red varieties of orache, revealing significant differences. The green variety reached an average leaf area of 4.8 cm², while the red variety had an average leaf area of 5.9 cm². It was found that red varieties grown in pots in greenhouses produce larger leaf surfaces compared to green varieties, which contrasts with results obtained from field cultivation (Figure 3 and Table 1).

Red orache varieties are also noted for their use in ornamental purposes (Johannson, 1933; Kachout et al., 2009), focusing on criteria such as leaf morphology, surface characteristics, leaf pigmentation, and overall plant compactness.

A possible reason for the larger leaf surface of red varieties grown in greenhouses is the controlled, optimal conditions of uniform climate, whereas plants grown in open fields are exposed to greater temperature fluctuations, humidity variations, and water availability, which can directly impact the habit and leaf size of more sensitive colored-leaf varieties. The size of the leaves are particularly important for culinary applications for preparing stuffed rolls and similar specialties. Through literature and web research, fifteen different recipes featuring garden orache have been identified, including stews, side dishes, and the preparation of "Sarman" with orache leaves. The determined leaf sizes of both varieties from open field production in this investigation are suitable for use in making dishes such as "sarman" or stuffed rolls.

The root mass is the third parameter monitored to assess the growth and potential of garden orache in cultivation.

Graph 2 The root mass of the orache



Source: authors

Green garden orache developed significantly greater root mass compared to the red variety. The total root mass for the green variety was 149.30 g per plant, whereas for the red variety it was 83.60 g per plant at the same time point (Graph 2).

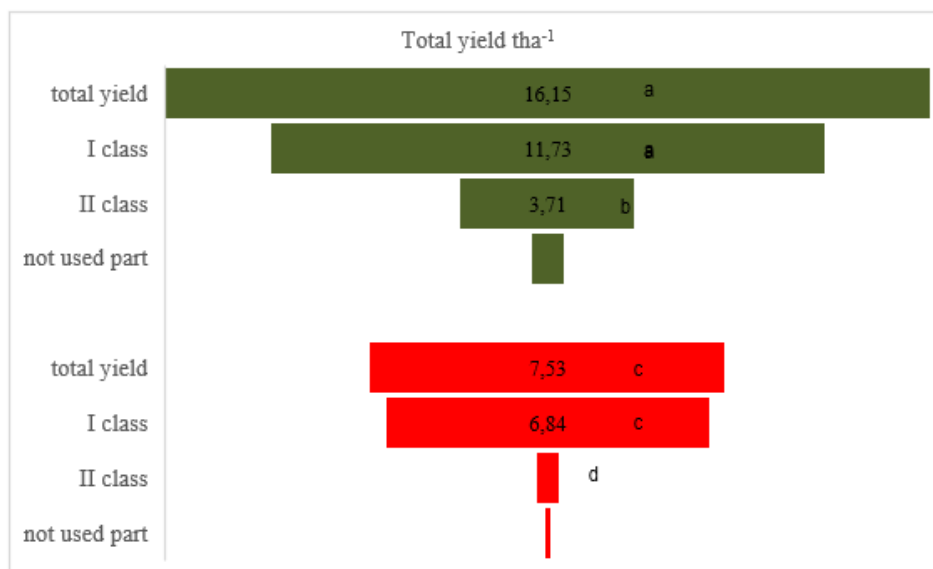
Sai Kachout et al. (2009) in their research found that the root length of garden orache grown in pots averages between 15 to 20 cm, with a mass of 2.25 g per plant, and the aboveground biomass at early harvest stages is approximately 14.5 g for the green variety. For the red variety, the root length varied between 18-20 cm, with an average root mass of 2.09 g per plant, and aboveground biomass of 14.36 g.

The values for root length and mass per plant significantly differ from those obtained in open-field cultivation. In this study, utilized pots with a diameter of 14 cm and a depth of 25 cm significantly restricted root development. Another complicating factor in their growth was their treatment with saline water during irrigation.

3.2. The yield of garden orache

The cumulative aerial fresh biomass yield of the green variety was significantly higher than that of the red variety. In the green variety, the yield of first-class leaves averaged 16.15 tha⁻¹, while in the red variety, the yield of first-class leaves averaged 7.53 tha⁻¹ (Graph 3).

Graph 3 Total yield of the orache leaves



Source: authors

This suggests a significant difference in yield between the two varieties, with the green variety showing higher productivity in terms of fresh biomass. According to Dudaš et al. (2016), species capable of thriving under low-input production technologies are robust, tolerant to variable agroecological conditions, and are considered plants for the future.

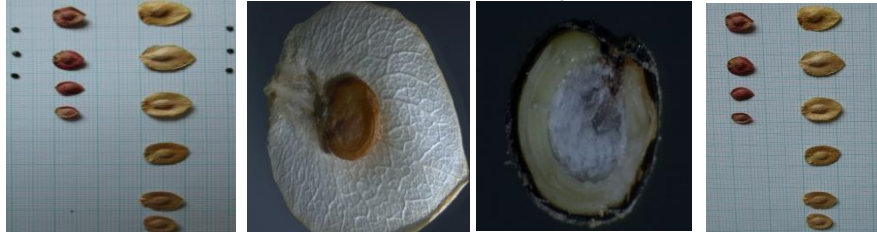
Sai Kachout et al. (2009) determined the aboveground biomass to be approximately 14.5 g in green orache and in red orache 4.36 g when grown in pots at an early harvesting stage with around 20 cm in height. In very early stages of development, orache can be consumed along with the herbaceous tops of the stem. However, as the plant matures, the stem becomes fibrous and tough and inedible, with only the leaves suitable for consumption.

According to data obtained in filed cultivation of orache in Landskrona and Lund, Sweden, garden orache can yield approximately 14 tonnes per hectare (tha⁻¹) of biomass, which aligns with the yields achieved in the field experiment in Istria. Duke (1983), suggest that higher yields might be reached in southern regions. Additionally, if leaf-protein were extracted, this could leave more than 13 tonnes of biomass as a by-product, which could potentially be converted into liquid or gaseous fuels. These findings point out the potential of garden orache not only as a food crop but also for its biomass production capabilities, which could contribute to sustainable energy solutions.

3.3. Seeds production per plant

Besides its leaves, the seeds of orache can also be used. In presented experiment, seeds were collected (Figure 2), and the total seed mass per plant was determined.

Figure 2 Fruit and seeds of the garden orache

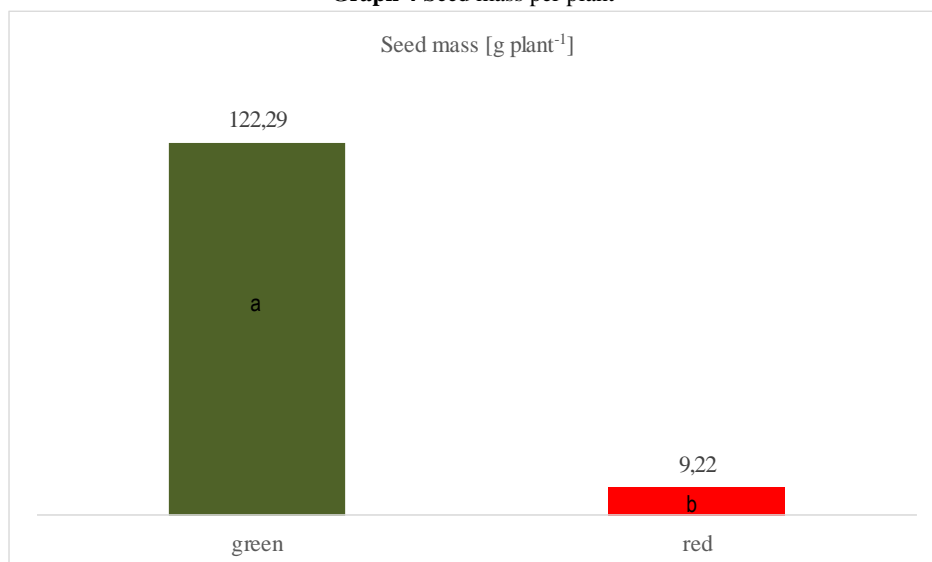


Source: Uzelac, 2018

Research indicates that the seed yield per plant is significantly higher in the green variety compared to the red variety (Graph 4).

The green variety exhibited a significantly higher average seed yield compared to the red variety.

Graph 4 Seed mass per plant



Source: authors

Rinchen and Singh (2015) determined that the total seed yield of garden orache ranges between 24 and 35 grams per plant, indicating significant variation depending on the variety, location, and growing conditions. This explanation can also be applied to the presented research results.

4. Conclusion

This research contributes to understanding the cultivation potential of *Atriplex hortensis* var. *hortensis* and var. *rubra* in the region of Istria, including its growth dynamics in open-field cultivation. Morphometric parameters, such as plant height, leaf

size, root mass, and the total yield of the green above-ground plant parts and seeds, were monitored under the cultivation conditions of the red Istrian soil.

Based on the analysis of the garden orache cultivation research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Green garden orache demonstrates significant superiority in cultivation compared to the red variety.
- The green variety shows larger and heavier leaves, greater root mass, and higher seed yield.

Future research should focus on chemical characteristics, antioxidant capacity, phenolic content, and pigment analysis. Special attention will also be directed towards assessing the quality, specifically the accumulation of nitrates, oxalates, and heavy metals transferred from the soil into the plant material.

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EXPERIENCE-RICH TOURIST PRODUCTS BASED ON GASTRONOMY AS A MEANS OF INCREASING DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS

Preliminary communication

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Abstract:

Tourist experiences connected with authentic food are becoming an important motivation for modern travelers. The significance of gastronomy as a resource for developing a competitive tourism offer has been recognized among tourism policymakers, and destinations with rich gastronomic and intangible heritage can leverage this advantage for better market positioning. Slavonia was chosen as the research area for this study due to its rich gastronomic heritage. The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of the need to enrich the basic gastro-tourism offer through experiential activities, to examine tourists' interest in additional gastro-tourism activities, and to determine the impact of such an offer on the increased intention to visit. The empirical part of the study is based on a questionnaire distributed via social networks and messaging apps. A total of 385 respondents from 19 Croatian counties participated in the research. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods, and the hypothesis was tested through factor and regression analysis. The research shows that individuals who prefer additional activities related to gastronomy are more likely to visit Slavonia for tourism purposes. The results indicate significant tourist interest in enriched gastronomic experiences, which increases their intention to visit destinations offering such experiences. Further research should focus on deeper exploration of tourists' preferences and the co-creation process of personalized tourism experiences through active interaction between service providers and tourists.

Keywords:

Destination attractiveness, food experience, gastro tourism, visit intention increase

1. Introduction

Local and traditional food has become an integral part of the tourist experience, playing a key role in the choice of destination and attracting tourists from around the world (Di-Clemente 2020; UNWTO 2017). Gastronomy tourism, as a specific form of tourism, has seen significant growth, with an average annual growth rate of 16.8% from 2020 to 2027 (Allied Market Research 2020). Similarly, the World Food Tourism Association report indicates that 96% of stakeholders in the gastronomy tourism sector have expressed positive predictions regarding the growth of this special form of tourism on a global scale

(WFTA, 2020). In today's dynamic tourism environment, gastronomy tourism stands out as a form of tourism with notable growth and tourism spending (Stone et al. 2019), providing destinations with rich gastronomic and related intangible heritage an opportunity to enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness in the tourism market (Chang and Mak 2018). In this context, the key role is attributed to the collaboration and active involvement of local communities in the development and promotion of gastronomy tourism offerings. Destinations that manage to sustainably harness the potential of gastronomy tourism can expect a significant contribution to the growth of the local economy, the preservation of cultural identity, and the strengthening of global competitiveness. Intangible cultural resources and traditional ways of life are precisely what potential visitors most often associate with Slavonia as a recognizable destination: good food, preserved customs, traditions, friendly and relaxing atmosphere, hospitality (Leko Šimić and Štimac 2012; Bakan et al. 2018; Boranić-Živoder et al. 2020), with gastronomy and the associated intangible heritage playing a significant role in this context. In the last decade, certain micro-locations in the Slavonia region have been strongly positioned as gastronomy tourism destinations (Vardarac, Bilje, Karanac, Ilok), traditional events themed around food, wine, brandy, and folk customs are regularly held. However, from the perspective of attractiveness and competitiveness, this region still represents a highly heterogeneous area in terms of achieved tourism development. Based on indicators of tourist trends, it is evident that the share of this region in the total tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Croatia is still small, 1.54% in arrivals and 0.62% in overnight stays (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). It can thus be concluded that this region still does not sufficiently utilize its comparative advantages concerning the attraction base for positioning and increasing the region's attractiveness in terms of tourism. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is first to raise awareness of the need for experiential enrichment of the basic gastronomic offer to create a competitive and experience-rich tourism product and increase the tourist attractiveness of Slavonia, and second, to examine the interest of potential tourists in participating in additional gastronomy tourism experiences, i.e., their preferences concerning additional experiences and activities that can be offered as part of a tourist trip. Through statistical analysis of respondents' answers, the aim of this paper is to provide answers to key questions: how interested are potential tourists in engaging in additional gastronomy tourism activities, how do they perceive the value of such experiences compared to other activities at a tourist destination, and to what extent can an expanded gastronomy tourism offer contribute to an increased intention to visit Slavonia for tourism purposes. The conclusions drawn from the empirical research within this paper will enable a deeper understanding of market needs and assist in creating strategies for the sustainable development of tourism based on local gastronomy in other destinations with a similar attraction base.

2. Literature Review

The desire for food-motivated travel has become one of the key paradigms of the modern tourism industry (Alsetoohy et al. 2021). It is important to emphasize that contemporary tourists no longer want to be passive consumers of tourism services; instead, they increasingly seek to actively participate in creating their own experiences (Tsai 2016; Tubić 2019; Brnjac et al. 2022, following Rand and Heath 2006). Tourists want to taste

authentic local specialties, learn about the methods of their preparation, and participate in traditional rituals related to food and food production (Anton et al. 2019). Consequently, tourism offerings based on authentic gastronomy and related experiences can serve to strengthen the emotional connection between tourists and the people in destinations they visit, thereby increasing the attractiveness of the destination and the likelihood of a visit (Seyitoğlu 2020).

These trends not only provide numerous opportunities for creating experience-rich tourism products and enhancing tourist satisfaction but also drive profound changes in the way destinations are developed and promoted, resulting in numerous benefits for all involved parties. It has been established that gastro-tourists tend to have higher incomes and spend more than average tourists (Stone et al. 2020; Dorta-Afonso and Padrón-Ávila 2021). They travel throughout the year, including outside peak tourism seasons (Everett and Aitchison 2008), prefer active involvement in the tourism experience, and seek diversity in enriching the classic gastronomic offer with an emphasis on preserving local traditional heritage, sustainability, and social responsibility (WFTA 2020). In this way, tourists experience unforgettable and authentic moments, local communities strengthen their economic stability and valorize cultural heritage, and destinations are profiled as sustainable and attractive to visitors from around the world (World Tourism Organisation and Basque Culinary Center 2019).

To increase the attractiveness of a destination in the segment of gastronomy tourism and thereby enable positive shifts in tourist arrivals and tourism revenues, it is important to raise awareness among destination management, direct service providers, and all other stakeholders in destination about the need to create gastronomy tourism offerings at an expanded level, specifically by developing experience-rich gastronomy tourism products (Carvalho et al. 2023). Only such products will inspire potential tourists to actively engage in creating a unique tourism experience aimed at learning about the local culture and forming an emotional connection with the people and destinations they temporarily visit (Testa et al. 2019; Rachão et al. 2021). By actively participating in gastronomy tourism experiences through culinary workshops, harvesting ingredients at rural family farms and in nature, and engaging in creative workshops, tourists more easily integrate with their surroundings and enhance the memorability of their own tourism experience (Williams et al. 2019; Di-Clemente et al. 2019; Andrinós et al. 2022), all of which results in increased destination attractiveness and growth in tourism (Rubish 2020).

It is also important to emphasize that coordinated and joint actions by stakeholders should ensure the recognizability of gastro-products, destinations, and regions, thereby creating differential value in relation to competing destinations. This process should serve as a platform for analyzing existing and potential products as well as their promotion and marketing (Richards 2020). In this context, the analysis and identification of tourist attractions, as well as direct and indirect tourism resources, has key importance for the development of gastronomy tourism. The positioning of these resources on the map of a destination's gastronomic values ensures relevance for interest-based associations and synergy among all stakeholders, with the goal of increasing the competitiveness of the gastronomy tourism destination (Ellis et al. 2018).

3. Research objective, Hypothesis and Methodology

Based on the studied scientific and professional literature, market trends observed, tourism indicators in the region that was the subject of research and empirical findings, the following research objectives have been defined:

- Examine respondents' interest in participating in certain additional activities during their stay at a tourist destination.
- Determine whether respondents prefer activities related to gastronomy over other offered activities.
- Determine whether respondents' interest in gastronomy tourism activities at an expanded level influences the increased intention of visiting the Slavonia region for tourism purposes.

Based on the established research objectives, the following research hypothesis has been defined:

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between the preference for gastronomy tourism activities and the estimated intention of visiting Slavonia

3.1. Research methodology

In this study, a wide range of scientific methods were used to achieve the most accurate and reliable findings, as well as to draw well-founded and expert conclusions. The theoretical framework of the paper is based on the latest research and empirical data, considering the results of relevant studies and publications from both domestic and international scientific and professional literature. Special attention was given to gastronomy tourism as one of the most market-dynamic specific forms of tourism. The literature used covers various aspects of this form of tourism, enabling a detailed analysis and understanding of its impact on the development of the tourist destination.

For the empirical part of the study, a questionnaire was constructed and distributed in the form of a Google electronic form. During the first phase of data collection, it was distributed via social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, while in the second phase, the questionnaire link was sent in targeted manner via instant messaging apps (WhatsApp and Viber) using the "snowball" sampling technique (Noy 2008). In the first phase, from December to February 2023, 130 completed questionnaires were collected, while in the second phase, which lasted from March to June 2024, an additional 225 responses were gathered. In total, the study was conducted on a convenience sample of 385 respondents from 19 Croatian counties.

Various techniques of descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the data analysis, with the statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) employed for the analysis. The data were presented through calculated frequencies to provide a clear overview of the response distribution. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used for the analysis of data collected via the Likert scale, enabling precise evaluation of the average opinions of respondents.

To explore the importance of different additional contents and activities that complement the basic tourism offerings when choosing tourist destinations, Kendall Tau-b correlation

and ordinal regression analysis were applied. The Kendall Tau-b correlation allowed for the assessment of the strength and direction of relationships between ranked variables, while ordinal regression analysis was used to estimate the impact of specific variables on the likelihood of visiting Slavonia as a tourist destination. These statistical methods provided deeper insights into respondents' preferences and allowed for conclusions to be drawn about the key factors influencing their decisions in the context of choosing Slavonia as a tourist destination they would like to visit. The conclusions may also be applicable to other destinations whose offerings are not of a maritime nature.

4. Results and discussion

The study involved 385 respondents from 19 Croatian counties (only respondents from Požeško-slavonska and Ličko-senjska counties were not represented in the sample). The largest representation in the sample was from the Virovitica-Podravina County area (41%). This data highlights one of the key limitations of this research, as the mentioned county is part of the region that was the subject of the study, which may reduce the representativeness of the sample due to the assumption that respondents from counties outside Slavonia may have a stronger motivation to visit tourist destinations in the region. Most respondents (64.9%) were female, while the most represented age group (60.6%) was between 36 and 59 years old. Regarding the size of the respondents' place of residence, 20.8% live in towns with a population between 5,001 and 10,000, 21.3% in towns with a population between 10,001 and 30,000, and 23.6% in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Most respondents have a monthly income ranging from 661 to 1,990 Euros.

As previously emphasized, one of the main goals of this paper was to examine the preferences and interest of potential tourists regarding additional experiential elements and activities that complement the basic tourist offer, and to determine whether there is a connection between respondents' interest in additional gastronomic activities and their increased intention to visit Slavonia. The likelihood of participating in gastronomic activities or other activities in a tourist destination was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where a rating of 1 indicated "not at all" and a rating of 5 indicated "very likely." The respondents' answers are presented in Table 1.

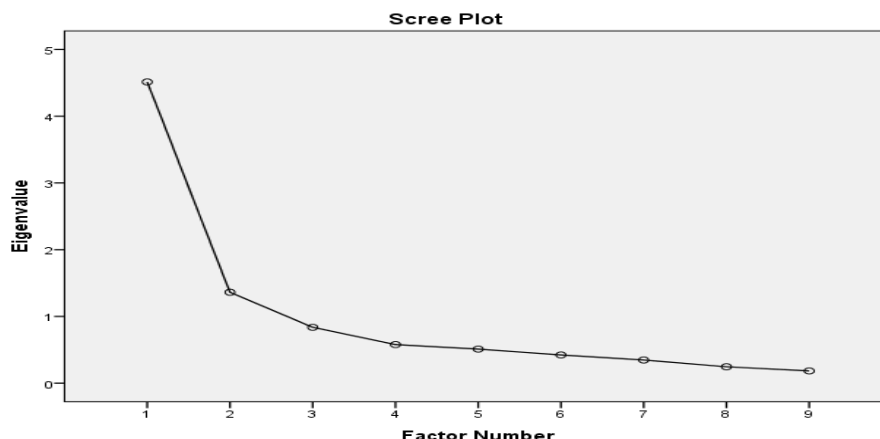
Table 1 Likelihood of participating in additional activities during the stay at a tourist destination

Activities	1 Not at all	2 unlikely	3 possibly	4 Likely	5 Very likely	Total	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Gastro and wine workshops - passive observation	41	98	136	83	27	385	2,80	1,09
Gastro and wine workshops - active participation	43	126	118	57	41	385	2,73	1,17
Harvesting vineyards, fruits, vegetables, preparing preserves, bottling wine, etc.	56	105	111	72	41	385	2,75	1,23
Creative workshops for making handicrafts	66	114	117	52	36	385	2,60	1,20
Painting and modeling	77	127	117	40	24	385	2,42	1,15
Photography and video recording	35	60	111	96	83	385	3,24	1,26
Walks and light activities in nature	4	15	71	131	164	385	4,01	0,93
Cycling	20	40	89	128	108	385	3,57	1,18
Caring for and spending time with domestic animals	44	89	105	87	60	385	2,98	1,29
Average of arithmetic means							3,01	

Source: processed by the authors

The average ratings, which are above 2.5 for almost all the offered elements, indicate that respondents show moderate interest in the additional activities offered during their vacation, with a particular preference for less demanding outdoor recreational activities. Given that the questionnaire also examined the likelihood of visiting the Slavonia region as a tourist destination, the research aimed to determine whether there is a correlation between respondents' preferences for gastro-tourism activities and their increased desire to visit Slavonia. Therefore, a hypothesis (H1) was formulated, which assumes a statistically significant correlation between the preference for gastro-tourism activities and the likelihood of visiting Slavonia. To test this hypothesis, respondents' self-assessed participation in certain activities that could potentially be offered at the tourist destination was measured. The statements were subjected to factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method of factor extraction and varimax rotation of the obtained factors. The factor analysis explained a total of 52.70% of the total variance, and from the scree plot (Chart 1) that follows, it can be seen that a two-factor solution corresponds to the data. The first factor explains 44.30%, and the second 8.40% of the variance.

Chart 1 Scree plot of factors related to the self-assessment of participation in tourist activities.



Source: processed by the authors, print from the SPSS program

The first factor in the factor matrix (Table 2) is strongly correlated with activities that have a clear gastronomic focus, such as active and passive participation in cooking workshops and harvesting. Therefore, this factor can be labeled the 'gastronomic participation factor'. Conversely, the second factor is primarily associated with non-gastronomic activities.

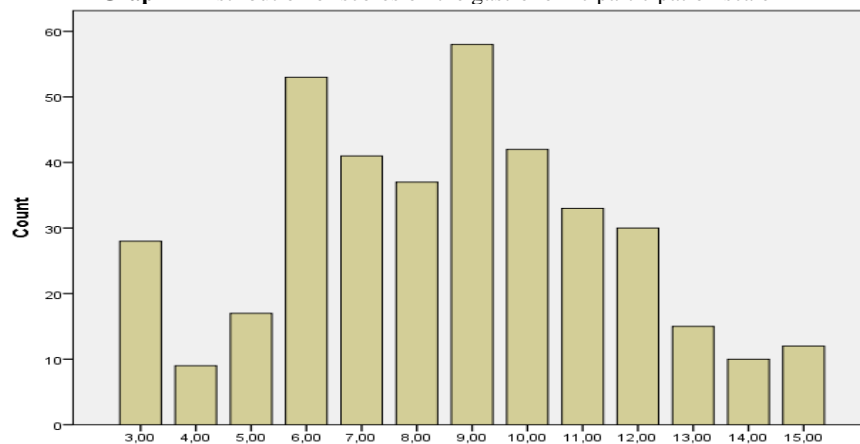
Table 2 Factor matrix for self-reported tourist activities

Activities	F1	F2
Gastro and wine workshops - passive observation	0,74	0,27
Gastro and wine workshops - active participation	0,90	0,24
Harvesting vineyards, fruits, vegetables, preparing preserves, bottling wine, etc	0,63	0,43
Creative workshops for making handicrafts	0,44	0,75
Painting and modeling	0,35	0,79
Photography and video recording	0,21	0,61
Walks and light activities in nature	0,10	0,49
Cycling	0,16	0,39
Caring for and spending time with domestic animals	0,29	0,53

Source: processed by the authors

Based on these findings, two specific scales were created by summing the scores of items strongly correlated with each factor. The scale measuring participation in gastronomic activities consists of three items, and its distribution is shown in Graph 1. The distribution is relatively symmetrical, with a minimum score of 3, a maximum of 15, an arithmetic mean of 8.53, and a standard deviation of 3.00. The reliability of this scale is very high, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85

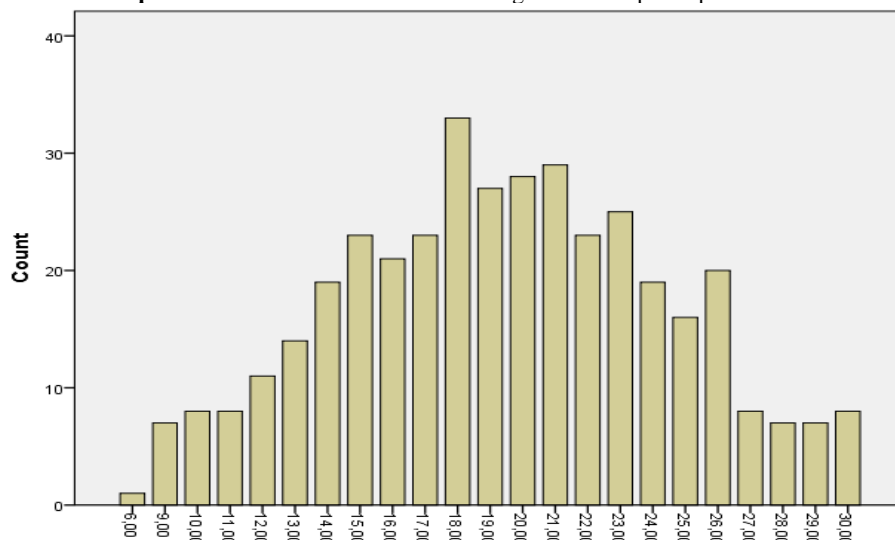
Graph 1 Distribution of scores on the gastronomic participation scale



Source: processed by the authors, print from the SPSS program

The remaining six items constitute the scale of participation in non-gastronomic activities. Graph 2 on the following page shows the distribution of results on this scale. The graph also shows that the results are relatively symmetrically distributed. It should also be noted that the minimum is 6, the maximum is 30, the arithmetic mean is 19.42, and the standard deviation is 5.02. The reliability of the obtained scale is also very high (Cronbach's alpha is 0.94).

Graph 2 Distribution of scores on the non-gastronomic participation scale



Source: processed by the authors, print from the SPSS program

To test the hypothesis (H1), a non-parametric correlation (Kendall's tau-b) was calculated between the scale scores and the likelihood of visiting Slavonia. The correlation coefficient (Table 3) for gastronomic activities was 0.18, significant at the 0.01 level,

while the coefficient for non-gastronomic activities was also significant at this level with a value of 0.12. The difference between these coefficients suggests that a preference for gastronomic activities is more strongly associated with the intention to visit Slavonia.

Table 3 Kendall's tau-b correlation between participation in specific tourist activities and the likelihood of visiting Slavonia

Participation in tourist activities	Likelihood of visiting Slavonia
Gastronomic activities	0,18**
Non-gastronomic activities	0,12**

note: * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$

Source: processed by the authors

A multivariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to further examine the hypothesis. The model significantly predicted the criterion variable (chi-square = 49.54, $p = 0.00$), with pseudo R² measures of 0.12 (Cox and Snell), 0.13 (Nagelkerke), and 0.06 (McFadden).

The results (Table 4) indicate that a one-unit increase in the gastronomic activities score was associated with a 13% increase in the odds of visiting Slavonia (odds ratio = e0.12 = 1.13). However, no significant association was found between non-gastronomic activities and the likelihood of visiting Slavonia.

Table 4 Ordinal regression with the probability of visiting Slavonia as the criterion variable (types of tourist activities as a predictor)

Variable	coefficient	Standard Error	Wald	Sig.	Interval (95%)
Gastronomic activities	0,12	0,04	7,38	0,00	0,03 to 0,20
Non-gastronomic activities	0,03	0,03	1,75	0,19	-0,02 to 0,09

Source: processed by the authors

Based on correlation and ordinal regression analyses, *the hypothesis (H1) is supported: individuals who prefer gastronomic tourism activities are more likely to choose Slavonia as a destination.*

5. Conclusion

Tourism experiences linked to authentic food are increasingly becoming a key motivation for modern travelers, highlighting the importance of gastronomy as a significant resource for developing a competitive tourism offer. Recognition of this trend among tourism policy makers opens new opportunities for destinations rich in gastronomic and intangible heritage, which can leverage this advantage for a better position in the global market. Slavonia, with its rich gastronomic heritage, was chosen as the ideal research area in this paper, with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of experiential enrichment of the basic gastrotourism offer. The research aimed to examine tourists' interest in additional gastrotourism activities and to determine their impact on the intention to visit the destination. Data analysis conducted using descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing using factor and regression analysis showed

that tourists who prefer additional activities related to gastronomy are more likely to visit Slavonia. These results clearly indicate a significant interest among tourists in enriched gastronomic experiences, which directly increases their intention to visit destinations that offer such experiences. Given these findings, further research is recommended that would focus on a deeper understanding of tourists' preferences and on the process of co-creating personalized tourist experiences through active interaction between service providers and tourists. Such an approach could further enhance the competitiveness of gastrotourism destinations, especially those with rich cultural and gastronomic heritage, such as Slavonia. Developing innovative and interactive gastrotourism products, based on the real needs and desires of tourists, can significantly contribute to the sustainable development and long-term attractiveness of these destinations on the market.

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INTERPRETATION INFLUENCE ON VISITORS' EMOTIONAL CONNECTION, INTENTIONS AND PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR: THE CASE OF PARKS IN CROATIA

Preliminary communication

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Abstract:

Education and interpretation are considered basic components of the tourist product in protected areas. Numerous studies emphasize that the visitors' experience in protected areas is predominantly based on education and interpretation. In addition to determining the contribution to the tourist experience, satisfaction and emotional bonding of visitors, the study aims to assess the influence of interpretation in protected areas on behavioural intentions and pro-environmental behaviour of visitors upon returning home. Empirical research was conducted applying the survey method, using an online questionnaire, which was distributed through the official websites and social networks of selected nature parks and national parks in Croatia. The research was conducted on a convenience sample with a total number of 142 respondents, and data were analysed using a univariate statistical method. The research confirmed the connection between interpretation and the creation of an emotional connection with the protected area. Likewise, the results of the research show that the interpretation has significant effects on stimulating reflection among visitors about the importance of conservation, but also regarding the application of responsible behaviour in everyday life. It was also confirmed that, due to the positive visitors' experience based on interpretation, the respondents tend to share positive impressions and recommend others to visit the protected area. Future research should primarily include a larger number of respondents and employs more sophisticated statistical methods to increase the relevance of the study.

Keywords:

interpretation; emotional connection; pro-environmental behaviour; protected areas; visitor intentions.

1. Introduction

The emergence of the concept of interpretation is mostly a consequence of man's curiosity and interest in places and objects in the development of which he did not participate. People have always used different tools to reach certain knowledge and convey it to others, although they were not yet called interpretation tools (Ludwig 2015). Interpretation is a form of communication aimed at conveying key messages in a unique way with the aim of creating a positive experience imbued with emotions and

experiences for visitors. The idea of conducting interpretive activities started in parks all over the world, and over time it expanded to other elements of natural and cultural heritage (Birkić et al. 2019). In this work, emphasis is placed on the interpretation of natural heritage that includes elements of biological diversity, where the key elements are flora, fauna, types of ecosystems and their structural and formational diversity (Ratković Aydemir et al. 2020). Interpretation completes the elements of natural heritage by interpreting natural phenomena, helps to discover how they came about and what basically makes them exceptional compared to others. A significant part of the natural heritage in Croatia consists of protected nature areas that are managed in a specially organized manner aimed at the long-term preservation of nature and the accompanying ecological system. All items of establishment and management of protected areas (PAs) are based on the Nature Protection Act - the main legal act for the protection of the natural values of the Republic of Croatia.

One of the main tasks of tourism in PAs, and therefore interpretation as a tool that connects the visitor and the PA, is to contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural assets on a global level. The role of interpretation in tourism, especially in PA, was recognized as a means of transmitting knowledge. So, today its role has gained even greater importance and is associated with emotions and the creation of an emotional connection with the visited place, e.g. the PA. Interpretation ultimately aims to influence behavioural change, guiding people toward responsible environmental decisions (Yau 2011).

Education and interpretation are considered basic components of the tourist product in PAs. Numerous studies emphasize that visitors' experience in PAs is predominantly based on education and interpretation (Tang et al. 2022; Birkić et al. 2019; Yau 2011, Moscardo 2010), and that interpretation contributes to visitor satisfaction (Wang 2015; Moscardo 2014; Hwang et al. 2005; Hughes and Morrison-Saunders 2002, Moscardo 1999), as well as, interpretation influences visitors' connection with the destination (Moscardo 2022; Tang et al. 2022; Bacher et al. 2016; Wearing et al. 2008; Hwang et al. 2005; Beck and Cable 1998) and their behaviour (Lee et al. 2023; Pan et al. 2020; Hvenegaard 2017; Marschall et al. 2017; Littlefair and Buckley 2008; Kim 2007; Baeyens 2005). Based on previous findings, the study aims to determine the interpretation contribution to the visitor experience, satisfaction, and emotional bonding of visitors, and to assess the influence of interpretation in different PAs on behavioural intentions (return/revisit, recommendation to others, online reviews) and pro-environmental behaviour of visitors upon returning home (increasing interest in learning about the nature conservation issues, attaching greater importance and undertaking activities for nature conservation). To achieve the aim of the study, empirical research was conducted applying the survey method, using an online questionnaire, which was distributed through the official websites and social networks of selected nature parks and national parks in Croatia. The research was conducted on a convenience sample with a total number of 142 respondents. Obtained data were analysed using a univariate statistical method (descriptive statistics).

2. Theoretical background

Environmental interpretation emphasizes connecting human and natural interests for mutual benefit (Ham 1992). This is illustrated by the interpretation triangle model, which consists of three components: 1) the place to be experienced, 2) the visitors, and 3) the tool that mediates the interpretation. The interpretation triangle involves participants, the phenomenon, and a specific interpretation tool, while the key element is the message which aims to resonate with participants and create an experience, encouraging them to return and potentially change their attitudes towards nature (Ludwig 2015). In addition to changes in attitudes (Moscardo 1999), enjoyment of interpretation programs, acquisition of new knowledge, and consequently a satisfactory experience can lead to support for the management of PAs (McArthur 1994).

The importance of interpretation in tourism, particularly in PAs, has been recognized to share knowledge. Today, its role is even more significant as it is linked to emotions and creating a connection with the PA. Connection with a place involves moments of intellectual and emotional discovery, known as "aha" and "wow" moments. Interpretation can achieve such moments by connecting the tangible resources found in the PAs (plants, animals, objects) with the concepts and ideas they represent. Visitors will mostly forget what was said or written, they will forget what was done, but they will never forget how something made them feel or what knowledge they came to (Ward and Wilkinson 2012). Therefore, interpretation does not convey a physical "take-home" message but leaves visitors to find their own messages and build bridges and pathways to environmental conservation and connection to place (Bacher et al., 2016). A factor that has been found to be associated with an effective interpretation program is enjoyment (Bright and Pierce 2002). Visitors who enjoy an interpretive program are more likely to learn from it and change their attitudes and behaviours. Ultimately, environmental interpretation aims to encourage visitors to make responsible environmental decisions (Yau 2011), both during their visit and upon returning home, whereby high-quality interpretation can contribute to the sustainability of the PAs.

Empirical research on the role of interpretation in tourism of PAs provides deep insights into how interpretation can shape visitor experiences, influence their attitudes and behaviours and foster emotional connections with natural surroundings. Interpretation in PAs is not merely an educational tool but plays a key role in emotionally engaging visitors and promoting their environmental beliefs. According to Tilden (1957), interpretation must go beyond mere facts and provide deeper meaning, enabling visitors to connect with a site on a personal level.

The emotional connection visitors establish with PAs is one of the most important goals of interpretation. Interpretive processes that utilize storytelling, interactive activities, and visual displays can deeply affect visitors, helping them feel connected to nature and better understand it. Tilden's theory of interpretation (1957) emphasizes that true interpretation not only informs but also inspires and stimulates thought. Through such emotional connections, visitors develop a deeper understanding of natural phenomena and a sense of responsibility for their conservation. Ballantyne and Packer (2011) emphasize the importance of emotional engagement in interpretive activities, noting that tourists who are emotionally connected to a site are more likely to develop positive

attitudes toward nature conservation. Their research, conducted in Australian national parks, showed that tourists who experienced emotionally engaging interpretation had a deeper connection with nature and a stronger sense of responsibility for its preservation. Domestic studies, such as those conducted in the Kopački Rit Nature Park (Ratković 2020), confirm that emotional interpretation can have long-term effects on visitors' attitudes toward nature conservation. In Croatia, interpretive activities in Plitvice Lakes National Park often include stories about the park's history, legends of the lakes' formation, and the importance of biodiversity, allowing visitors to establish a deeper emotional connection with the site (Čorak and Šimunović 2014). Additionally, research conducted in Lonjsko Polje Nature Park showed that interpretation of wetland ecosystems through storytelling and educational activities creates a sense of connection with nature and increases visitors' awareness of the importance of preserving these areas (Ratković 2020).

One of the key goals of interpretation in PAs is to create long-lasting visitor loyalty. Loyalty is often expressed through the intention to revisit, which is directly linked to the quality of interpretation. According to research by Lee et al. (2013), emotionally engaging interpretation increases visitor satisfaction and encourages them to return. Their study, conducted at a tourist destination in South Korea, showed that interpretation that connects visitors to local ecological and cultural features significantly influences their decision to revisit. Domestic examples, such as research in Učka Nature Park, show similar results. Ratković Aydemir et al. (2020) found that quality interpretation, which includes interactive activities with local guides, not only improves the visitor experience but also encourages them to return to the park. These guides, who are well-educated about the park's ecological features, help visitors better understand local ecosystems and establish an emotional connection with the natural environment, increasing the likelihood of a return visit. Ham (2016) also emphasizes that interpretation can be crucial for creating visitor loyalty in the context of sustainable tourism. According to his research, visitors who experience interpretation that highlights the ecological values of the area are more likely to return and support conservation projects in these areas. In the context of Croatia, Krka National Park serves as an example of an area where interpretation contributes to visitor loyalty by integrating educational content about the importance of water and its impact on the environment (Čorak and Šimunović 2014).

Recommendations that visitors give to their friends, family, and acquaintances are key to increasing the visibility of PAs. According to research by Ballantyne and Hughes (2001), interpretation that engages visitors on an emotional and intellectual level encourages them to share positive experiences with others. Visitors who have had a positive interpretive experience are more likely to spread information about PAs through word of mouth and social media. Research conducted in Kopački Rit Nature Park (Ratković 2020) showed that visitors who participated in interpretive activities often share their positive experiences with others. Based on these positive recommendations, PAs gain additional visibility, and the spread of positive impressions contributes to attracting new visitors. According to Čorak and Šimunović (2014), interpretation in Plitvice Lakes National Park has a similar effect. Visitors often share their experiences through social media, which increases awareness of PAs and attracts new visitors. This form of informal marketing, based on visitors' real experiences, is an important tool for increasing visitor numbers and strengthening the reputation of PAs.

One of the key roles of interpretation is to encourage behavioural changes in visitors regarding the environment. According to Powell and Ham (2008), interpretation that helps visitors understand the ecological importance of PAs can foster pro-environmental changes, such as reducing waste, recycling, and using sustainable modes of transportation. Their study, conducted on the Galapagos Islands, shows that interpretation can have long-term effects on visitor behaviour, thereby contributing to the conservation of natural resources. In Croatia, research conducted in Lonjsko Polje Nature Park (Ratković 2020) shows that interpretation of the importance of wetland ecosystems can motivate visitors to change their behaviour after returning home. Respondents reported that after their visit, they began considering reducing plastic use, taking better care of nature, and participating in local environmental initiatives. Moreover, domestic research in Biokovo Nature Park (Radović 2018) shows that the interpretation of natural phenomena, such as the geomorphological features of the mountain, can help visitors better understand the importance of preserving natural resources. Visitors who participated in interpretive programs showed increased awareness of the need for responsible behaviour toward the environment, including environmentally friendly practices during their visit and after returning to everyday life. Sustainable tourism requires a balance between nature conservation and providing unforgettable experiences to visitors. Interpretation in PAs plays a key role in achieving this balance. Ham (2016) emphasizes that interpretation is essential for educating visitors about the importance of nature conservation and reducing the negative impacts of tourism. According to his research, interpretation that highlights the ecological challenges faced by PAs can help mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism. A domestic study conducted in Papuk Nature Park (Petrić 2021) shows that the interpretation of local geological and cultural features can educate visitors about the importance of conserving natural resources and encourage them to behave more responsibly. Visitors who participate in such programs often develop a deeper awareness of sustainable tourism and the preservation of natural heritage. In the context of Croatia, interpretive activities in parks such as Biokovo and Kopački Rit are aimed at educating visitors about the ecological importance of the area and encouraging responsible behaviour during their stay in the park (Radović 2018; Ratković 2020). These activities contribute to the sustainable development of tourism by educating visitors about the importance of nature conservation and encouraging them to actively participate in environmental protection.

Empirical research in Croatia and worldwide shows that interpretation plays a crucial role in shaping visitor experiences in protected natural areas. Through emotional connections, increasing loyalty, spreading positive impressions, and promoting environmentally conscious behaviour, interpretation contributes to the conservation of natural resources and the sustainable development of tourism. Both domestic and international research confirms that interpretation is a powerful tool for achieving long-term conservation goals and sustainable tourism.

3. Empirical research

Empirical research was conducted under the defined aim of the study. In the research, a quantitative methodological approach was applied, along with the application of

descriptive statistical analysis in data processing. In the following, the methodology of the study and the results of the conducted empirical research are concisely presented.

3.1. Methodology

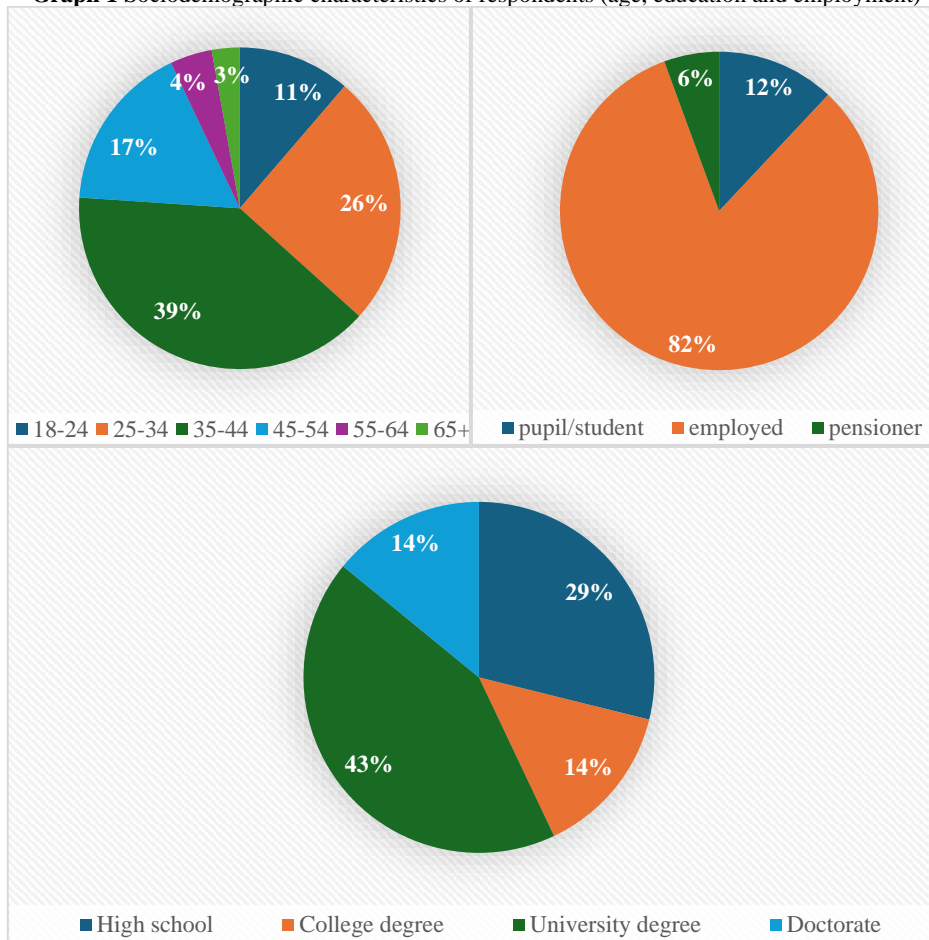
The study aims to determine the interpretation contribution to the visitor experience, satisfaction, and emotional bonding of visitors, and to assess the influence of interpretation in different PAs on behavioural and pro-environmental behaviour of visitors upon returning home. Empirical research was conducted on selected nature parks and national parks in Croatia, which differ according to their geographical, natural and other features, as well as the number of visitors, visitor infrastructure and distance from highly visited coastal tourism destinations.

This study applied a quantitative methodology, using a survey method. The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire in the Croatian language, where the particles were measured using a nominal and ordinal (Likert) measurement scale. To collect data from respondents, an online questionnaire was used, which was distributed through the official websites and social networks of selected nature parks and national parks. The research was conducted on a convenience sample with a total number of 142 respondents, and data were analysed using a univariate statistical method (descriptive statistics).

3.2. Research results and discussion

The results of the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (Graph 1.) show that 142 domestic respondents participated in the research (73.9 female, and 26.1 male), among whom the respondents who are employed (82.4%) dominate, and the most represented the age group from 35 to 44 years (39.4%), and the least those aged 55 and over (7%). When looking at the structure of the respondents according to the level of education, most of the respondents have a university degree of education (43%).

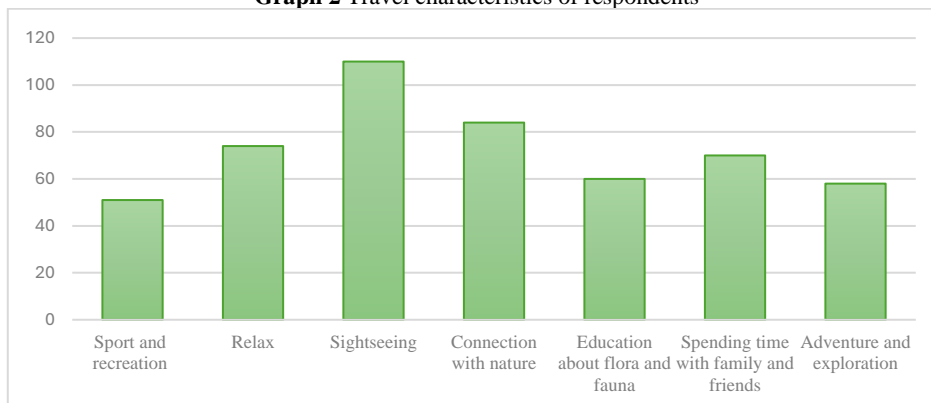
Graph 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (age, education and employment)



Source: research results

Following the aim, besides sociodemographic and travel characteristics, the study considers the importance of interpretation in relation to other components of the tourist product of PAs and the preferred interpretation tools of the respondents. The preferred activities **and** reasons for coming and staying in the PAs are sightseeing, connecting with nature, relax and spending time with family and friends (Graph 2.).

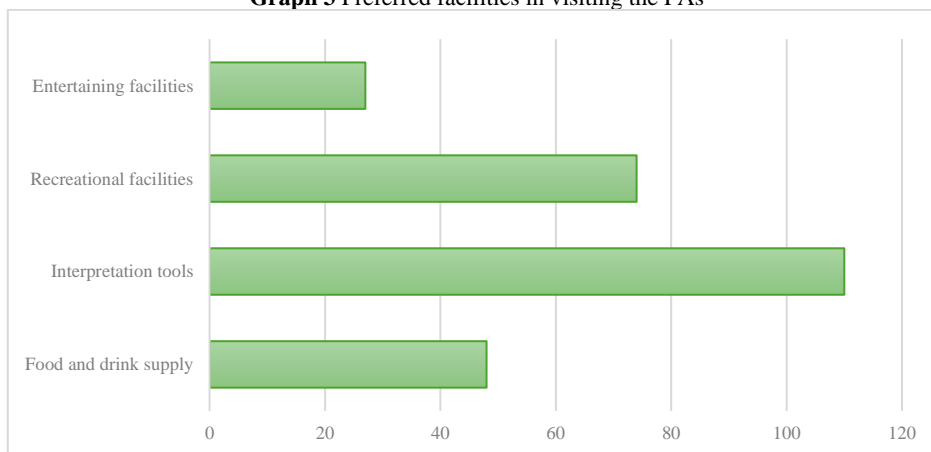
Graph 2 Travel characteristics of respondents



Source: research results

Furthermore, the main motive for visiting a protected area in the context of preferred facilities is interpretation tools (77,5%), followed by recreational facilities (52,1%) (Graph 3.).

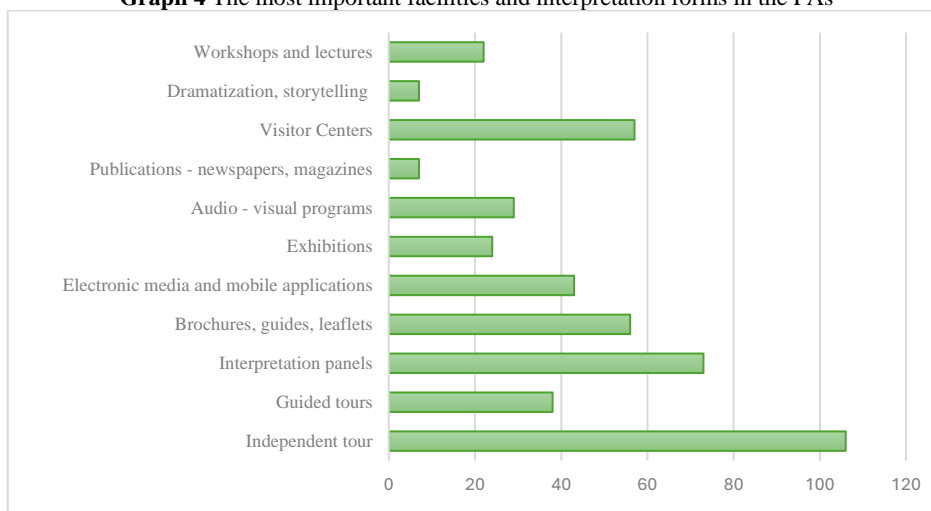
Graph 3 Preferred facilities in visiting the PAs



Source: research results

Considering interpretation tools and facilities, the most important form of interpretation is the independent tour (74,6%), followed by interpretation panels (51,4%) and visitor centres (40,1%). Ranking of other facilities and tools are shown in Graph 4.

Graph 4 The most important facilities and interpretation forms in the PAs



Source: research results

This part presents the descriptive statistic results related to the main constructs, measured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. First, an effort was made to determine the interpretation influence on visitors' emotional connection with the PA in the context of satisfaction, experience and general emotional connection, and the results are shown in Table 1. The research results show that the respondents are satisfied on average with the offered forms of interpretation in the visited PA ($\bar{x} = 3.74$), while satisfaction with the information obtained through interpretation in PA is slightly higher ($\bar{x} = 3.86$). Furthermore, the respondents showed that interpretation contributes to increasing interest in the PA itself and its values ($\bar{x} = 4.01$), the overall tourist experience in the PA ($\bar{x} = 4.05$), as well as the emotional connection with the PA ($\bar{x} = 3.75$).

Table 1 Interpretation influence on visitors' connection with the protected area (PA) – satisfaction, experience, emotional connection

INDICATOR		1	2	3	4	5	Mean
TS1	Satisfaction with interpretation and tools in the visited PA	1,4%	2,8%	32,6%	44%	19,1%	3.74
TS2	Satisfaction with the information obtained through interpretation in PA	0,7%	2,1%	33,1%	38,7%	25,4%	3.86
TE1	Contribution of interpretation to increase interest in PA	1,4%	4,9%	23,2%	32,4%	38%	4.01
TE2	Contribution of interpretation to the overall tourist experience in PA	1,4%	4,2%	21,1%	34,5%	38,7%	4.05
EC1	Contribution of interpretation to the emotional connection with PA	4,9%	7%	27,5%	28,9%	31,7%	3.75

Source: research results

Regarding determining the interpretation influence in PAs on visitors' behavioural intentions (Table 2.), the research results show positive intentions of the respondents in all three observed categories (revisiting the PA – $\bar{x} = 3.99$, recommendations of the PA, and online reviews – $\bar{x} = 4.00$).

Table 2 Interpretation influence on visitors' behaviour intentions – revisit, recommendations and online reviews

INDICATOR		1	2	3	4	5	Mean
BI_RV	A tourism experience based on interpretation encourages me to revisit PA	1,4%	6,3%	22,5%	31,7%	38%	3.99
BI_RC	I recommend family, friends, and acquaintances to visit the PA for an interpretive tourism experience	1,4%	2,8%	22,5%	41,5%	31,7%	4.00
BI_OR	I share my positive experience through social networks and other channels to motivate others to visit PA	0,7%	2,1%	26,1%	38,7%	32,4%	4.00

Source: research results

Likewise, a positive influence of interpretation was established on all examined visitors' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Table 3.). More reflection on the issues and importance of nature conservation and preservation was rated with the highest average score ($\bar{x} = 4.35$), followed by other positively expressed attitudes and behaviours with average scores above 4.

Table 3 Interpretation influence on visitors' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour

INDICATOR		1	2	3	4	5	Mean
PEB 1	More reflection on the issues and importance of nature conservation and preservation.	0,7%	2,1%	15,5 %	25,4 %	56,3 %	4.35
PEB 2	Increased interest in learning and information about the protected area and similar topics	1,4%	4,2%	17,6 %	39,4 %	37,3 %	4.07
PEB 3	Increased interest in nature conservation issues in everyday life	0,7%	4,2%	15,5 %	33,1 %	46,5 %	4.20
PEB 4	Changing behaviour in everyday life which is more supportive of nature conservation	2,1%	4,9%	18,3 %	30,3 %	44,4 %	4.10

Source: research results

The research showed that interpretation has a certain impact on the visitor experience, interest in PA' revisiting and recommendations to others. Moreover, a positive impact of interpretation on the pro-ecological behaviour of visitors was determined, which would contribute to the PA' ecological sustainability, and support nature conservation in everyday life. However, interpretation does not have a significant impact on the PA'

emotional connection of visitors. The results indicate that PAs should continue to invest in interpretation and the tools that support it, following current trends. Given the increasing presence of multimedia, high-tech solutions and AI tools in the tourism industry, it is necessary to increasingly rely on modern digital solutions in addition to existing approaches to interpretation. Such an approach would facilitate the achievement of management goals in nature conservation through stronger visitor support for environmentally sustainable tourism initiatives while increasing more environmentally acceptable revenue. It is also expected that a more effective interpretation would encourage the arrival of more environmentally aware visitors, prompted by the recommendations of visitors' predecessors. Ultimately, a broader social goal would be achieved, namely broader social support for nature conservation, within and outside PAs.

4. Conclusion

Interpretation has a significant effect on tourism in PAs. The emotional connection of visitors to the PAs can be seen in the context of cause-effect relationships with interpretation. Interpretation creates an emotional connection, which is consequently reflected in the behaviour of visitors within the PAs, but also in their attitudes and everyday behaviours. The emotional connection between the visitor and the PAs has positive effects on the visitor, as well as on the visited PA. The visitor gets a unique tourist experience based on new knowledge, which enriches him as a person. With such a connection, the PA gets responsible behaviour from the visitors, and their support in its fundamental task, i.e. protection and conservation. There is also greater support and approval from the public, and certain promotional and economic benefits are realized.

It can be observed that the respondents showed marginal satisfaction with the interpretation in Parks of Croatia. However, they show that the interpretation has a positive effect on the connection with PAs - contribution of the interpretation to increased interest in PA ($\bar{x} = 4.01$) and to the overall tourist experience ($\bar{x} = 4.05$), while the influence on emotional connection is positive, but debatable ($\bar{x} = 3.75$). It was also confirmed that, due to the positive visitors' experience, which is largely the result of interpretation, the respondents tend to revisit PA ($\bar{x} = 3.99$) and to share positive impressions and recommend others to visit PA ($\bar{x} = 4.00$). Likewise, the results of the research show that the interpretation has significant effects on pro-environmental attitudes (stimulating reflection among visitors about the importance of conservation), but also regarding pro-environmental behaviour (the application of responsible behaviour toward nature conservation and preservation in everyday life).

The research confirmed the connection between interpretation and the creation of an emotional connection with the protected area. Relying on the results, interpretation has significant effects on stimulating reflection among visitors about the importance of conservation, but also regarding the application of responsible behaviour in everyday life. It was also confirmed that, due to a positive experience in a protected area, which is largely the result of interpretation, respondents tend to share positive impressions in a way that they recommend visiting a protected area. Although this study represents a contribution, it also has certain limitations. First, the data was collected exclusively from domestic visitors and exclusively online. Second, the smaller number of respondents involved in the research reduces the objectivity of the results. Future research should

primarily include a larger number of respondents to increase the relevance of the study. Equally, it would be useful to consider the existence of differences in the influence of interpretation on the constructs regarding sociodemographic and travel characteristics of visitors to PAs.

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MAPPING CHARDAKS IN SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE DRAVA AND DANUBE RIVER

Preliminary communication

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Abstract:

Research presented in this text deals with wooden structures used for grain storage in rural households in Croatia. These structures, called chardaks, could once be found in almost every farmyard but are now both functionally as well as materially decaying. Chardaks are gradually disappearing in rural households in Eastern Croatia and this research is directed towards documenting different variations of existing chardaks in three different counties along the Drava and Danube river. A common structure in rural farmyards for centuries, chardaks were also present in rural intangible heritage like songs and traditional building techniques. Overall purpose of the research is preserving Croatian rural architectural heritage with the emphasis on rural non-residential buildings. Research methodology is developed according to research phases. In this initial research phase, research teams are formed and dispatched to a large number of villages along the Drava and Danube river with the task of documenting chardaks. Standardised textual and photographic research forms are created in order to record data on chardaks – dimensions, materials, building techniques, position, structural types, finishings, ornamentation etc. Second phase of research consists of statistical analysis of acquired data, followed by a research synthesis defining chardak types. Third research phase covers the process of producing technical documentation of selected chardaks. In this text members of the project team cover results of the first and second phase of the research. A wide range of chardaks will be presented, showcasing their variety, craftsmanship, functionality and beauty, not forgetting aspects like their current state and use. Presented research is a direct contribution to documenting still existing rural architectural heritage in the segment of often neglected non-residential architecture. Further research should be oriented towards ways of re-using and reviving these structures based on solid technical data provided within this research.

Keywords:

Rural architectural heritage, technical documentation, traditional building techniques, wooden structures

1. Introduction

Small agricultural granaries, chardaks, Turkish word, root in Persian word chahar taq (Kljajić, 2002) are settled in the continental part of Croatia, but some of the finest examples are to be found in rural settlements along the Drava and Danube rivers in the central and eastern parts of the country. The same name was used in European fortification terminology for military buildings with watching and guarding purposes (Chardaque, Wachthaus, Wachtposten, Wachtchardaken, Cordonswachthütte,

Wachthäuser, Csardaken, Tschardaken, Wachtchardaken) (Kruhek, 1995; Kljajić, 2002, Bing, 2018). The old Balkan name for chardaks is "house between heaven and earth". It is a wooden observation house with embrasures and ladders, standing on pillars, which stood along the historical military boundaries. Such structures were built in Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries, but no remains. A chardak is also a one-story wooden country house in Pokuplje, Turopolje and Posavina, Croatian regions on the Sava River. The chardak we present and document in this research represents a raised granary, which can still be found in rural settlements as one of the identification elements of the traditional peasant household and farms.

Chardaks have a purposeful, clear storage function and do not represent luxurious, formal and innovative architecture. Chardak was used for grain storage as a large „basket“ lifted from the ground and covered with a sparse membrane made from local wood resources. In this area, many different forms of chardaks can be found - knitted, riveted, connected with wooden wedges, one-story and two-story, made entirely of wood or combined with other materials like clay, brick, etc. (Figure 1). Chardak's design represents different building technology areas and shows a wide range of wood types, structures, and designs.

Several Croatian ethnologists, art historians, and architects have written about rural non-residential buildings, as well as about techniques, materials, forms, and types. Somek (2013) describes corn storage from the Podravina region in Croatia, the region along the Drava River and states that planked storage was more accessible and easier to build than knitted ones. She also named Croatian regional names for building parts and construction types. Moslavac (2010) presents the traditional way of construction in Moslavina, a nearby Croatian region to Podravina, starting from the village spatial level (the image of the village), plot organization (description of the garden and house position) to very detailed construction and technology solutions and materials. In her text, we can also find some interesting facts and stories about building processes, local names and constructs for construction parts of wooden buildings in Moslavina. Peršić-Kovač (1996) deals with two types of corn storage, knitted and assembled ones, in a specific locus, village Torčec, a village near the Drava River. In the article, she describes techniques of construction, names of chardak parts and details and many more related stories.

Figure 1 Chardak in Suza, Osijek-Baranja County



Source: project team photograph, 2024

The initial incentive for the research lies in the fact that the knowledge and skill of chardak builders were mainly transmitted by word of mouth, and there are no architectural plans for rural chardaks that could be used for their revitalization or conversion.

Therefore, a need to document disappearing chardaks arose, through the collection of technical data but also oral stories and video materials, workshops with local craftsmen and students of GRAFOS (bachelor's study of architecture and urban planning) and students from the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology University of Zagreb (bachelors' student of wood technology). Previously, the methodology of working with students in research work was checked and refined for this purpose (Kranjčević, Dolaček-Alduk, Stober, 2022).

2. Description of the Research

2.1 Framework

Oxford Brooks University and Arcadia Foundation financed this research through the Endangered Wooden Architecture Programme – EWAP. The EWAP programme is currently funding several global projects focused on documenting endangered wooden architecture. Research project activities of chardak investigations started in 2023 and should be completed in 2025.

Research is led by the team at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture in Osijek (GRAFOS) with several teachers and around 40 students, and it is carried out in cooperation with the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology of the University of Zagreb, Centre for Cultural Heritage in Osijek, Academy of Arts in Osijek, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek and local collaborators and assistants. In this article, we will describe the ongoing project's structure and aim.

2.2 Research Goals

The goal of the research is to create a chardaks database for more than 45 villages in the continental part of Croatia, along the rivers Drava and Danube, and to identify the typologies of chardaks by volume, material, construction, design, building technology, location, etc. The field research will also include collecting oral stories about using chardaks and their construction. For each typology, several chardaks will be selected and recorded in detail. Two workshops will be conducted in which local artisans present the main techniques for chardak construction.

2.3 Research Phases

Research is divided into five chronologically overlapping phases (Figure 2). First phase consists of desk work and fieldwork conducted in a selection of settlements in Koprivnica-Krizevci County, Virovitica-Podravina County and Osijek- Baranja County.

Figure 2 Research phases (concluded research highlighted)

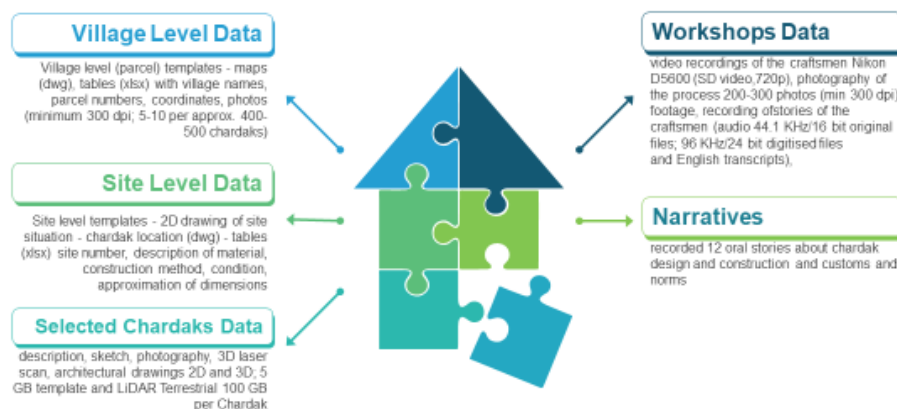


Source: project team illustrations, 2024

In this phase, researchers selected settlements with most significant numbers of chardaks, based on a visual field survey of the entire area. This way, almost 500 chardaks were mapped and photographed. Local authorities and conservation organizations were consulted to obtain data on local craftsmen with knowledge and skills in chardak

construction. In this phase one workshop is planned, with the goal to check and update survey templates (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Research data levels



Source: project team illustrations, 2024

The second phase is the review of collected data - analysis of chardaks and categorization by style, construction, size, shape, condition, material, location, design, construction technique etc. Later, based on data analysis, 5 to 10 representative chardak examples will be selected for the next phase.

The third phase consists of producing digital documentation of selected representative chardak samples using photogrammetry and point measurements resulting in 3D models. The fourth phase comprises two 2-day workshops with the participation of craftsmen and students from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture and the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology. Workshops will be conducted on-site, in the open museum in a traditional house in Topolje. A Collection of audio stories and video materials about chardaks' building technology and materials will be recorded.

The final phase results in a complex database on chardaks due to all previous work - 3D models, BIM models, 2D architectural documentation, texts and video material.

2.4 Research Methodology

The research was divided into several spatial and content levels (Figure 3). The project began with the design of templates for data collection. Templates were created for data collection at the local site (parcel) levels and for selected chardak buildings. Local level templates included the following data: maps and tables with village names, photos of village streets and the appearance of chardak in the village morphology. Village-level (parcel) templates included maps, tables with village names, parcel numbers, coordinates and photos. Site level templates - 2D drawing of site situation - chardak location, site number, description of material, construction method, condition, approximation of

dimensions. Chardak-level templates included descriptions, sketches, photographs, 3D laser scans, and architectural drawings in 2D and 3D.

Figure 4 Site level templates' example (page 1 of 2)

OBRAZAC ZA EVIDENCIJU STRUKTURE - ČARDAK/KUKURUŽNJAK/VIRJAN/KOŠ			
PODATCI O SMJEŠTAJU STRUKTURE		GODINA IZGRADNJE	
		1946.	
SMJEŠTAJ U ODNOSU NA ULICU	PARALELNO S ULICOM ①	SMJEŠTAJ NA PARCELI	NA REGULACIJSKOJ LINIJ ①
	OKOMITO NA ULICU ②		U PREDNJIEM DIJELU ②
	POD KUTOM ③		U STRAŽNJIEM DIJELU ③
ODNOS PREMA DRUGIM ZGRADAMA	SLOBODNOSTOJEĆA ①	TIP STRUKTURE	JEDNOSTRUKA ①
	POLUUGRAĐENA KRAČOM STRANOM ②		DVOSTRUKA U NIZU ②
	POLUUGRAĐENA DUŽOM STRANOM ③		DVOSTRUKA PARALELNO ③
	UGRAĐENA KRAČIM STRANAMA ④		OBLIK L ④
	UGRAĐENA KRAČOM I DUŽOM STRANOM ⑤		OBLIK U ⑤
	UGRAĐENA S TRI STRANE ⑥		DRUGO ⑥
	DRUGO ⑦		
BROJ ETAŽA	PRIZEMLJE ①	OBLIK STRUKTURE	PRAVOKUTNA ①
	PRIZEMLJE I KAT ②		ELIPSA ②
	PRIZEMLJE, KAT I TAVAN ③		OBLIK L ③
	DRUGO ④		OBLIK U ④
KONSTRUKCIJA ZIDOVA	ZIDANA ①	PROCJENA DIMENZIJE	SLOŽENI OBLIK ⑤
	KANATNA - DRVENA ②		DRUGO ⑥
	KOMBINIRANA ③		
KROVIŠTE	JEDNOSTREŠNO ①	KRAĆA X DUŽA STRANA	3 x 9 m x m
	DVOSTREŠNO ②	VISINA PRIZEMLJA	1,5 m
	VIŠESTREŠNO ③	VISINA DO SLJEMENA	5 m
	RAVAN KROV ④	OJAČANJE KONSTRUKCIJE	DRVENE PODUPORE ①
	DRUGO ⑤		METALNE PODUPORE ②
KONSTRUKCIJA KROVIŠTA	ROŽENIČKO PRAZNO ①	STUBIŠTE	JEDNOKRAKO ①
	ROŽENIČKO S PAJANTOM ②		DVOKRAKO ②
	DRVENA - STOLICA ③		VIŠEKRAKO ③
	DRVENA - VISULJA ④		DRVENE LESTVE ④
	DRUGO ⑤		METALNE LESTVE ⑤
STANJE	IZVRSNO ①	DRUGO ⑥	
	DOBRO ②		
	LOŠE ③		
	IZRAZITO LOŠE ④		

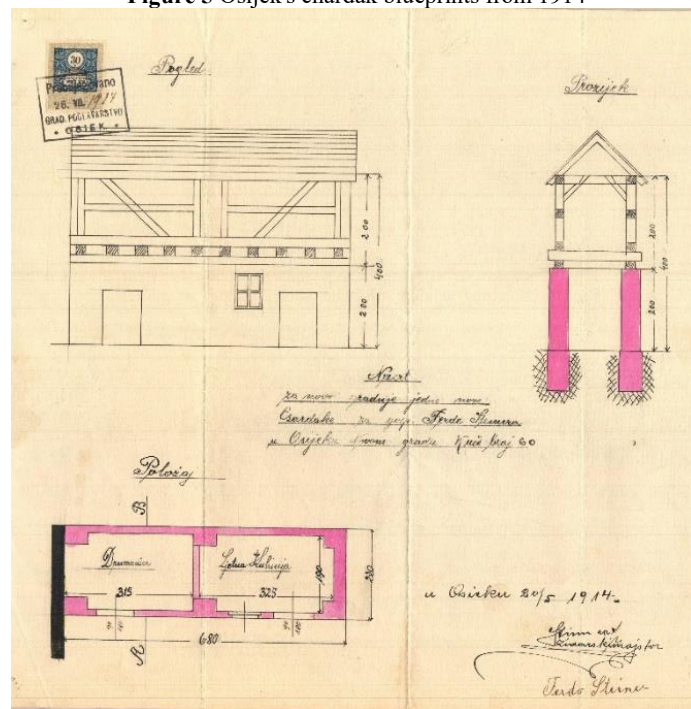
8.1.2

Source: project team material, 2024

3. Research Results

In the project's first phase, the project team researched existing data on chardaks, including literature and internet sources, as well as collections of the Historical State Archives in Osijek (Figure 5) and local archives along the Drava River.

Figure 5 Osijek's chardak blueprints from 1914



Source: State archives Osijek, 2024

Also, the team conducted research on the conditions of the rural landscape in Croatia. The overall population of Croatia is characterised by decreasing fertility, depopulation, and severe population ageing. Previous studies have confirmed the complete depopulation of non-urban settlements in Croatia (Kranjčević and Stober, 2021; Kranjčević and Stober, 2024). Croatia, as a predominantly rural area and part of the common European space and culture, is following the current global social and economic processes - globalisation, de-agriculturalization, market-oriented agriculture, etc., so further deterioration and devastation of villages is to be expected. Research has confirmed that the number of villages without inhabitants is increasing in various Croatian regions, especially in the northern Adriatic coast, Istria, Slavonia, and Banovina, where the villages described are sparsely inhabited, and the abandoned built environment dominates (Kranjčević and Stober, 2024). Today, family farms are threatened by abandonment and functional change of the family property, from agriculture to tourism, remote work, trade, etc. Chardaks, non-residential buildings that belong to the farm plot, became empty, without function and proper maintenance. Although usually on the edge of the property, in new circumstances they are dismantled

and the material is reused or disposed of. Another threat is the loss of knowledge and skills in chardak construction, leaving most of the remaining chardaks damaged, unprotected and exposed to rain and further deterioration (Somek, 2013).

The team has conducted a survey of 28 settlements documenting 153 chardaks in Koprivnica - Križevci County, 136 in Virovitica – Podravina County and 181 in Osijek – Baranja County. Settlements were chosen based on a preliminary visual field survey of the entire area, including sites with the largest numbers of chardaks. Altogether, data was collected for 470 chardaks in three counties, containing village level (parcel) templates, maps, tables with village names, parcel numbers, coordinates and photos. This part of the research, conducted on the village/settlement level, confirmed the assumption that chardaks are structures with various meanings and manifestations.

Figure 6 Chardaks in Koprivnica-Križevci County



Source: project team photographs, 2024

Various types of chardaks can be found along the Drava and Danube rivers, characterized by different construction techniques and aesthetics (Figure 6). The granaries along Drava were made in the form of baskets woven from thicker willow and hazel branches, but only a few of them can be found today. Soft wooden forms testify to an extraordinary knitting art which is disappearing. Oval-knitted vessels have a shorter base and a prolonged upper part, usually very decorative. A projecting upper part on both longer sides characterises oval porches. Bearings are elevated on wooden supports (crossbeams) and usually placed in an open yard, where the airflow allows better cob drying. They were usually decorated with carvings on beautifully shaped beams. At the bottom of the wooden containers, there were one or two doors through which the corn could be ejected.

Figure 7 Two chardaks in Kopačevo, Osijek-Baranja County



Source: project team photograph, 2024

The other chardak type, the Osijek-Baranja County granary, is a more functional agricultural building, usually two-story high with a brick base and a wooden upper floor, a simple ground plan and rhythmic oak boards construction that ensures air flow that dries the grain. Several variations exist, some containing beautiful masonry or wooden decorations. A number of chardaks have been protected by the Croatian state as cultural assets, as part of the traditional Croatian country house with yard.

First of the two planned workshops already took place in November 2023 in the village of Kneževi Vinogradi, incorporating professors, students and locals (volunteers, NGOs, craftsmen etc.) and sharing their experiences, goals and stories centred around local rural heritage and possible ways of its preservation.

Figure 8 Workshop in Kneževi Vinogradi, November 2023



Source: project team photograph, 2023

4. Conclusions

At the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture in Osijek (GRAFOS), there is a longstanding tradition of researching rural areas and integrating them into university education. Over time, GRAFOS has undertaken various projects, such as exploring abandoned railway stations along the dismantled railway and investigating mills, gators and tunnels in loess walls, all in the region of Baranja. Consequently, rural space is an

important field of interest for GRAFOS (Lončar, Dolaček-Alduk, Stober, 2010; Kranjčević, Dolaček-Alduk, Stober, 2022; Foški, Mrak, 2023).

Chardaks were typical farmyard structures in Croatian villages for centuries. Now, with their material structure endangered and their numbers rapidly dwindling due to economic and societal changes in the last few decades, other aspects of chardaks' intangible rural heritage, like songs and traditional building techniques, are also in danger of disappearing.

Current research presented in this article is oriented towards documenting chardaks as an intrinsic part of rural architectural heritage, aiming to produce high quality data on existing chardaks on various levels. However, further research should be focused on re-use and revival of chardaks based both on acquired data and on researching local and global solutions to same or similar issues. Some of these examples already exist, naming here a 2024 chardak conversion into a village library in Šarengard, a settlement in the Vukovarsko-srijemska county.

Main beneficiaries of this research would be rural residents and chardak owners who want to keep their chardaks. There are no written or formal documents in place to ensure the upkeep and renovation of chardak structures. Local artisans would benefit from revitalized chardak maintenance skills and sensibilities as well. Second-tier beneficiaries would be providers of rural tourism that lean on the authenticity of rural environments and could include stories about chardaks in their promotion of local values and authenticity. Students will also benefit from learning about chardaks construction, traditional building technology, materials, and design.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MONITORING OF RURAL TOURISTIC ENTITIES IN THE CROATIAN BARANJA

Preliminary communication

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Abstract:

The adoption of sustainable tourism practices is related to sustainable development of rural tourism. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has been in implementation for a decade and their contribution to environmental, social and economic transformations is expected. Empirical evidence on sustainable practices of rural tourism entities in the Croatian part of Baranja (dis)confirms their achievements. This paper focuses on individuals, subjective opinion of their practices in terms environmental, socio-cultural and economic contribution for the sustainability of rural tourism. The respondent's opinions were collected by semi-structured questionnaire. In three tourist communities in the area of Baranja: TC Baranja, TC Bilje and TC Draž, 153 rural tourist entities were recorded. The research data was collected from 47 participants, which is 30.72% of the total sample from the area of 17 villages. Preliminary interviewing with the use of questionnaires was carried out during November 2023 (10.53%) and then a survey was conducted in December and April 2024. The results showed that socio-cultural contributions achieve the greatest value in the segments of digital business and the ethical behaviour in communication with visitors. Following, the environmental contribution is achieved mostly in terms of organic and other waste disposal and green areas arrangement and maintenance. Finally, economic contributions are realized with the highest representation in connection with customer loyalty and development visions realization at the tourist entity. This study offers practical implications for the sustainable development of rural tourism.

Keywords:

continental rural tourism, monitoring, sustainable development, touristic entities

1. Introduction

The rural area is faced with depopulation, deagrarianization as well as weaker entrepreneurial activity. Rural tourism is an effective component of integrated and sustainable development for the revitalization of villages, and is an important factor in

strengthening development of local agricultural and non-farming activities in rural areas and a special incentive to employment. Multifunctionality and diversification are proposed as rural development strategies in which the community development policy depends on the ability of the community. It is a - *sustainable rural development*, that involves sustainable management of natural resources and the socio-cultural-economic development of rural areas and communities (Seal, 2022).

Rural tourism is the object of transdisciplinary research and the plane of practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) according to the Shevchenko and Petrushenko (2021). Rural areas have to face their issues with proposals for - *rural development from within*, where endogenous resources must replace exogenous resources in rural development policies.

Rural tourism is regarded as a part of both rural development and sustainable development. It is also considered a nature-based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favouring the local communities socially and economically. Such form of tourism has created tremendous impact on the local economy and socio-cultural scenario of the rural area on one hand and carries a lot of potential for the rural residents on the other hand. Developing a sustainable rural destination is crucial for economic, social and environmental development, according to Kim Lian Chan (2023).

Moreover, Kantar and Svržnjak (2017) showed that the integrated sustainability of rural tourism consists of four dimensions: biological, ecological, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability.

The mentioned dimensions of sustainable tourism are contained in the national Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030 (*STD-Strategy-2030*), which is aligned with the documents and policies of the European Union. The Strategy contains a vision of sustainability in accordance with the needs and potentials to be realized by key stakeholders following the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The vision is - *By respecting the natural and cultural heritage and the unique identity of all regions, we will create a sustainable year-round tourism desirable for investment, work and life, which contributes to the harmonious economic development of Croatia*. This complex vision will achieve all 17 SDGs, which are summarized in national goals: (1) year-round and regionally balanced tourism; (2) tourism through preservation of the environment, space and climate, (3) competitive and innovative tourism, and (4) resilient tourism (*STD-Strategy-2030*).

In order to realize such a vision, it is necessary to implement innovative solutions that are in accordance with regional specificities, while increasing the efficiency of tourism policies.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the possibilities and limitations in the creation and applicability of sustainable development through rural tourism. The aim of the research is to recognize to what extent, rural tourism entities in the Croatian Baranja,

achieving to the realization of the global sustainable development goals (SDGs), through three pillars of sustainability: environmental, socio-cultural and economic.

2. Material and methods

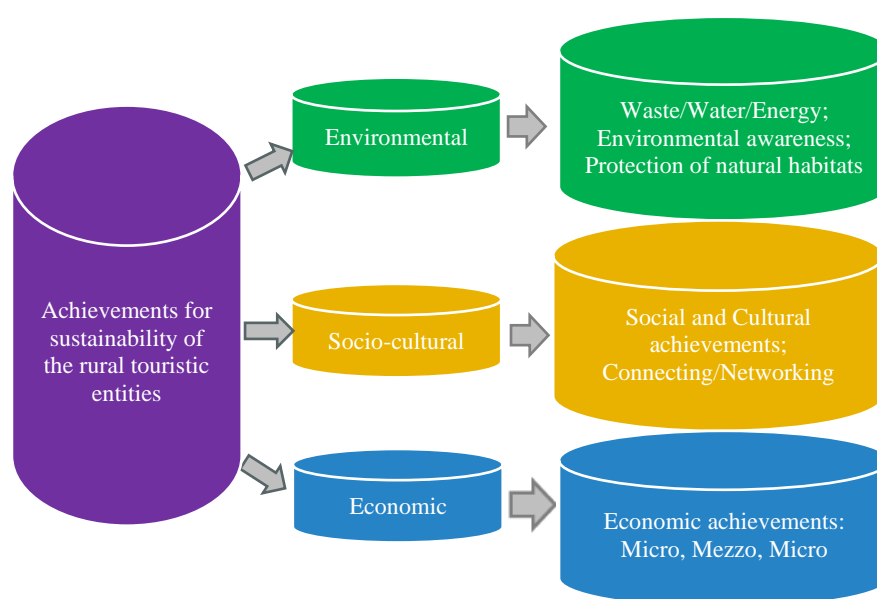
In accordance with the aim of the research, it focused on conceptualizing the structure of the three basic pillars of sustainability, which are defined as determinate. They contained attributes and their descriptions that were evaluated in order to carry out the evaluation process. The quality and ability to update data are critical to have meaningful indicators, and yet severe difficulties arise when measuring sustainability. Sustainability data, in general, have improved in recent times, but we have not seen enough of these advances transfer to the tourism sector where the completeness and comparability of sustainable tourism indicators are still poor (Alfaro Navarro et al. 2019; Buckley 2012; Font et al. 2021; Miller and Torres-Delgado 2023).

The hypothesis was that rural tourist entities in the Croatian Baranja contribute to sustainable development by achieving the most to social development and cultural sustainability.

The research process contained procedures for collecting primary data using a survey questionnaire, which was compiled as a basic research instrument. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions grouped into three groups of achievements in sustainable development: A) Environmental; B) Socio-cultural; C) Economic.

The level of achievement and implementation of sustainability goals in rural tourism entities are followed by an analysis through three pillars of sustainable development. These pillars represented determinants that contained attributes, shown in next figure:

Figure 1 Determinants and attributes of analytic model for sustainability rural tourism
Source: analytic model is author's creation



In accordance with the above, a questionnaire was compiled that contained three groups with 15 questions, a total of 45 statements/opinions. In the research, the Likert scale was used as a psychometric scale for evaluating the statements/opinions from the questionnaire. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the statements using a scale. Each level has a numerical value added from the lowest (1) which increases for each new level (up to 5). The response for each claim can be analysed separately or can be summed for a group of claims (Aasa 2021).

The research was conducted in the geographical area of the Croatian part of Baranja, where there are three tourist communities: TC Baranja, TC Bilje and TC Draž, which register 153 rural tourist entities. Preliminary face-to-face interviewing to determine ambiguities and errors (10.53% of the research sample) was carried out during November 2023. The online survey process using the Google form were carried out until the beginning of April 2024. Respondents answered 46 questionnaires, which is 30.72% of the total sample. Statements and opinions were given by 62% women and 38% men, average age 49 years (24 ± 72) from 17 villages. They have been engaged in rural tourism for an average of 8 years (1 ± 35) in registered holiday homes (59.6%), family farms (19.1%), rooms for rent (12.8%) and other forms of touristic entities (8.5%). Two-thirds of respondents (66%) are employed outside the tourism sector, and at the same time work in their own tourist entities.

The methodology required the definition of attributes and their descriptions for the evaluation process, which were created based on the SDGs. Attributes and their descriptions are classified into three pillars of sustainable development: A) Environment; B) Socio-cultural; C) Economic, which are called determinants. Environmental achievements in environmental determinant were evaluated through attributes: Waste/water/energy; Environmental awareness; Protection of natural habitats. Socio-cultural achievements were monitored through the attributes: Social; Cultural; Connection/networking with the local community. The last determinant of sustainable development consisted of achievements in the economic determinant that were evaluated through: Macro; Mezzo; Micro attributes.

Based on the collected data on environmental, socio-cultural and economic achievements in the realization of the SDGs, a database was created for the analysis of the rural tourist entities sustainability. For the purpose of data analysis, the procedure of weighting and evaluation of the attributes and their descriptions as well as determinants were calculated. The quantification of the value of each attribute was calculated using the method of average scores. The evaluation of environmental, socio-cultural and economic determinants it was created by summing up the weighted values of all attributes (Deže, et al. 2023).

The purpose of this paper is to analyse achievements in the realization of sustainable development in rural tourism. The aim of this research is to recognize to what extent, rural tourism entities in the Croatian Baranja, achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs): environmental protection, preservation of socio-cultural assets and economic growth and development.

3. Results and discussion

In order to reach the aims of sustainable development, it is necessary to monitor their implementation in the real sector of rural tourism. It is necessary to monitor, measure and evaluate environmental, socio-cultural and economic determinants. The monitoring was carried out by collecting the statements/opinions of respondents, which they expressed using a Likert scale.

3.1. Evaluation of the environmental achievements in rural touristic entities

The business growth of rural tourism entities tends to connect challenges that are oriented on the one side to strengthening economic activity, and on the other side to environmental sustainability. Such a concept of sustainable development can be understood as the contrast between contemporary economic progress and environmental, social-cultural and economic limitations. Sustainable development aims to support progress with long-term protection of environmental values (Emas 2015).

In this chapter, the environmental determinant consisting of the attributes Waste, water and energy, Environmental awareness and Protection of natural habitats plants and animals will be evaluated through the analysis of the share of attributes and their descriptions in the structure of the determinant. The following table shows the structure of the share of attributes and their description by Likert scale of five levels (1=Insufficient to 5=Extremely good):

Table 1 Structure of the environmental determinant (%), mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)

Attributes	N	Description of attributes	1	2	3	4	5	Σ	M	SD
Waste, water, energy	1	Disposal/organic waste /compost	2	2	22	22	52	100	4.20	1.00
	2	Reducing other waste	0	4	17	28	51	100	4.24	0.89
	3	Reducing /water	2	15	24	33	26	100	3.65	1.09
	4	Reducing/energy	0	4	21	37	38	100	4.07	0.87
	5	Use/renewable energy	50	22	13	4	11	100	2.04	1.34
Environmental awareness	6	Workshops participation/reduce waste	62	17	15	2	4	100	1.72	1.08
	7	Traditional architecture	24	13	17	9	37	100	3.22	1.61
	8	Environmental awareness in consumption and food preparation	7	7	22	22	42	100	3.89	1.22
	9	Knowledge transfer/	11	22	28	9	30	100	3.26	1.37

		traditional lifestyle								
	10	Introduce/renewable energy	7	9	22	17	45	100	3.87	1.26
	11	Organic agriculture/plants and livestock	13	17	17	17	36	100	3.43	1.44
Protection of natural habitats plants and animal	12	Biodiversity preservation/indigenous plant and animal species/breeds	15	7	26	22	30	100	3.46	1.38
	13	Maintenance/green areas	4	2	13	17	64	100	4.33	1.07
	14	Breeding/wild animals	83	2	11	2	2	100	1.39	0.92
	15	Protection/bees/other bugs	40	2	17	17	24	100	2.85	1.64

Source: author's calculation

The results of the research on the environmental determinant in which the first attribute was related to waste disposal, water protection and the use of renewable energy sources, 52% (*Med.4.2*; *SD1.00*) of respondents claim that they dispose of organic waste extremely well, as well as 51% (*Med. 4.24*; *SD0.89*) of those who strive to reduce the amount of other waste.

The next attribute contained claims about environmental awareness, and the most significant results were in the segment of awareness about the importance of introduce of renewable energy was 45% (*Med.3.87*; *SD1.26*). On the contrary, workshops participation for the reduce waste 62% (*Med.1.72*; *SD1.08*) was insufficient.

The research showed that in the attribute Protection of natural habitats plants and animals 64% (*Med.4.33*; *SD1.07*) of respondents confirm that Maintenance of the green areas is extremely good. At the same time, they claim that they insufficiently breed wild animals, feathered and/or large game 83% (*Med.1.39*; *SD0.92*) and protect bees and other insects 40% (*Med.2.85*; *SD1.64*).

By measuring and evaluating the attributes and their descriptions, the value of the environmental determinant were calculated, i.e. extent of the environmental achievements:

Table 2 Weights, ratings and determinant values of the environmental determinant

Attributes	N	Description of the attributes	Importance weights	Ratings	Determinant values
	1	Disposal/organic waste /compost	0.08	4.20	0.35
Waste,	2	Reducing other waste	0.09	4.24	0.36
water,	3	Reducing /water	0.07	3.65	0.27
energy	4	Reducing/energy	0.08	4.07	0.33
	5	Use/renewable energy	0.04	2.04	0.08
<i>Waste, water, energy average value</i>			<i>0.07</i>	<i>3.64</i>	<i>0.27</i>
Environmental awareness	6	Workshops participation/reduce waste	0.03	1.72	0.06

	7	Traditional architecture	0.06	3.22	0.21
	8	Environmental awareness in consumption and food preparation	0.08	3.89	0.31
	9	Knowledge transfer/traditional lifestyle	0.07	3.26	0.21
	10	Introduce/renewable energy	0.08	3.87	0.30
<i>Environmental awareness average value</i>			<i>0.06</i>	<i>3.19</i>	<i>0.21</i>
	11	Organic agriculture/plants and livestock	0.07	3.43	0.24
Protection of natural habitats plants and animal	12	Biodiversity preservation/indigenous plant and animal species/breeds	0.07	3.46	0.24
	13	Maintenance/green areas	0.09	4.33	0.38
	14	Breeding/wild animals	0.03	1.39	0.04
	15	Protection/bees/other bugs	0.06	2.85	0.16
<i>Protection of natural habitats average value</i>			<i>0.06</i>	<i>3.09</i>	<i>0.19</i>
Total value of the environmental determinant			1.00	3.31	3.55

Source: author's calculation

The ranking procedure identified the highest average determinant values in the structure of environmental achievements. Waste disposal, water protection and energy saving stand out as the most valuable attribute with the highest average importance weights 0.07, ratings 3.64 and average value 0.27. In second place is the attribute Environmental awareness, with average importance weights 0.06, average ratings 3.19 and average value 0.21. In the last place, the attribute Protection of natural habitats plants and animals was evaluated with average importance weights 0.06, average ratings 3.09 and average value 0.19. In conclusion, the overall determinant values of the environmental achievements were 3.55. According to research (Li et al. 2024; Faraji Vaghaslo et al. 2023) there are environmental advantages of rural tourism for traditional villages and nature-based tourism are: the optimal use of natural resources, protect traditional landscape, obtain maintenance and protection funds, improved public infrastructure and recreational facilities and ecological protection of rural landscape.

3.2. Evaluation of the socio-cultural achievements in rural touristic entities

The following determinant was evaluated through socio-cultural achievements by analysing structure attributes and their description using Likert scale (1=completely disagree to 5=completely agree):

Table 3 Structure of the socio-cultural determinant (%), mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)

Attributes	N	Description of the attributes	1	2	3	4	5	Σ	M	SD
Social achievements	16	Participation/trainings	30	28	22	7	13	100	2.48	1.38
	17	Up/to/Date educations	20	17	46	7	11	100	2.72	1.17
	18	Needs/new knowledge	0	11	35	20	35	100	3.78	1.04

Cultural achievements	19	Communication/foreign languages	0	11	22	22	46	100	4.02	1.05
	20	Internet daily	0	0	9	20	72	100	4.63	0.64
	21	Participation/local events	11	7	22	28	33	100	3.65	1.29
	22	Preservation/traditional architecture in tourist facility	7	20	22	11	41	100	3.61	1.36
	23	Preservation/culture & storytelling	2	7	15	24	52	100	4.17	1.06
	24	Existing business inheritor	13	9	37	17	24	100	3.30	1.28
Connecting/networking with the local community	25	Importance of family support	9	2	17	30	41	100	3.93	1.12
	26	Participation/creation of local development strategies	37	13	24	9	17	100	2.57	1.48
	27	Cooperation/travel agencies	11	13	24	28	24	100	3.41	1.28
	28	Participation/competitions in the touristic sector	54	13	4	9	20	100	2.26	1.63
	29	Ethical behaviour in communication with: visitors, suppliers and other institutions	9	0	7	11	74	100	4.41	1.19
	30	Shaping local development/associations, cooperatives, clusters or other partnership activities	33	15	13	11	28	100	2.87	1.64

Source: author's calculation

The socio-cultural determinant of sustainability was analyzed through the first attribute, social achievements, in which 72% (*Med.4.63; SD0.64*) of respondents completely agree that they use the Internet daily for business: email, software, databases and other software packages. Preservation of cultural heritage, as an attribute of sustainability, was achieved in the highest proportion in the preservation culture segment through storytelling about the way of life of the local population, with which 52% completely agree (*Med.4.17; SD1.06*). Significant and somewhat smaller shares are related to the preservation of traditional architecture in tourist facility with which they completely agree 41% (*Med.3.61; SD1.36*) and importance of family support with 41% (*Med.3.93; SD1.12*). In the analysis connecting and networking with the local community, the most represented achievement is related to ethical behaviour in communication with: visitors, suppliers and other institutions, with which 74% research respondents (*Med.4.41; SD1.19*) completely agree. The socio-cultural achievements determinant was measuring through the process of weighting and evaluating attributes and their descriptions in order to calculate the overall value of this determinant:

Table 4 Weights, ratings and determinant values of the socio-cultural determinant

Attributes	N	Description of the attributes	Importance weights	Ratings	Determinant values
Social achievements	16	Participation/trainings	0.05	2.43	0.11
	17	Up/to/Date educations	0.05	2.72	0.14
	18	Needs/new knowledge	0.07	3.78	0.28

	19	Communication/foreign languages	0.08	4.02	0.31
	20	Internet daily	0.09	4.63	0.41
	<i>Social achievements average value</i>		<i>0.07</i>	<i>3.52</i>	<i>0.24</i>
	21	Participation/local events	0.07	3.65	0.26
	22	Preservation/traditional architecture in tourist facility	0.07	3.61	0.25
Cultural achievements	23	Preservation/culture & storytelling	0.08	4.17	0.34
	24	Existing business inheritor	0.06	3.30	0.21
	25	Importance of family support	0.08	3.93	0.30
	<i>Cultural achievements average value</i>		<i>0.07</i>	<i>3.73</i>	<i>0.27</i>
	26	Participation/creation of local development strategies	0.05	2.57	0.13
	27	Cooperation/travel agencies	0.07	3.41	0.22
Local community networking	28	Participation/competitions in the touristic sector	0.04	2.26	0.10
	29	Ethical behaviour/communication	0.09	4.41	0.38
	30	Shaping local development/associations, cooperatives or other partnership activities	0.06	2.87	0.16
	<i>Local community networking average value</i>		<i>0.06</i>	<i>3.10</i>	<i>0.19</i>
	<i>Total value of the socio-cultural determinant</i>		<i>1.00</i>	<i>3.45</i>	<i>3.60</i>

Source: author's calculation

Through the calculation process, the highest average determinant values in attributes socio-cultural achievements were determined. The cultural achievement attribute stands out as the most valuable with the highest average importance weights 0.07, ratings 3.73 and average value 0.27. It is followed by social achievement with average importance weights 0.07, ratings 3.52 and average value 0.24. The latest achievements are related to activities in shaping local development through associations, cooperatives, clusters or other partnership activities - they were evaluated with average importance weights 0.06, average ratings 3.10 and average value 0.19. Overall determinant values were 3.60 of the socio-cultural achievements. Regarding the importance of establishing channels of communication among the various stakeholders, Aas et al. (2005) determined that it is important for the preservation of the entire tourism sector, generating income, involving the local community in decision making concerning tourism development and heritage conservation issues, involving the local community in tourism activities and the extent of stakeholder collaboration. Furthermore, results of studies were supported by the fact that residents' attachment to community positively correlated with residents' perceptions towards tourism development. That study provided better understanding of the factors that can have impact on residents' attitudes in relation to tourism and highlighted the importance of paying attention to local community as one of the most significant players for tourism development, especially in those regions that want to boost its economy by developing sustainable tourism (Bajrami et al. 2020; Fong and Lo 2015).

3.3. Evaluation of the economic achievements in rural touristic entities

The third determinant of sustainability was evaluated through economic achievements using attributes and their description. The respondents using a Likert scale from 1=totally dissatisfied to 5= very pleased:

Table 5 Structure of the economic determinant (%), mean (M) and standard deviation (SD)

Attributes	N	Description of the attributes	1	2	3	4	5	Σ	M	SD
Macro economic achievements	31	Satisfaction/cultural & social services	9	22	35	24	11	100	3.37	1.11
	32	Visitors continuity	4	9	43	33	11	100	3.28	0.92
	33	Cooperation/competitors/	7	9	33	37	15	100	3.07	1.06
	34	Satisfaction/taxes, contributions, business costs	28	26	35	9	2	100	2.59	1.04
	35	Satisfaction/support institutions/ subsidies	24	28	22	15	11	100	2.85	1.30
Mezzo economic achievements	36	Income growth	2	17	37	28	15	100	3.35	1.01
	37	Number of reservations	2	13	50	24	11	100	2.89	0.90
	38	New employment	17	28	30	17	7	100	3.46	1.12
	39	Introduction/new products and services (Innovation)	13	26	35	15	11	100	2.30	1.16
	40	Visitors loyalty	0	0	30	30	39	100	2.61	0.83
Micro economic achievements	41	Quality/marketing activities	9	24	41	22	4	100	3.00	0.98
	42	Base/contacts of visitors	15	11	46	15	13	100	4.09	1.18
	43	Satisfaction/selling products at the touristic farm	13	22	43	11	11	100	2.85	1.12
	44	Fulfilment of personal expectations, visions	0	7	50	28	15	100	3.52	0.83
	45	Voluntary work/cooperation without financial support	17	22	41	15	4	100	2.67	1.07

Source: author's calculation

The attributes of economic achievements in sustainable development are divided into macro, mezzo and micro groups. Although in the macro, the representation of a high level of satisfaction is low, it is still possible to single out 15% (*Med.3.07; SD1.06*) claims related to cooperation with competitors in order to jointly offer services and food. In mezzo economic achievements, visitor's loyalty appears in smaller representation, more specifically repeat visits of regular guests, with 39% (*Med.2.61; SD0.83*) claims of the respondents are very pleased.

The last ones are micro economic achievements, where there are low shares of representation of claims with a very pleased level. Despite this, the claim of fulfilment of personal expectations, visions and development of rural tourist entities is represented with a 15% share (*Med.3.52; SD0.83*) which is the most in relation to other opinions

about claims. Economic achievements were analysed by weighting, measuring and evaluating attributes and their descriptions in order to calculate the overall value of this determinant:

Table 6 Weights, ratings and determinant values of the economic determinant

Attributes	N	Description of the attributes	Importance weights	Ratings	Determinant values
Macro economic achievements	31	Satisfaction/cultural & social services	0.07	3.07	0.20
	32	Visitors continuity	0.07	3.37	0.25
	33	Cooperation/competitors/joint offer	0.08	3.46	0.26
	34	Satisfaction/taxes, contributions, business costs	0.05	2.30	0.12
	35	Satisfaction/support institutions/ subsidies	0.06	2.61	0.15
<i>Macro economic achievements average value</i>			<i>0.07</i>	<i>2.96</i>	<i>0.20</i>
Mezzo economic achievements	36	Income growth	0.07	3.37	0.25
	37	Number of reservations	0.07	3.28	0.23
	38	New employment	0.06	2.67	0.16
	39	Introduction/new products and services (Innovation)	0.06	2.85	0.18
	40	Visitors loyalty	0.09	4.09	0.36
<i>Mezzo economic achievements average value</i>			<i>0.06</i>	<i>3.25</i>	<i>0.24</i>
Micro economic achievements	41	Quality/marketing activities	0.06	2.89	0.18
	42	Base/contacts of visitors	0.07	3.00	0.20
	43	Satisfaction/selling products at the touristic farm	0.06	2.85	0.18
	44	Fulfilment of visions and personal expectations	0.08	3.52	0.27
	45	Voluntary work/cooperation without financial compensation	0.06	2.67	0.16
<i>Micro economic average value</i>			<i>0.07</i>	<i>2.99</i>	<i>0.21</i>
Total value of the economic determinant			1.00	3.07	3.15

Source: author's calculation

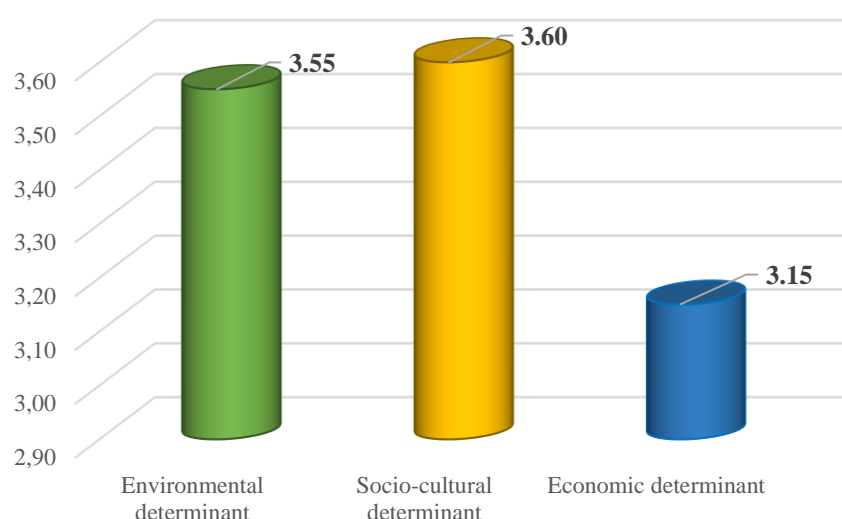
In the process of ranking the calculated values of macro, mezzo and micro attributes of economic achievements, mezzo stands out as the most valuable with the highest average importance weights 0.06, ratings 3.25 and 0.24 average value of the economic achievements. The following attributes are macro and micro with a very small difference in the average value of the economic determinant. Regarding the research results, macro economic achievements have importance weights 0.07, rating 2.96 and average value 0.20 and the result of micro economic achievements is very close with importance weights 0.07, rating 2.99 and average value 0.21. In conclusion, the total value is 3.15 of the economic achievements. According to research findings (Megha and Sarker 2024; Sudarić et al. 2019) shows that tourism gives more stability to rural economy. Growth in

income statement, more employment, high demand for local products, handicrafts, and agricultural products, increased local businesses, infrastructural development, women empowerment in rural area are some outcomes of sustainable rural tourism.

3.4. Monitoring of the achievement's sustainability rural tourist entities

In order to be able to more clearly see the differences between the calculated values of the determinants when researching achievements in the goals of sustainable development of rural tourism, a graphic representation was created:

Figure 2 Overview of the sustainable development monitoring in rural touristic entities
Source: author's creation based on the research results



Values of attributes, their description and total values of determinants that objectively reflect achievements in the realization of the SDGs were calculated using the weighting method. Synthesis of the results of monitoring, evaluation and ranking of researched determinants in tourism entities recognized the highest level of achievements in the sustainability, in order: (1) Socio-cultural achievements, 3.60; (2) Environmental achievements, 3.55 and (3) Economic achievements, 3.15.

According to Saputro et al. (2023) evaluation of the sustainability status of rural tourism confirmed that the strategic priority for development should be based on socio-cultural determinants, education, environmental preservation and agriculture. Wang et al. (2018) propose a revised sustainable livelihoods framework, emphasizing the importance of

offering alternate means of livelihood for traditional villages to achieve long-term sustainability. This will require multi-sector and multi-scale cooperation in order to not only to strengthen cooperation among PA-related governmental departments, but also other stakeholders, including non-governmental institutions and local communities. A more synthetic plan needs to be brought forward instead of multiple and sometimes even contradictory plans made by different departments. This new, more holistic approach should consider the interests of local residents and offer alternative livelihood strategies to help local people adapt to the new strategies. Finally, the academic community has also shown interest in the advancement of traditional industries. The integration of traditional farming practices with the tourism industry is widely recognized as a significant catalyst for the rejuvenation of rural areas, as confirm Shen and Chou (2022).

4. Conclusions

This study monitors, analyzes and evaluates the sustainability status of rural tourism development in Croatian Baranja. The object of the research were rural touristic entities in which achievements in the realization of sustainability are measured, evaluated and ranked through three pillars/determinants of sustainable development: environmental, socio-cultural and economic. The results of the analysis were created using by method of weighting and evaluation of attributes, their descriptions and determinants. The hypothesis was that rural tourist entities in the Croatian Baranja contribute to sustainable development by achieving the most to social development and cultural sustainability.

The results of the research showed that the highest contribution to sustainability is in the socio-cultural determinant (3.60), actually in the values of digital business (0.41) and ethical behaviour in communication with visitors (0.38). Achievements follow, with a small difference in results, to the environmental determinant (3.55) with values in the disposal of organic and other waste (0.35) and the arrangement and maintenance of green areas (0.38). The economic determinant has the lowest level of compared to the previous ones (3.15). When analyzing the attributes, it was found that the most significant achieving sustainability are related to customer loyalty (0.36) and the realization of development visions (0.27) of rural tourism entities. As a final result, sustainable development in rural tourism in Croatian Baranja has a strategic comparative advantage in social development and cultural sustainability.

The adoption of information from this paper contributes to institutional, administrative and economic reforms that are necessary for sustainable rural tourism. The possibilities of applying the research results can be two-way - through continued support and improvement of socio-cultural conditions that create sustainability to the greatest extent and/or by strengthening institutional activities that directly affect the economic empowerment of rural tourism entities.

As in many similar studies, this one faced several challenges. At the beginning, in creating and designing an analytical model in which determinants, attributes and their descriptions were formed. In this part of the research process, previous research was

used, but it is mostly about the subjective observations and experiences of the author. The next challenge was to collect data on the respondent's opinions and attitudes. The invitation to participate in the survey was repeated through three online calls and several verbal requests to tourist boards.

Recommendations for future research are offered in the guidelines for improvements in terms of creating more indicators to measure the achievement of sustainable development goals, statistical data processing, and comparative research to identify differences, recognize development limitations, and highlight examples of good practice in the implementation of sustainable rural tourism.

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH CULTURAL ROUTES AND TRAILS

Preliminary communication

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Abstract:

The aim of the article is to analyse the current state of valorisation of the cultural and tourist route “The Routes of the Frankopans” in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County in Croatia and to define goals and concrete proposals for the innovation of the content, promotion and sustainable development management of the cultural route, taking into account the development of rural destinations. In the context of the challenges of modern tourism and sustainability, cultural routes are developing into a significant tourism product, created to familiarise visitors with local history, tradition and indigenous values. The research methodology includes an analysis of trends pertaining to the cultural route “The Routes of the Frankopans”, case analyses, situation and scenario analyses of the route’s sustainable development, and its multiplier effect on tourism revitalization in rural micro destinations. Structured interviews were conducted with tourist board managers of the rural micro destinations along the route and with the main actors in profiling and managing the sustainable development of the cultural route. The study’s main results refer to identifying the competitiveness of the cultural route “The Routes of the Frankopans”, providing a situation analysis of the route, and putting forward concrete guidelines and proposals to improve the route’s offering, thus improving the tourism development of cultural destinations. The cultural route opens up opportunities for strengthening the tourism development and positioning of 14 micro destinations, as a generator for the creation of competitive advantages based on linking all stakeholders, and on the active involvement of the local population and tourists as co-creators based on market research and knowledge transfer. The contribution of the research is that it proposes concrete action and activities based on an analysis of the cultural route’s development trends and on an analysis of the views of the main stakeholders, aimed at renewing the content of the cultural route “The Routes of the Frankopans” and synergistically linking 14 micro destinations into a unique and immersive tourist experience.

Keywords:

Cultural routes, rural destinations, tourism development.

1. Introduction

In the past decade, destination management organizations have shown a growing interest in designing new cultural routes, roads or trails in tourist destinations or in incorporating destination resources into already existing cultural routes. Creating cultural routes is particularly important in tourist destinations in rural areas, as such routes, linked by similar themes and features, help to connect, unite and promote rural areas. The development of cultural routes in Europe has been encouraged by the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme, launched in 1987 to showcase shared European cultural heritages. Each Cultural Route is representative of European values that are common to at least three countries, and, as a result of shared European memory, history, heritage and identity, it contributes towards the interpretation of Europe's diversity (Trupković 2012). The first Cultural Route proposed by the Council of Europe was the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Route. Up to date, the Council of Europe has certified 48 Cultural Routes, 17 of which pass through Croatia.

From early initiatives and shared presentation of specific themes, cultural routes, trails and roads have evolved into important tourism products, particularly in rural areas. Cultural routes can be designed across all levels to link cultural heritage, interpret historical and traditional values and indigenous elements, and be integrated into other elements of a tourism offering. It is vital that cultural routes in tourist destinations in rural areas are identified as innovative tourism products that can enable regional development. Hence, this paper investigates the role of cultural routes, roads and trails in developing tourism in rural areas, and its aim is to determine how the present and future role of cultural routes, roads and trails in rural areas is perceived by tourist destination stakeholders.

2. Literature review: cultural routes in rural tourist destinations

ICOMOS (2008) provided one of the first definitions of "cultural route", stating that a cultural route is any communication route by land, water or other means that is physically defined and is characterised by its own specific dynamic and historical functionality to serve a specific and well-established purpose. A cultural route can be seen as a combination of three elements: the geographical region within which attractions and areas of interest are located; a theme, linking different parts of a route; and tourism products and services, provided to visitors to various destinations included in a route (Pattanaro, Pistocchi 2016). The Council of Europe (2011) groups related activities within cultural routes into four categories: restoration and preservation of heritage; raising awareness of cultural heritage; marketing and business development; and commercialisation of cultural attractions and products. A cultural route refers to a collection of points of interest (POI) encompassing a specific geographical region and

sharing comparable attributes, a central theme and distinctive architectural or historical features, together with facilities, natural landscapes and buildings. A cultural route seeks to create a link between the past and the present of a given region, town or settlement (Iakovaki, Konstantakis, Teneketzis, Konstantakis 2023). Zebbini (2012) sees cultural itineraries as a novel approach that involves cultural heritage and provides new perspectives and tools for heritage protection. Cultural routes are a synergy between visits to cultural sites and tourist mobility (Idajati, Nugroho 2018).

Cultural routes are becoming ever more important given the conditions and challenges of post-pandemic tourism. Concurrently, cultural routes are becoming the subject of scientific studies with regard to determining situational and scenario analyses, valorising cultural preconditions, generating innovation-based competitive advantages, destination branding, effects on a destination's competitiveness and development, synergistic development management, and focus on sustainable development (Dayoub, Yang, Dayoub, Omran, Li 2020; Timothy 2018; Cojocariu, 2015, Ramirez 2011). It should be noted that for a cultural route to function properly within a tourism offering, it needs to have financial backing, legal status, marketing and promotional activities, together with cooperation among stakeholders and activities to raise awareness of sustainable heritage development and to create an integrated offering (Rudan, 2022). Furthermore, as pointed out by Rudan, Stipanović and Zubović (2024), stakeholder cooperation is the basis of any cultural itinerary and is needed to ensure its sustainability.

In valorising the opportunities of cultural routes in generating competitiveness, it is key to ensure the systematic management of sustainable development based on knowledge transfer and research, the synergistic action of stakeholders, space and infrastructure, structure and organization as well as ensuring the involvement of tourists and local residents in creating a unique tourist experience (Zhou, Buhalis, Fan, Ladkin, Lian 2024; Melis, McCabe, Atzeni, Del Chiappa 2023). When developing cultural routes, it is also essential to ensure the sustainable valorisation of cultural assets by synergistically linking attraction elements, in order to design an active experience of culture by bringing together the local population, entrepreneurs and tourists in creating new value (Manal, Madjid, Salah 2023; Pedrosa, Martins, Breda 2022). At the same time, cultural routes should have a multiplier effect on the development of entrepreneurship and the region to ensure the sustainable valorisation of cultural wealth, local development, and sustainable tourism in rural micro destinations (Zouridaki, Apostolakis, Joao, Kourgiantakis 2022; Goral 2016). In particular, cultural routes have the ability to connect rural destinations and valorise them in terms of tourism. The development of European cultural routes is of vital importance for the expansion of cultural tourism, promoting lesser-known destinations in most cases and focusing largely (90%) on rural regions (Cojocariu 2015). By developing cultural routes, rural areas can ensure tourism development and, in turn, regional development, especially through entrepreneurial initiatives. Stipanović and

Rudan (2021) point out that a resource base and activities facilitate tourism development in rural regions, with the predominant types of tourism being based on indigenous features and specific landscape features, as well as on the tangible and intangible elements of heritage identified by the inhabitants of rural regions. Identifying resources in rural regions is vital in bringing together resource bases and attraction bases in a cultural route. Also essential to further development is the provision of continuous education and training for personnel in rural regions, considering that tourism business entities in urban areas have more choice on the labour market (Madžar, Madžar 2016). Rural regions are important because, according to Čagalj et al. (2021), they account for the majority of territory in the European Union (90%) and are home to over 56% of its population. This is even more so in Croatia where rural regions cover 97.5% of the country's territory and contain 78.9% of its population.

3. Research methodology

The study analyses the current state of the cultural route “The Routes of the Frankopans” and puts forward concrete proposals for innovating the offering and promotion and improving the sustainable development management of the cultural route as a driver and multiplier in revitalising the tourism valorisation of the rural destinations that the route links. The research is based on structured interviews with stakeholders of the cultural-tourist route “The Routes of the Frankopans”. The interviews were conducted according to pre-prepared questions and took place during March and April 2024. A total of 9 persons were interviewed, of which 4 are engaged in tourists boards, 1 in an association operating in the route, and 4 in regional and local self-government units. Key questions in the interview refer to the attractiveness of the offering's elements and the distinctiveness of the cultural route, the role of the route in developing tourism in rural areas, how the route is managed, and objectives and concrete proposals for offering and promotion innovation, in view of the results of situation analysis and financial and personnel potential. Special emphasis is placed on assessing the connection between and the synergistic activities of all stakeholders, in particular residents and tourists as co-creators of the offering, in generating and multiplying tourism business and activating rural tourist destinations.

4. Analysis of the current state of the cultural-tourist route “The Routes of the Frankopans”

The cultural-tourist route “The Routes of the Frankopans” was created in three phases, from 2005 to 2021, within the framework of the EU project HERA using grants from EU structural funds. The route evokes the spirit of the Frankopans as witnesses to the times and spirit of Croatia's rich history (Law Code of Vinodol of 1288) from AD 118 to 1657 (from Dujmo I up to the execution of Fran Krsto Frankopan) and presents it in the form

of a unique experience geared to the tourists of today and tomorrow in conditions of digital transformation. The route stretches across Primorje-Gorski Kotar County in Croatia, and encompasses the Littoral region, the island of Krk, and the highland region of Gorski Kotar. Focusing on castles, fortified towns overlooking the sea, endowments, battles, victories and defeats, diplomatic games and conspiracies, personal dramas and national turning points, this cultural route connects the following micro destinations: Čabar, Delnice, Ravna Gora, Vrbovsko, Grobnik, Trsat (Rijeka), Bakar, Kraljevica, Crikvenica, Vinodol, Novi Vinodolski, Vrbnik, Punat, and Krk, and Interpretation Centres in Čabar, Brod na Kupi, Grobnik, Trsat, Bakar, Kraljevica, Bribir and Krk.

The cultural-tourist route is managed by Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, together with the Maritime and Historical Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, while the castles and Interpretation Centres are managed by local government and self-government units and the Diocese of Krk. The County is tasked with bringing together stakeholders, ensuring the involvement of local residents, organizing events, workshops and training, and building the route's brand. Key issues centre on how to sustainably valorise this vastly rich cultural and historical heritage, and how to present it to tourists and residents and transform it into must-visit attractions. The route plays a special role in driving tourism development in rural micro destinations and in generating a multiplier effect for the entire economy. The Frankopan heritage and route is presented in a variety of ways – through events, exhibitions, theatrical performances, Medieval workshops, workshops for children and toddlers, interesting interpretations, and excursions to some of the locations along the route. Activities also include designing promotional material, creating an enogastronomic offering, and brand building.

5. Research results

In the course of the interviews, all the respondents underlined the importance that the cultural route has in presenting the Frankopan heritage in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County and in designing an innovative cultural-tourism offering (cultural, gastronomic, outdoors offering, etc.). The cultural route provides a new tourism experience to tourists staying in this region.

Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, as the regional self-government, is engaged in branding and promoting the cultural route, while other activities are carried out at the level of municipalities and towns. One of the tourist board representatives stated, “This is a good product for the micro destination and as a supplement to the tourism offering, but in no way is it a primary motivation for travelling to our destination”. “For our destination, this is a praiseworthy project and the best project for our cultural and historical heritage, and our tourist board is deeply and actively involved in it”. The association representative commented that the project has reinforced the distinctiveness of the cultural and

historical heritage linked to the Frankopans. Local residents actively participate in the programmes and events organised in the Interpretation Centres. The route's offering depends on the engagement and creativity of the individual activity providers and on the organising of various events, presentations, theatrical performances, festivals, and organised visits, especially of schoolchildren.

With regard to weaknesses, the local self-government representative pointed out that the ownership structure of certain Interpretation Centres is the reason why the route is insufficiently connected and that local communities possess neither the strength nor the knowledge to further strengthen the offering within their territories. She went on to say that "there is not enough incentive from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport for the development of cultural routes, and travel agencies are not interested in new products because of the existing tourist attractions in their vicinity, such as the Plitvice Lakes. Travel agencies simply have no interest in this new product". Furthermore, the cultural-tourism route is also poorly promoted by other tourism supply providers, in particular accommodation providers. One stakeholder drew attention to the issue of disconnect between tourist boards and hoteliers, with hoteliers not being interested in promoting tourist activities outside the hotel, and went on to point out that the idea that castle ruins are at the forefront of a tourist experience is wrong. A regional self-government representative sees as an issue the fact that better-developed tourist destinations have no need during the winter months (outside the high season) to coordinate and participate in organising events and activities along the route. Tourist board representatives said that local entrepreneurs are not overly interested in becoming more actively involved in the route's offering. They agree that despite significant efforts in devising promotional strategies (the route's brand, promotional strategies, designing souvenirs such as the DeliciAna Cake, Frankopan bread, Frankopan wine, umbrellas), the route is still insufficiently distinctive.

One tourist board representative stated, "The organisation of activities has been handed down to local self-government units. There would be greater success if they had remained at the level of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, that conceived and started the project, furnished the Interpretation Centres and repaired some of the fortresses along the cultural route". The stakeholders also centred on the issue of managing the route and the poor linkage and communication between the castles and Interpretation Centres. A tourist board representative referred to yet another weakness: "It is indeed the lack of financial and personnel power that is impeding further development; nevertheless, a tourism offering along the cultural route does exist and needs to be improved upon and included in all events and happenings that are organised". This was also confirmed by another tourist board representative who reported that "by overcoming personnel and financial challenges, the tourism offering of the cultural route as a cultural-tourism product can be improved". Other issues involved the inability to charge fees for visiting

the castle and Interpretation Centres and to sell souvenirs, which in turn makes it impossible to finance new facilities, services and employees.

Based on the situational analysis, objectives need to be set that will ensure the enhanced valorisation of the cultural route, revolving around the design of an innovative offering, improved promotion and a new sustainable development management model founded on stakeholder synergy.

6. Discussion

The development objectives of cultural-tourism route “The Routes of the Frankopans” are focused on encouraging offering and promotion innovation and on ensuring more effective sustainable-development management. The route’s objectives need to be aligned with the tourism development vision of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, a diverse, high-quality and innovative destination of sustainable development that provides tourists year-round with unique immersive experiences in the Croatian Littoral, on its islands and in the highlands, while ensuring good working and living conditions for the local population. The diversity of the Kvarner region’s offering is reflected in the diversity of the cultural-tourism route “The Routes of the Frankopans”. The valorisation of the route needs to be grounded on an innovated management model and on synergistic action that will highlight the special features of each micro destination, in particular in rural areas, together with quality and excellence. Although the route has become an integral part of the County’s cultural-tourism offering, the various micro destinations still remain poorly connected within the framework of their shared cultural and historical heritage. The cultural route positively impacts tourism development and is bringing about changes that help to improve the destination’s offering (events, outdoor activities, food and wine offering, etc.). The most important aspect is establishing how the route is to be managed, considering that the management of the individual parts of the route is poorly coordinated and connected, while the municipalities and towns along the route lack the personnel and financial resources to independently develop this tourism product. Training and education is required for interpreters in the local communities, and towns and municipalities should encourage invitations to tender not only to valorise the Frankopan heritage but also to promote the participation of the local communities in programmes and projects carried out.

The sustainability of the cultural route and the engagement of all stakeholders in creating tourism products in rural areas is also of the utmost importance. To this end, the need was highlighted for establishing an institution that would involve all municipalities and towns. A regional government representative also pointed out that support to and initiatives for the cultural route are stronger in micro destinations that are less developed in terms of tourism. The local population needs to be educated on the importance of the

Frankopan heritage, to not only improve their knowledge of their own history but also to improve opportunities for entrepreneurial initiatives and activity within the framework of this cultural route. Efforts are required to strengthen the local community to be able to identify and take advantage of opportunities in boosting the distinctiveness of a shared theme – the abundant cultural and historical history of the Frankopan family. Without an understanding of the past, it is impossible to understand the present or create the future. This pertains in particular to poorly recognised rural tourism destinations, in which the cultural-tourism route “The Routes of the Frankopans” needs to become a major motivation for tourist arrivals and an opportunity for the tourism valorisation of micro destinations. Preconditions to this involve raising the awareness of the local population of the fact that they could make a good living out of tourism, and networking entrepreneurial undertakings based on sustainable agriculture, local eno-gastronomy and relief from stressful urban life. The stakeholders stress the need to better connect the route’s offering with the offerings of the micro destinations; design novel innovative products based on traditional heritage and customs, particularly in rural destinations; introduce new digital solutions to better represent the route; devise new events based on the Frankopan heritage; and connect events in the destinations to events in fortresses and castles along the route. The cultural-tourist route should be linked with the gastronomic offering, outdoor activities, cultural events, etc. to promote a joint integrated offering. Joint promotion is also required for the project to take its place in the overall tourism offering of the Kvarner region and to become an engine for revitalising tourist destinations, in particular rural micro destinations. A precondition is circular creativity and networking to facilitate joint research and knowledge transfer in generating new strategic directions to achieve sustainable development (Horvat, Mijoč, Plaščak 2022). Furthermore, the continuous and systematic linkage of all route stakeholders – destination management organisations, entrepreneurs, associations and local residents – is essential to ensure the sustained innovation and enrichment of the route’s offering and promotion to generate a competitive tourism product grounded on a rich history as well on innovated elements of the tourism.

7. Conclusion

Cultural routes connect rural tourist destinations through a shared theme. They are an important cultural-tourism product linking the valuable heritage of rural destinations. Over the past decade, destination management organisations have shown a continuously growing interest in the creation of cultural routes, paths and roads.

The results of research and interviews with key stakeholders in the cultural route “The Routes of the Frankopans”, presented in this paper, confirm that the route’s offering is continuously being enriched with a variety of events such as enogastronomic events, theatrical performances and workshops, through the involvement of the local population,

associations and local entrepreneurs. In term of marketing, however, the route is not as distinctive as it could be and has weak brand recognition. In most cases it represents an auxiliary element of the offering of rural destinations and is not a primary travel motivation for tourists to these destinations. A key issue refers to route management and to the poor networking of tourism facilities and services, which despite the synergistic action of the County are not based on systematic management and sustainable development but instead depend on the knowledge, enthusiasm and financial means of the local government and self-government units that manage the individual resource bases along the cultural route.

It is essential that sustainable development in rural tourist destinations is systemically managed, with all stakeholders and micro destinations striving to develop their own, specific offerings and create additional attractions to enhance the cultural route's competitiveness and distinctiveness, while overcoming personnel and financial challenges. The inadequate connectedness of the route is an issue of ownership structure. Through systematic improvements to and networking of business elements across all levels and by connecting with other attractions elements of the offering to valorise local specific features and Frankopan heritage, the route has the potential to become a key travel motivation, a driver of tourism development in rural micro destinations and a tourism brand of the Kvarner region. Future research should focus on tourists and visitors to the cultural route "The Routes of the Frankopans", with a view to further improving the offering and adjusting it to the modern demands of the tourism market.

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ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES OF RURAL TOURISTS IN CROATIA - COMPARISON OF COASTAL AND IN-LAND RURAL AREAS

Review paper

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Abstract:

This paper aims to profile rural tourists and compare those visiting rural destinations in coastal and in-land areas. Data analysis is based on the TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023 survey on tourist demand, conducted by the Institute for Tourism. Utilising the OECD's classification based on a population density threshold, from the sample of the cities and municipalities where the TOMAS survey was conducted 69 cities and municipalities were identified as rural in coastal counties and 31 in in-land counties. The sample size was 5,290 respondents in coastal and 2,067 in in-land rural areas. The analysis revealed significant differences between coastal and in-land rural tourism demand. In-land rural destinations attract significantly more domestic tourists; tourism seasonality is less pronounced; rural tourists in in-land areas tend to be older on average; they are more likely to travel alone or with a partner, and they are more often on business trips, visiting friends or relatives, or travelling for health reasons. When seeking information, tourists in in-land rural destinations rely more on online travel agencies and websites of accommodation facilities; the average stay in in-land rural destinations is significantly shorter, and tourists report higher satisfaction with various elements of the tourism offer compared to rural destinations in coastal counties. The results highlight the distinct characteristics of rural tourism demand, revealing the diversity in preferences, behaviours, and satisfaction between tourists in rural destinations of coastal and in-land areas. These insights can help in tailoring tourism policies and marketing strategies to suit the needs and wishes of tourists better.

Keywords:

rural tourism, rural tourists, tourists' profile, tourists' attitudes

1. Determination of rural areas

Rural tourism takes place in rural areas and is one of the key contributors to the sustainability of these areas. By including the natural and cultural-historical heritage and local products and services in the tourist offer, it is possible to contribute to the preservation of primary food production and increase the multiplying economic impacts of tourism, thereby influencing a higher living standard and preventing the outflow of the population from rural areas.

Gregory et al. (2009) define rural areas as areas dominated by agriculture and forestry, small settlements of less centralisation with a pronounced connection to the landscape

that most perceive as rural, areas that encourage a lifestyle that respects the environment and one's own life. Tubić (2019) includes customs and village identity, i.e. cultural and social characteristics in the concept of rural area. Koščak (2020) describes the rural area as a source of food, supply of water, energy, forests, metals, minerals and other life-enabling resources and space with exceptional, untouched natural resources, cultural and living heritage expressed through the everyday life of people over the centuries. Miljenović et al. (2016) state that the urban and rural areas could be determined primarily by the existence of cities as urban entities and municipalities as rural areas. This approach is not always applicable, primarily because some municipalities have more inhabitants and a population density threshold than some cities. The OECD regional typology could offer more appropriate criteria. It is based on criteria of population density and size of the urban centres located within a region. The methodology consists of three main steps (OECD, 2011):

1. Classifying "local units" (administrative entities at a geographical level lower than TL3) as rural if their population density is below 150 inhabitants per square kilometre.
2. Aggregating this lower level (local units) into TL3 regions and classifying the latter as "predominantly urban" (if the share of the population living in rural local units is below 15%), "intermediate" (if the share is between 15% and 50%); and "predominantly rural" (if the share is higher than 50%).
3. The third step takes into account the size of the urban centres contained in the TL3 regions and adjusts the classification based on the following rules: a region classified as predominantly rural in steps 1 and 2 becomes intermediate if it contains an urban centre of more than 200 thousand inhabitants representing at least 25% of the regional population; a region classified as intermediate predominantly urban if it contains an urban centre of more than 500 thousand inhabitants.

Following the OECD's classification, in the first step, all counties of the Republic of Croatia, except for the City of Zagreb, could be considered as rural areas. The population density in the City of Zagreb is over 150 inhabitants per square meter (1,197 inhabitants per square meter). The City of Zagreb is the only city (county) in Croatia with over 200,001 inhabitants (767,131 inhabitants, 27.61% of the total population of Croatia). In the second step, sixteen Croatian counties were classified as predominantly rural areas. In some of those counties, there are good practices of rural tourism based mainly on agricultural traditions, wine landscapes, protected nature, and similar. That is the main reason why the cities and municipalities with up to 150 inhabitants per square meter were chosen over the counties in the research for this paper. However, cities and municipalities were divided into in-land and coastal areas based on their location. If they are located in the coastal county, they could combine the seaside with rural offers because of their proximity to the sea.

2. Creation of rural tourism offer

The Action Plan for Tourism Development of Rural Areas in the Republic of Croatia (Kunst and Ivandić, 2015) gives examples of good practices from France, Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Austria, with themes more or less differentiated from country to country:

bioproduction and agricultural production, wellness, child-friendly households and farms, horse riding, cycling, wine, picking medicinal/aromatic herbs, educational programs, sports activities, cultural and traditional activities, religious and cultural activities, recreational activities, vernacular architecture, fishing, national parks and nature parks, wintering and other themes. The catalogue "Rural Tourism of Croatia" (2015) included natural resources such as national parks, nature parks, drywall landscapes, vineyards, olive groves and folk culture: traditional architecture, crafts, culinary arts, folklore and legends. Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism (Chandrashekara and Nagaraju 2014). Many authors (Ye et al, 2019; Komppula, 2014; Grujo Vrkljan and Galeković, 2023) point out that rural tourism often has its initial development or central role in family tourism agricultural farms or plantations or small family hotels and accommodations.

Successful rural tourism destinations are those that have:

- agricultural tradition and reputation for growing certain crops or farming;
- local people appreciating and have pride in their traditions;
- the ability of local producers to embrace innovation in the production and preparation of food, accommodation, or any other traditional activity according to tourists' preferences;
- proximity to urban centres, which brings a concentration of demand and a source of talent and investors;
- the accommodation which can be offered in small family hotels, glamps, camps, tents, local family homestays or guesthouses, or revived manors and fortresses;
- a concentration of restaurants, shops, and tour organisers to offer excursions and trips, all involved in the value chain;
- events and products such as local markets, food or wine or living history festivals, experiences where tourists can participate in the host's activities (planting and harvesting olives, grapes, herbs and plants or in the processing or preparation of food and beverages, etc.), familiarisation with traditional crafts and participation in workshops, gastronomic roads and tours such as wine roads, olive oil roads, or any other theme emerging from the area specialisation, visits to local producers or farmers, visitor centres, cooking classes, farm-to-table dining experiences and other;
- various activities such as horseback riding, cycling, walking in nature, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, rafting and canoeing, bird watching, or wellness programs;
- the stories which allow guests to immerse themselves locally;
- the readiness of the infrastructure, primarily traffic connections, public transport, tourist signage, the arrangement of roads, cycling and pedestrian paths, etc.

The purpose of such an offer is to attract tourists and ensure their multi-day stay by enriching their experience. All those attractions and infrastructure should offer and provide the core experiences in rural tourism, which are relaxing, learning, and

socialising. Rural tourism is more than just staying in rural areas; it is a social and cultural exchange, an affirmation and renewal of community identity based on hospitality.

Rural tourism is deeply rooted in the traditions and landscapes of rural areas, and its benefits stretch beyond tourism to agriculture and food production, promoting environmentally friendly and traditional practices that influence overall sustainable development. Rural areas can capitalise on their cultural and gastronomic heritage to attract tourists and offer an authentic and unique cultural experience. It supports local economies and the well-being of local communities by creating demand for local products based on the consumption of locally sourced and seasonal ingredients, contributing to the preservation of primary food production; it supports local farmers and producers, generating income for small-scale producers, creating jobs, reversing out-migration processes, raising the living standard of local communities and stimulate economic growth in rural areas. Shortening supply chains helps in reducing the negative impact of tourism and transport on the environment. It supports the preservation of biodiversity and promotes environmental sustainability, enhancing the well-being of visitors. Nevertheless, it contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage by restoration of buildings, areas and manifestations of significant historical, cultural and natural values.

3. Who are rural tourists?

Analysis of the difference in the quality of life in rural and urban areas (Eurofound, 2014) shows that in some countries of the European Union (Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Hungary), the quality of life is lower in rural areas, while some other countries (France, Austria, Germany, Ireland) rate the quality of life in urban areas as lower. Since more than 90% of the territory of the European Union is a rural area, it is not surprising the role that a strategic sector such as tourism can play in the implementation of this concept is emphasised in various policies, programs and related financial support of the European Union (Camatti et al., 2022). More and more tourists, especially during and after Covid-19, are seeking rural surroundings for their vacation and well-being.

Rural tourists are generally experienced travellers from higher socioeconomic groups and are highly educated (CBI, 2018). They are willing to pay more if they get a quality immersive experience including authenticity, good organisation, hospitable staff, experienced guides and safety. Tourists today, escaping from urban environments' busy lives and in search of digital "detoxification", choose rural environments in search of authentic values, natural beauty, rich gastronomy, getting to know a culture different from their own which all requires a certain degree of contact and closeness with the host in a natural, social and cultural context, which confirms hospitality in the true sense (Vrkljan and Galeković, 2023). They like authentic, small-scale accommodation run by local people, preferably reflecting the authentic rural heritage of the area. Freedom and flexibility are also important, especially for families. Rural tourism is popular among Europe's older age group of 50–70, with their children moving out or entering retirement; older travellers generally seek higher levels of comfort than younger groups (CBI, 2018).

Analysing the tourists' attitudes in coastal destinations in Slovenia, Vodeb and Nemec Rudež (2010:79-80) found that almost half of the respondents would like to spend their vacation in rural areas of Slovenian Istrian countryside; besides accommodation and ecologically produced food, they are interested in touring, hiking, wine tasting and wine roads, nature parks, bike paths, food preparation workshops, tennis and horseback riding. According to the Rural Tourism Quality Survey 2009-2010 (LCTA, 2010:3) conducted on a sample of 3487 respondents from 55 countries, the respondents associate rural tourism with active vacation (riding, cycling, hiking, etc. - 19%), bed and breakfast or room in a country house (18%), and the agricultural farm with domestic animals (agro-tourism - 17%). The most popular booking method (70%) among the respondents is directly with the homeowner. The study shows that as a reliable source of information for travel planning, travellers consider Internet resources, friends' and colleagues' advice, and personal experience. Travel agencies and tourist trade fairs are the least important information sources.

A two-year study conducted in Southern Germany (Opperman, 1996) revealed that rural tourism demand was essentially domestic, made of individuals who travel in small groups with less than six members.

Many authors recognise that rural tourism is made up of individuals with different characteristics, needs, and wants (Barke, 2004; Frochot, 2005; Lane, 1994). Knowledge of the characteristics and preferences of rural tourists is of fundamental importance in providing a suitable offer and developing tourism policies which will support the sustainable development of rural areas. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have compared the characteristics and attitudes of tourists in coastal rural and in-land rural areas. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to:

- profile rural tourists;
- compare those visiting rural destinations in coastal and in-land counties of the Republic of Croatia as a case study;
- contribute to the further development of rural tourism.

4. Methodology

Utilising the OECD's classification, the rural areas were defined based on a population density threshold of up to 150 inhabitants per square meter in both in-land and coastal areas.

A descriptive analysis of physical tourism flows (tourist arrivals and overnight stays) in rural areas was conducted using data from an eVisitor system. The eVisitor is a central electronic system for registration and deregistration of tourists in the Republic of Croatia. By law, all accommodation service providers must use this system to register their overnight guests. The system is accessible online as a web application; it is free of charge for its users. It requires no installation on a computer (gov.hr/en/tourist-registration-and-deregistration/1432). It also enables real-time reporting, providing both a global and highly detailed overview of tourism indicators by destination, country of tourist's origin, type and category of accommodation facility, season/month and similar while ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of personal data.

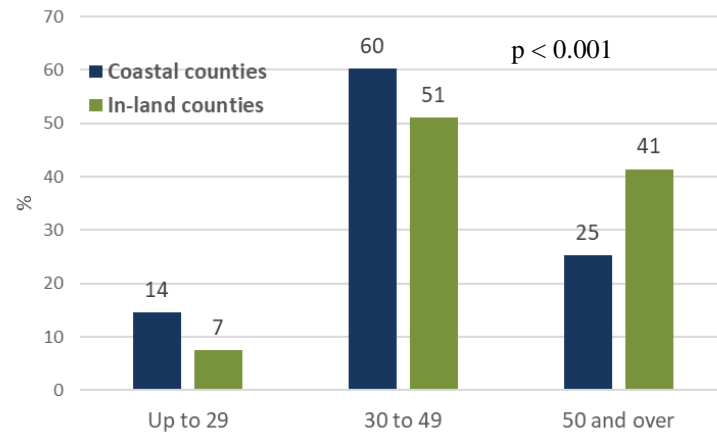
The analysis of rural tourists' profiles was based on the Survey on Attitudes and Expenditures of Tourists in Croatia (TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023 survey). The TOMAS Survey is longitudinal research on tourist demand characteristics in the Republic of Croatia, conducted by the Institute for Tourism since 1987. The latest survey in the series was conducted in 2022/2023 on a sample of 14,632 respondents, both domestic and foreign tourists, in 148 destinations. Among these, 69 cities and municipalities in coastal counties and 31 in in-land counties were identified as rural destinations. The total sample size for rural destinations in the TOMAS survey was 7,357 respondents (5,290 respondents in coastal and 2,067 in in-land counties). The difference in tourism demand characteristics between coastal and in-land areas was tested using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test for continuous variables and the Chi-square test for categorical variables. P-value of 0.05 or less was considered as evidence of statistical significance.

5. Results

The analysis of tourism flows in rural destinations revealed that the coastal rural destinations are heavily reliant on foreign tourism demand as the majority of arrivals and overnights are realised by foreign tourists; they have heavily pronounced tourism seasonality as the majority of arrivals and overnights are realised during the summer months; the most of arrivals and overnights are realised in family accommodation (rooms, apartments), followed by campsites and hotels. On the other hand, in-land rural destinations attract more domestic tourists (43%) compared to rural destinations in coastal counties (11%); the distribution of tourist arrivals and overnights is more even throughout the year with the less pronounced tourism seasonality; the most arrivals and overnights are realised in hotel accommodation, followed by family accommodation, while the arrivals and overnights in campsites are the least represented.

In general, the rural tourists are mostly (58%) middle-aged (30 to 49 years old), 30% of them are over 50 years and the minority (12%) is younger than 29 years. However, the age distribution of rural tourists between those staying in in-land and coastal destinations is significantly different ($p < 0.001$, Figure 1). Rural tourists of 50 years of age and older are more represented in in-land destinations, while the youngest and middle-aged rural tourists are more represented in coastal destinations (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Age distribution of rural tourists in in-land and coastal destinations

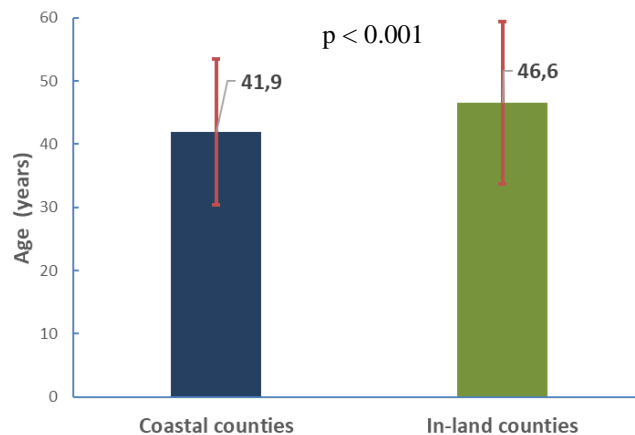


Note: p-value from Chi-square test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Consequently, rural tourists in in-land destinations tend to be older on average (47 years) in comparison to those visiting coastal destinations (42 years, $p < 0.001$, Figure 2).

Figure 2 The mean age of rural tourists in in-land and coastal destinations

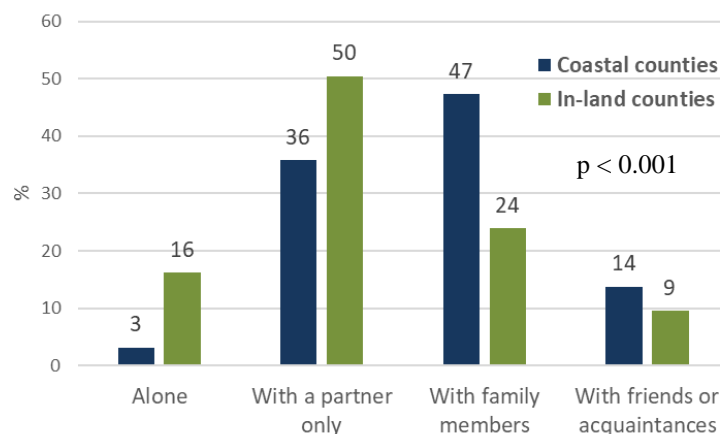


Note: p-value from Wilcoxon rank-sum test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Most rural tourists in Croatia travel with family members (41%) or with a partner (41%); 7% of them travel alone and 12% with friends. Tourists travelling to coastal rural destinations are travelling more often with family members or friends than those travelling to in-land rural destinations. In in-land rural destinations, there are more trips without a travel party or with a partner only ($p < 0.001$, Figure 3).

Figure 3 Rural tourist travel party when travelling to in-land and coastal rural destinations

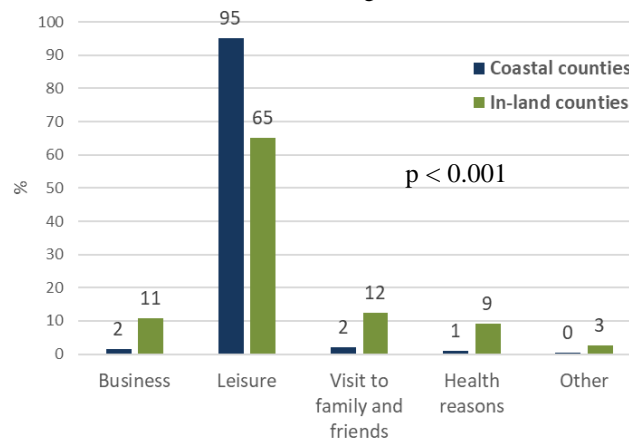


Note: p-value from Chi-square test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Tourists travelling to rural destinations in in-land counties, in comparison to those travelling to rural destinations in coastal counties, are more often on business trips, visiting friends or relatives, or travelling for health reasons ($p < 0.001$, Figure 4). This finding is in line with findings on travel party of rural tourists in in-land destinations since those on business trips, visiting friends and relatives or travelling for health reasons are more often travelling alone or with a partner only. The vast majority (95%) of tourists travelling to rural destinations in coastal counties are motivated by leisure motives.

Figure 4 Travel motives of rural tourists travelling to in-land and coastal rural destinations



Note: p-value from Chi-square test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Visiting rural landscapes and villages, enjoying wellness and SPA treatments, and hiking and walking in nature are significantly more pronounced motives for rural tourists travelling to in-land destinations (Table 1). A significant difference in motivation was

also found for the sea and nature, which motivates more rural tourists to visit rural destinations in coastal destinations. There are no significant differences in the proportion of tourists motivated by gastronomy or city breaks between the in-land and coastal rural destinations.

Table 1 Leisure motives of rural tourists in in-land and coastal rural destinations

Leisure motives	Coastal rural destinations (%)	In-land rural destinations (%)	p-value
The sea	76	-	-
Nature	68	44	<0.001
Gastronomy	18	17	NS
City break	16	14	NS
Touring/sightseeing	11	7	<0.001
Entertainment/festivals	9	1	<0.001
Other sports and recreation	8	2	<0.001
Hiking/walking	8	16	<0.001
Events	8	2	<0.001
Culture and art	8	1	<0.001
Villages/rural areas	7	24	<0.001
Wellness/thermal spa	2	32	<0.001
Cycling/mountain biking	1	1	NS

Note: p-value from Chi-square test, NS – not significant

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

There are significant differences in the use of information sources in trip planning between rural tourists in in-land and coastal destinations. When seeking information, tourists in in-land rural destinations rely significantly more on online travel agencies and websites of accommodation facilities than those in coastal destinations (Table 2). Those in coastal destinations use all other information sources significantly more. In coastal destinations, rural tourists collect information from several sources. The recommendations of friends and relatives, as well as experience and contacts from previous stays, are also the primary sources. These findings call for investments in the implementation of service culture at all levels of the value chain in order to ensure guest satisfaction and, through this, a positive word-of-mouth spread directly via social media and, consequently, tourists' return. In addition, since there is a relatively high share of those visiting family and friends in in-land rural destinations (12%, Figure 4), the education of the hosts –residents, as they will be the primary source of information, is essential. They can recommend to their guests how to enrich their stay by sharing information and stories.

Table 2 Information sources of rural tourists

	Coastal rural destinations (%)	In-land rural destinations (%)
Croatian Tourism boards' web pages	18	12
Online tourist agencies	30	43
Accommodation facilities websites and mobile applications	11	20
Tourist attractions websites	12	9
Social media posts	23	16

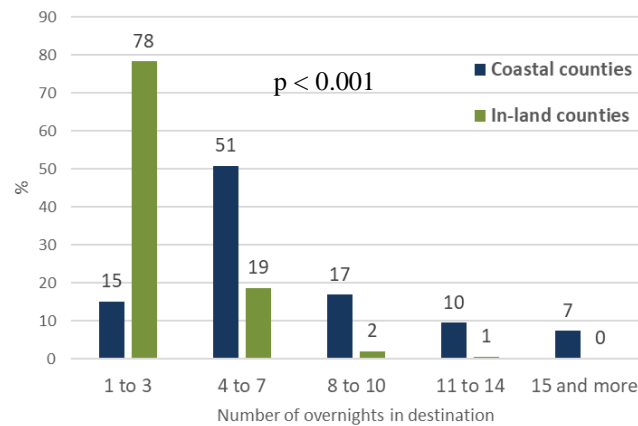
Blogs, forums and travel-oriented portals	14	8
Sponsored ads on search engines, social media, portals	9	4
Advertising on TV or radio	9	2
Documentary movies or stories on TV or radio	8	2
Articles in the newspapers and magazines	6	1
Advertisements, posters, catalogues, brochures, and other printed promotional collaterals	6	1
Tourism and other fairs and exhibitions	7	1
Recommendations from friends and relatives	36	25
Recommendations from travel or tourist agencies	11	2
Recommendations from travel clubs or associations	5	1
Previous visits	31	27

Note: All differences are significant ($p < 0.01$); Chi-square test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Partly in line with travel motivation (i.e. a high proportion of business trips), there is a significant difference in the length of stay of rural tourists between the in-land and coastal destinations. While 78% of rural tourists in in-land areas stay in the destination for up to three days, every second (51%) rural tourists in coastal destinations stay in the destination for four to seven nights, and only 15% stay three or fewer nights (Figure 5, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 5 Length of stay in rural destination

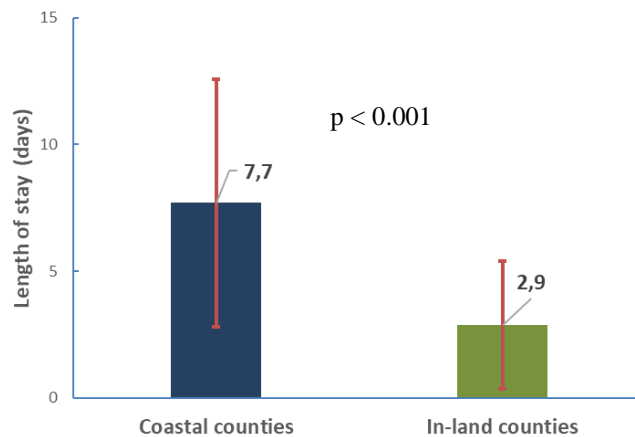


Note: p-value from Chi-square test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

The average stay in in-land rural destinations is significantly shorter (2.9 nights) compared to rural destinations in coastal counties (7.7 nights, Figure 6). The findings support the need for further development and enriching the rural tourism offer in the in-land areas and promotion.

Figure 6 The average length of stay of rural tourists in in-land and coastal rural areas



Note: p-value from Wilcoxon rank-sum test

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

In general, tourists report a high level of satisfaction with the elements of tourism offer (Table 3). At the top of the satisfaction scale, the tourists in coastal rural destinations report high satisfaction with the beauty of nature and landscape and personal safety. At the bottom of the satisfaction scale, in coastal rural areas, tourists were not satisfied with local public transportation, shopping options, and traffic at the destination. At the top of the satisfaction scale, the tourists in rural destinations of in-land rural counties report

high satisfaction with various elements of the tourism offer such as personal safety, hospitality of local population, atmosphere and mood, availability of information in destination, ecological preservation of natural beauty and beauty of nature and landscape. At the bottom of the satisfaction scale in in-land rural areas, there are more elements with which they are dissatisfied or less satisfied, such as sports facilities, events, entertainment, local public transportation and shopping options.

Table 3 Satisfaction of rural tourists with elements of tourism offer

Element of tourism offer	Coastal counties (%)	In-land counties (%)	p-value
The beauty of nature and the landscape	95	95	NS
Personal safety	95	98	<0.01
The beauty of the destination	94	94	NS
Overall stay	94	93	NS
Atmosphere, mood	93	96	<0.01
Beach cleanliness	92	94	NS
Ecological preservation of the place	91	95	<0.01
The extent to which the destination is cared for and maintained	91	88	<0.01
Hospitality of the local population	91	97	<0.01
Accommodation facility	90	93	<0.01
Destination suitable for children	89	92	<0.01
Beach equipment/how fixed up	88	88	NS
Walking paths	88	88	NS
Destination is pedestrian-friendly	88	87	NS
Information available at the destination	87	95	<0.01
Marked heritage sites	86	94	<0.01
Gastronomic offer in destination	86	89	NS
Free Internet at destination	86	92	<0.01
Traffic accessibility at the destination	85	92	<0.01
Culture and art	85	94	<0.01
Information/education in protected nature areas	84	92	<0.01
Offer of organised trips/excursions to the surrounding area	84	80	<0.01
Cycling routes and paths	83	88	<0.01
Destination adapted to people with special needs	82	86	<0.01
Sports facilities	81	79	NS
Entertainment/Nightlife	80	74	<0.01
Events	80	79	NS
Local public transport	77	73	NS
Shopping options	76	68	<0.01
Traffic in destination	73	83	<0.01

Note: Presented is a proportion of tourists who rated each element with grades 6 or 7 on a scale from 1-very low to 7-very high; p-value from Chi-square test; NS – not significant

Source: TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023, data analysis by authors

Commonly poorly rated elements in coastal and in-land rural areas are local public transportation and shopping opportunities. When comparing satisfaction with elements between coastal and in-land rural destinations, the extent to which the destination is cared

for and maintained, the offer of organised trips and excursions, entertainment and shopping options are significantly better rated for coastal in comparison to the in-land rural areas. Many more elements are rated significantly better in in-land than in coastal rural destinations, such as personality safety, the hospitality of the local population, atmosphere, ecological preservation, information available at the destination, marked heritage sites, culture and art, accommodation facilities, etc. There are also some elements with no statistically significant difference in tourist satisfaction, such as the beauty of nature, landscape and destination, beach cleanliness and equipment, walking paths or pedestrian-friendly destination, gastro offer, etc.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the profiles of rural tourists visiting coastal and in-land destinations in Croatia, highlighting significant differences between these two groups. Coastal rural destinations are primarily frequented by foreign tourists who predominantly visit during the summer months, showcasing a pronounced seasonality. In contrast, in-land rural destinations attract a higher proportion of domestic tourists, with a more evenly distributed visitation pattern throughout the year. Tourists in in-land rural areas are typically older, more likely to travel alone or with a partner, and often visit for business, health, or to see friends and relatives. Meanwhile, coastal rural tourists are younger and primarily motivated by leisure activities such as enjoying the sea and nature.

Tourists in in-land rural areas rely more on online travel agencies and accommodation websites for information and tend to have shorter stays compared to those in coastal regions. They also report higher satisfaction levels with various elements of the tourism offer. Activities such as visiting rural landscapes, wellness and spa treatments, and hiking are more common among in-land tourists. The findings suggest that while coastal rural tourists are drawn by the combination of rural and seaside experiences, in-land tourists seek a more serene, nature-focused retreat. This demographic and motivational variance underscores the need for differentiated tourism policies and marketing strategies tailored to the unique preferences and behaviors of each group.

The study reveals that successful rural tourism in both in-land and coastal areas depends on the ability to leverage local traditions, natural resources, and authentic experiences. Coastal destinations benefit from their proximity to the sea, while in-land areas capitalize on their natural beauty and cultural heritage. The insights gained from this research are crucial for developing targeted marketing efforts and enhancing the overall tourism experience, ensuring that both types of destinations can sustainably attract and satisfy their respective tourist profiles.

Our study's findings on the profiles of rural tourists in in-land and coastal destinations are consistent with the existing literature, yet they provide nuanced insights into the different characteristics and behaviors of these tourist segments. For example, Frochot's (2005) benefit segmentation study in Scotland highlighted the importance of nature-related activities and rural experiences, corroborating our observations that rural landscapes and hiking are significant motivators for in-land rural tourists. Additionally,

our results echo the findings of the Rural Tourism Quality Survey 2009-2010, which indicated a preference for active vacations involving hiking and cycling among rural tourists. This supports our data showing that in-land tourists are more inclined towards wellness and hiking activities compared to their coastal counterparts. The survey also noted that direct booking with homeowners and reliance on internet resources were prominent among rural tourists, which we also found in our analysis of information sources used by tourists in in-land areas.

Furthermore, Komppula's (2014) research on the role of individual entrepreneurs in rural tourism competitiveness underscores the significance of local hospitality and service quality, elements we found to be better rated in in-land rural destinations. Our study extends these findings by highlighting specific areas of tourist satisfaction and identifying opportunities for enhancing rural tourism experiences through improved service culture and local engagement. These comparative insights not only validate our findings but also emphasize the diverse motivations and behaviors of rural tourists in different geographical contexts.

Future research could delve into the spending patterns of rural tourists to understand the economic impact of tourism in these areas. This includes examining how much tourists spend on accommodation, food, activities, and local products, and comparing the expenditure between coastal and in-land rural tourists. Such insights could help local businesses and policymakers optimize their offerings and pricing strategies to boost economic benefits.

Furthermore, given the significant portion of non-leisure travelers in in-land tourism demand, a deeper investigation into the preferences and behaviors of leisure rural tourists, and comparison of their profiles between the in-land and coastal destinations could provide valuable information for enhancing rural tourism products and services. Understanding what drives leisure tourists to choose either in-land or coastal rural areas, analyzing the differences in their travel patterns, and measuring the satisfaction levels of leisure tourists with various aspects of their visit, can help in understanding their expectations and provide insights into potential areas for improvement. By comparing these factors, researchers can uncover targeted strategies to enhance the appeal of both in-land and coastal rural destinations for leisure tourists. This approach can help in developing tailored marketing campaigns, improving infrastructure, and creating specialized tourism products that cater to the unique preferences of leisure tourists in each region.

By extending research in these areas, stakeholders can gain a more holistic understanding of rural tourism dynamics, leading to more effective and sustainable tourism development strategies.

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CHALLENGES OF TAX REFORM: TAXATION OF VACATION HOUSES

Review paper

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Abstract:

At the beginning of 2024, the implementation of nine amended tax acts and pertaining regulations began. Amendments to one of them, the Local Taxes Act, regulate the method of determining local taxes as well as their collection. The tax on vacation houses, as one of the taxes of local self-government units, has recently attracted the interest of the public. Since the focus of the paper is on the current changes in tax regulations, its purpose is to investigate the latest changes related to the taxation of vacation houses. The aim of the paper is to study the legal framework for the introduction of tax on vacation houses and to highlight its most important characteristics. In the empirical research, the methods of analysis and synthesis of legal provisions regulating the taxation of vacation houses were used. Decisions of local administration and self-government units in five counties of continental Croatia were analysed in order to see which cities/municipalities have a prescribed tax on vacation houses and in what amounts. Research, using the survey method, was also conducted on a convenient sample of legal and natural persons who are liable to pay tax on vacation houses in the observed five counties. The results of the research have shown the extent to which persons liable to pay tax on vacation houses are familiar with the latest changes in legislation, and their views on the taxation of vacation houses were analysed. The contribution of the paper is in the systematization of the theoretical approach relative to the topic of regulating the taxation of vacation houses.

Keywords:

vacation houses, local taxes, tax on vacation houses

1. Introduction

The beginning of 2024 marked the commencement of the application of the nine amended tax acts and regulations pertaining to them, with the purpose of relieving taxpayers, i.e., introducing fiscal order among the most demanding forms of taxation. Among other things, the tax reform changed the provisions of the Local Taxes Act pertaining to the tax on vacation houses. Since this is a tax payable to local self-government units, determining the amount of tax on vacation houses depends on the decision of the representative body of the city or municipality in which the vacation house is located. The term vacation house implies any building, part of a building or apartment which taxable persons use seasonally or occasionally, while commercial

buildings whose purpose is to house agricultural machinery, accessories and tools are not considered a vacation house. (Local Taxes Act, Official Gazette 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23). Žunić Kovačević i Pisačić (2023) state that the taxation of vacation houses was introduced into the tax system in 2000, while the system of local taxes was regulated within the tax reform at the end of 2016 with the adoption of the Local Taxes Act. Research results (Bronić 2013) conducted ten years ago pointed to guidelines that the Tax Administration should publish data on the bases of local taxes in order to gain insight into the tax effort for each local tax, including the tax on vacation houses. Today, these data are publicly available within the framework of decisions submitted to the Tax Administration by local government and self-government units.

The paper presents the legal framework for regulating the system of taxation of vacation houses. The most important features of taxation with this tax form are highlighted and an analysis of the decisions of local government and self-government units related to the tax on vacation houses was carried out, whereas conclusions on the attitudes of legal and natural persons regarding the taxation of vacation houses were reached through empirical research.

2. Literature review - legal framework

According to the Act on Financing of Local and Regional Self-Government Units (Official Gazette 127/17, 138/20, 151/22, 114/23), local and regional self-government units are financed by income from taxes, from aid, and from own and dedicated revenues in accordance with special regulations, which means that local taxes are regulated by special provisions.

According to the latest changes in the Croatian tax system, the tax on vacation houses is in the category of taxes of the units of local self-government alongside the other two local taxes such as Consumption Tax and Tax on the Use of Public Land. (Local Tax Act, Official Gazette 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23).

Before the latest changes of taxes accruing to local self-government units, whose application came into force at the beginning of 2024, local taxes included the income tax surcharge¹. Since these are local taxes belonging to local and regional self-government units, the decisions of cities and municipalities in accordance with the provisions of the Local Taxes Act determine the types of taxes, taxable persons, tax rate and base, tax rates and amounts, and the method of calculation and payment of taxes.

The most common irregularities which appear in the decisions of the local self-government units are related to non-compliance with the deadlines for adopting and implementing decisions, regulating issues for which the local self-government unit is not authorized, adopting several different decisions regulating the payment of local taxes, and not submitting the decisions to the Tax Administration in the prescribed manner and within the prescribed period. If the decision related to local taxes was adopted contrary

¹ The income tax surcharge was in effect until the end of 2023

to the provisions of the Local Taxes Act, the High Administrative Court of the Republic of Croatia evaluates the legality of such a decision (Ministry of Finance 2020).

Local self-government units are obliged to submit the decision of their representative body relating to local taxes to the Ministry of Finance, i.e. the Tax Administration within eight days from the date of its adoption for publication on the website of the Tax Administration and for taking over the authority to determine and collect taxes (Article 43. Local Taxes Act, Official Gazette, 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23).

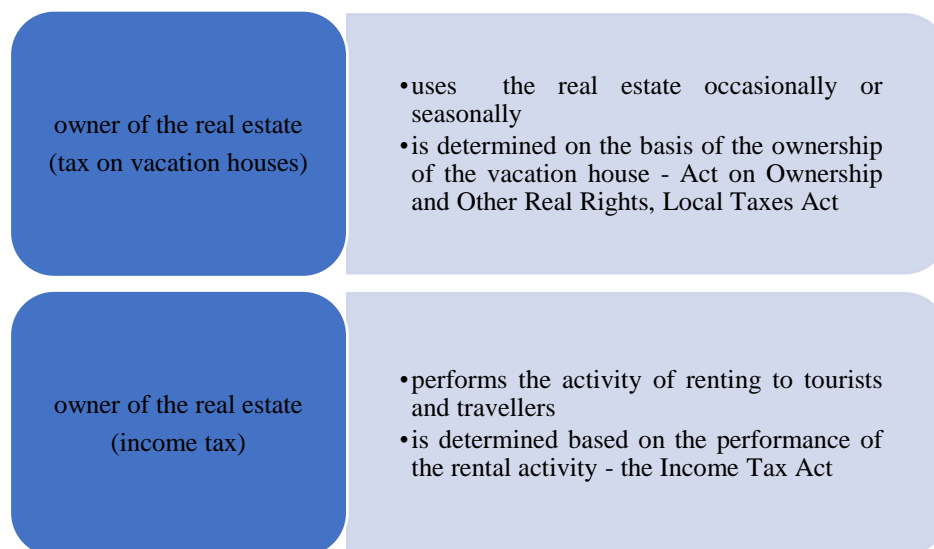
In accordance with Article 42 and Article 46 of the Local Taxes Act, for the purposes of paying taxes on vacation houses, the representative body of the local self-government unit determines the amount of the tax, taking into account the location of the property, its age, the condition of the infrastructure, as well as other circumstances important for use of the vacation house. Moreover, the competent tax authority for determining and collection of taxes is also determined. According to the latest regulations, the representative body of local self-government units prescribes by decision the amount of tax on vacation houses within the limits of EUR 0.60 to EUR 5.00 per m² of usable area of the property in question. (Local Taxes Act, Official Gazette, 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23). The Act on Ownership and Other Real Rights defines the usable area as the total floor area of an apartment or other independent room minus the width of the walls which interrupt it (Official Gazette, 91/96, 68/98, 137/99, 22/00, 73/00, 129/00, 114/01, 79/06, 141/06, 146/08, 38/09, 153/09, 143/12, 152/14, 81/15, 94/17).

According to Article 25 of the Local Taxes Act and in accordance with the provisions of the special regulation on income tax, the determination of the status of a vacation house is not affected by the obligation to pay income tax based on the activity of renting apartments, rooms, and beds to travellers and tourists, and organizing campsites (Local Taxes Act, Official Gazette, 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23). Comparison of the income tax in a flat amount collected for the activity of rental of apartments, rooms, and beds to travellers and tourists, and organization of campsites with tax on vacation houses reveals that they are two separate forms of tax which are determined on two different bases and are regulated by two different acts (Ministry of Finance 2012). Income tax based on the rental of apartments, rooms, and beds to travellers and tourists, and the organization of campsites is regulated by the Income Tax Act (Official Gazette 115/16, 106/18, 121/19, 32/20, 138/20, 151/22, 114/23) and the Ordinance on flat-rate taxation of the activity of rental and organization of accommodation in tourism (Official Gazette 1/19, 1/20, 1/21, 156/22, 1/24). The obligation to pay tax on vacation houses applies to legal and natural persons who are owners of vacation houses, and is determined based on the ownership of the vacation house (Ministry of Finance 2019).

A real estate which is not used occasionally or seasonally is not considered a vacation house. In the event that the owner of the real estate performs rental activities in the real estate and performs this activity periodically or seasonally (only in part of the calendar year), the same real estate is subject to payment of the tax on vacation houses. If the real estate or part of the real estate is used by the owner for rental throughout the year, then that real estate or part of it is not considered a vacation house in that year because its occasional or seasonal use is absent, in which case the owner is not liable to pay tax on vacation houses (Ministry of Finance 2022).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual delimitation of the payment of tax on vacation houses, where the legal criteria are defined under which the property owner pays tax on vacation houses and/or income tax based on rental activities.

Figure 1 Criteria for payment of tax on vacation houses



Source: the authors according to: Act on Ownership and Other Real Rights, Local Taxes Act, Income Tax Act

By the end of March in the year for which the vacation house tax is assessed, the vacation house taxpayer is obliged to submit information about the vacation house (location and usable area) to the competent tax authority and, within 15 days from the delivery of the tax assessment decision, settle their obligation. If the taxable person, a legal person, does not submit data for determining the tax on vacation houses, they will be fined for an offense in the amount of EUR 260.00 to 3,310.00, whereas a natural person will be fined from EUR 10.00 to 660.00 (Article 49 i Article 56 Local Taxes Act, Official Gazette, 115/16, 101/17, 114/22, 114/23).

According to the data for the year 2022, there are a total of 556 local self-government units in the Republic of Croatia, and of that number, 463 units or 83.27% have a prescribed tax on vacation houses. As for the tax autonomy of local authorities, municipalities and cities independently determine the tax rate for vacation houses by a decision (until the end of 2023, the rate was determined within the limits of EUR 0/0.66 - 1.99), and the tax base, as well as exemptions from payment of this tax, is determined by law. In 2022, income from the payment of tax on vacation houses amounted to 0.90% of the tax income of local authorities. In accordance with the tax autonomy of local authorities, it is planned that in 2024 the income from the basis of tax payments on vacation houses will still amount to 0.90% of the tax income of local authorities (The Government of the Republic of Croatia 2023).

3. Research methodology

The empirical research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase of the research, the available decisions on local taxes of cities/municipalities were analyzed, especially the tax on vacation houses. The aim of the conducted analysis is to establish which cities/municipalities have prescribed a tax on vacation houses and to establish which of them has prescribed the largest amount of this local tax. The method used was content analysis of the websites of the Ministry of Finance-Tax Administration. Analysis of decisions on local taxes of local government and self-government units was made on a sample of five counties of continental Croatia (Virovitica-Podravina County, Bjelovar-Bilogora County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Osijek-Baranja County, and Požega-Slavonia County). Decisions related to 116 cities/municipalities from the mentioned counties were analysed. The second phase of the research was related to the examination of the attitudes of legal and natural persons on the payment of taxes on vacation houses using a survey questionnaire. Empirical research was conducted on a sample of 54 legal and natural persons from those five counties in order to evaluate their attitude related to the taxation of vacation houses. A survey questionnaire was created with open and closed questions and a Likert value scale with five statements and five degrees of intensity was used (1 - I strongly disagree, 2 - I disagree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 4 - I agree, 5 - I strongly agree). The research was conducted in the last week of March 2024, and the results were analysed using descriptive statistics. All respondents in the sample are vacation house owners.

4. Analysis of decisions on local taxes of local government and self-government units

An analysis of the decisions of local government and self-government units was carried out with the aim of identifying which cities and municipalities have a tax on vacation houses prescribed by a decision as part of local taxes, after the latest provisions regulating local taxes had come into force. The decisions of five units of local administration and self-government were analysed, namely of Bjelovar-Bilogora County, Virovitica-Podravina County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Požega-Slavonia County and Osijek-Baranja County. According to the Local Taxes Act, the units of local administration and self-government are obliged to submit the decisions prescribing local taxes to the Tax Administration within the prescribed time limits, and the Tax Administration then publishes them on its website. Based on available data from the Ministry of Finance – Tax Administration (2024), the submitted decisions of all cities/municipalities (a total of 116 cities/municipalities) belonging to the abovementioned counties were analysed. Out of the total number of cities/municipalities, 40 cities/municipalities do not have a prescribed tax on vacation houses.² Table 1 shows the percentage of cities/municipalities in each county which have prescribed a tax on vacation houses and highlights the cities/municipalities with the highest amount of tax on vacation houses in the observed five counties.

² The analysis was made based on the decisions of local administration and self-government units available on the website of the Ministry of Finance - Tax Administration on April 2, 2024.

Table 1 The percentage of cities/municipalities which have prescribed a tax on vacation houses and the highest amounts of tax on vacation houses in the five observed counties

County	Percentage/number of cities/municipalities which have a prescribed tax on vacation houses		City/Municipality with the highest amount of tax on vacation houses	The highest amount of tax on vacation houses per square meter of usable area EUR/m ²
	%	n		
Bjelovar-Bilogora	73.91	23	Dežanovac	4.00
Virovitica- Podravina	50.0	16	Virovitica	2.00
Koprivnica-Križevci	44.00	25	Drnje	1.99
			Kalnik	1.99 (over 25m ² of usable area)
Osijek-Baranja	73.81	42	Draž	4.00
Požega-Slavonia	80.00	10	Lipik	2.00 (zone I)

Source: the authors according to the Ministry of Finance - Tax Administration (2024)

In the Bjelovar-Bilogora County, 73.91% of the cities/municipalities have a prescribed tax on vacation houses, and the largest amount of tax on vacation houses was prescribed by the municipality of Dežanovac (4.00 EUR/m²). In the Virovitica-Podravina County, 50% of cities/municipalities have a prescribed tax on vacation houses, and the city with the highest tax rate on vacation houses is the city of Virovitica (2.00 EUR/m²). In the Koprivnica-Križevci County, the municipalities of Drnje and Kalnik have prescribed a tax of 1.99 EUR/m², and a total of 44.00% of cities/municipalities have a prescribed tax on vacation houses in that county. The municipality of Draž in Osijek-Baranja County has prescribed a tax of 4.00 EUR/m², and 73.81% of cities/municipalities in that county tax vacation houses. In Požega-Slavonia County, as many as 80% of cities/municipalities have a prescribed tax on vacation houses, with the city of Lipik having the highest tax rate of 2.00 EUR/m² for real estate located in Zone I.

According to the data of the Ministry of Finance - Tax Administration (2024) and the published decisions of local government and self-government units, out of a total of 116 cities/municipalities, 37 of them did not revise their decisions related to the amounts of tax on vacation houses in terms of conversion to the euro. There are a total of eight such cities/municipalities in Bjelovar-Bilogora County, one in Virovitica-Podravina County, eight in Koprivnica-Križevci County, sixteen in Osijek-Baranja County, and four in Požega-Slavonia County which did not revise their decisions on local taxes after the introduction of the euro. The analysis also found that despite the implementation of regulations within the Local Taxes Act, there are differences and different criteria related to the calculation of taxes on vacation houses in individual units of local administration and self-government. For example, the town of Daruvar prescribes its tax on vacation houses in accordance with the special Decision on zones in the area of the town of Daruvar, according to which a higher tax on vacation houses is paid for real estate in

zones I and II (2.00 EUR/m²), whereas in zones III, IV and V the tax on vacation houses is paid in the amount of 1.33 EUR/m². The town of Orahovica also charges a tax on vacation houses by zones (zone I - 1.99 EUR/m², zone II - 1.33 EUR/m², zone III - 0.93 EUR/m²). The town of Lipik also has a division of taxes on vacation houses according to four zones (zone I: 2.00 EUR/m², zone II: 1.70 EUR/m², zone III: 1.50 EUR/m², zone IV: 1.00 EUR/m²) in accordance with the Decision on communal fees. Sveti Petar Orehovec in Koprivnica-Križevci County charges tax on vacation houses according to the usable area of the vacation house of up to 25 m² and more than 25 m². The municipality of Đulovac charges a lower tax on vacation houses in the amount of 0.93 EUR/m² if the real estate does not have the possibility of connecting to public infrastructure, whereas in all other cases the tax amount is higher (1.46 EUR/m²). In the Osijek-Baranja County, the municipality of Bilje uses the age criterion of the property to calculate the tax on vacation houses. If the vacation house is older than 20 years, then a lower tax is to be paid on the vacation house (0.66 EUR/m²), and if it is up to 20 years old, then 1.33 EUR/m² is to be paid. The city of Đakovo also calculates a tax on vacation houses depending on the age of the property (up to 10 years - 1.59 EUR/m², from 10-20 years 1.06 EUR/m², and over 20 years old 0.66 EUR/m² of usable area)³. In its decision, the representative body of the town of Kapela also states that all types of covered and open balconies/terraces are considered usable areas for calculating tax on vacation houses, with the fact that 50% of their total area per m² is calculated for tax calculation.

5. Results of empirical research

Empirical research was conducted on a sample of 54 respondents from five counties, and the goal of the research was to gain insight into the attitudes of owners of vacation houses, i.e., opinions about the taxation of vacation houses. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 2. According to the research results, the majority of respondents, i.e., 35 of them, are male (67.31%). Also, the majority, or 14 of respondents, are from the Virovitica-Podravina County (26.92%), and according to the completed level of education, 40.38% of the respondents have completed university or college education, while the same number have completed secondary education.

Table 2 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents n=52 (gender, county, completed level of education)

		N	%
Gender	male	35	67.31
	female	17	32.69
	Total	52	100.0
County	Virovitica-Podravina County	14	26.92
	Bjelovar-Bilogora County	11	21.15
	Osijek-Baranja county	10	19.23
	Požega-Slavonia County	8	15.39
	Koprivnica-Križevci County	9	17.31

³ Since the tax amounts on vacation houses in the decisions on local taxes of the municipality of Bilje and the city of Đakovo are shown in HRK, the value of the tax was converted into EUR at the exchange rate of EUR 1 = HRK 7.53450

	Total	52	100.0
Completed level of education	University/college	21	40.38
	Primary school	10	19.24
	Secondary school	21	40.38
	Total	52	100.0

Source: Authors

Furthermore, the research has shown that a total of 37 respondents (71.15%) stated that they did not declare the vacation house to the competent tax authority even though it was mandatory, while 33 respondents (63.46%) believed that the amount of tax on vacation houses per square metre was not too high.

The respondents' perception of the tax on vacation houses is shown in Table 3. A total of five statements were made to which respondents could express their attitude with grades from 1 - I strongly disagree to 5 - I strongly agree.

Table 3 Respondents' attitudes on the taxation of vacation houses

Statement		N	%	\bar{x}
The latest changes to the legislation relating to the taxation of vacation houses were unnecessary	I strongly disagree	0	0.00	
	I disagree	0	0.00	
	I neither agree nor disagree	16	30.77	
	I agree	22	42.31	
	I strongly agree	14	26.92	
	Total	52	100.0	3.96
The available information related to the taxation of vacation houses is transparent and clear	I strongly disagree	0	0.00	
	I disagree	8	15.38	
	I neither agree nor disagree	6	11.54	
	I agree	21	40.39	
	I strongly agree	17	32.69	
	Total	52	100.00	3.90
Prescribed fines for not submitting the necessary information about the vacation house are too high	I strongly disagree	0	0.00	
	I disagree	0	0.00	
	I neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00	
	I agree	14	26.92	
	I strongly agree	38	73.08	
	Total	52	100.00	4.73
The age of the property should be the determining factor for determining the payment of real estate tax	I strongly disagree	0		
	I disagree	13	25.00	
	I neither agree nor disagree	10	19.23	
	I agree	23	44.23	
	I strongly agree	6	11.54	
	Total	52	100.00	3.42
The tax on vacation houses does not burden property owners to the extent that other local taxes do	I strongly disagree	0	0.00	
	I disagree	2	3.85	
	I neither agree nor disagree	11	21.15	
	I agree	18	34.62	
	I strongly agree	21	40.38	
	Total	52	100.00	4.12

Source: Authors

According to the results of the research, the highest values of the arithmetic means of the answers of the respondents who participated in the research were recorded for the 3rd statement *Prescribed fines for not submitting the necessary information about the vacation house are too high*, where the arithmetic mean of the respondents' answers is 4.73, and for the 5th statement *The tax on vacation houses does not burden property owners to the extent that other local taxes do* ($\bar{x}=4.12$). A total of 69.23% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the latest legislative changes related to the taxation of vacation houses were unnecessary, but also 73.08% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the available information related to the taxation of vacation houses is transparent and clear. As many as 25% of respondents disagree with the statement that the age of the property should be the determining factor for determining the payment of real estate taxes.

6. Conclusion

The tax on vacation houses is a so-called optional tax which local government and self-government units may or may not prescribe if they deem this type of tax revenue unnecessary. The latest amendments to the legal provisions on the taxation of vacation houses aim to establish the transparency of taxation and strengthen the tax autonomy of local authorities. This is not an introduction of a new tax and its application, as this tax form is perceived by the public, since the tax on vacation houses was in effect even before the last tax reform. Current amendments to the tax on vacation houses have increased the upper limit of prescribing the amount of this local tax and defined provisions related to determining the status of a vacation house if the same house is used for rental activities in tourism.

In the first phase of the research, an analysis of the content of the Internet pages of the Ministry of Finance - Tax Administration was carried out. Decisions of local government units and self-governments related to local taxes, specifically the tax on vacation homes, were analyzed. After the analysis of the local tax decisions of the local administration and self-government units in the observed five counties, it was determined that not a single city/municipality has a prescribed maximum amount of tax on vacation houses, which, according to the latest amendments to the Local Taxes Act, is EUR 5.00/m² of usable area for real estate in question, and that individual cities and municipalities have determined additional criteria for tax calculation and collection in accordance with the legal framework. The largest number of cities/municipalities that have imposed a tax on holiday houses is in Osijek-Baranja County, where a total of 42 cities/municipalities (73.81%) have imposed this tax. The municipality of Draž in Osijek-Baranja County has the highest amount of tax on holiday houses per square meter of usable area (4.00 eur/m²).

Empirical research has shown that respondents are still not aware of their obligations and the consequences of not complying with legal provisions if they do not declare vacation houses by the end of March of the current year, since more than 71% of respondents have not declared their property. The survey showed that as many as 63.46% of respondents believe that the amount of tax on vacation houses per square meter is not too high. A total of 69.23% of the respondents agree that the latest changes in the legislation relating

to the taxation of holiday houses were unnecessary. 100% of the respondents of this survey believe that the fines provided for if the necessary information about the vacation houses are not submitted are too high. A total of 75% of respondents believe that the tax on vacation houses does not burden property owners to the extent that other local taxes do.

For the purposes of future research, the proposal is to expand the analysis of decisions on local taxes of local government and self-government units to other counties, as well as to conduct an empirical research of respondents' views on the taxation of vacation houses in all counties of the Republic of Croatia, and to compare the obtained results to make specific conclusions related to the taxation of vacation houses in order to determine the advantages and disadvantages of this form of taxation.

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RURAL MOTIFS IN CROATIAN WINE POETRY

Review paper

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Abstract:

In Croatian literature, there have been neither analyses nor syntheses of poetry dominated by wine and wine-related, mostly rural motifs. From the article, one can conclude that there is hardly a significant Croatian literary figure who has not written at least a few poems inspired by wine, and some have even produced entire wine-themed bodies of work. The development of Anacreontic poetry is traced through interpretations of the union of viticulture, viniculture, and winemaking in the art of words. These literary contributions are of high aesthetic value. Poetry dedicated to wine has been created throughout all periods of Croatian history, from the father of Croatian literature, Marko Marulić, to contemporary authors. The verses were written either in the Croatian standard language or in various Croatian dialects. The people in all Croatian regions also created wine-inspired lyricism. The study also delves into the lesser-known canon of so-called Croatian merriment, a collection of toasts, drinking songs, and wine ditties, often accompanied by music and dedicated to wine, which experienced its expansion in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This paper interprets the literary contributions of the most famous Croatian poets, as well as oral wine poetic contributions, as an exceptional addition to the entirety of Croatian wine culture. It also encourages the use of both authorial and oral Croatian wine poetry on wine bottles and in the branding of different wine labels across Croatian wine regions and vineyards.

Keywords:

authorial wine poetry, Croatian merriment, Croatian wine culture, oral wine poetry, rural motifs, wine

1. Introduction

In the end, only two remain: God and wine (Hamvas 1997, 7). This widely known sentence from the renowned Hungarian philosopher and writer Béla Hamvas points to the exceptional importance and value of wine in human life. Wine permeates most continents, countries, cultures, and religions on the globe. Even where wine does not grow, it is often consumed. This has been the case for many centuries before Christ. The vine originates from the early stages of Earth's development. Fossil remains prove that in ancient times there were plants related to and resembling those from the *Vitaceae* family, to which the noble grapevine belongs today, likely originating in Central Asia, although opinions about the origin of the noble grapevine differ. Cultivation began in the area between the Black and Caspian Seas, from where the vine spread in three directions: eastward to India, southward to Palestine and Egypt, and westward across southern parts of Russia to the Balkan Peninsula. The Phoenicians brought the vine by sea routes to the shores of the Black, Mediterranean, and Adriatic Seas. Gradually, the vine spread across the world, in some places sooner, in others later. Wine often carries an identity-related significance. The precious liquid of wine in the traditions of all peoples over the centuries was not discovered by just anyone; it had to be a god or at least a king who was credited with the art of winemaking (Baran 2024, 20).

When the Croats settled in their current territories in the 7th century, they encountered the culture of the vine and embraced it as their own. Through all the ups and downs of

history, all social strata lived with and encountered wine: peasants, citizens, and the aristocracy alike. People were born and died, rejoiced and mourned with wine; many life, seasonal, and work customs were intertwined with wine. This is still the case today. Wine is omnipresent in Croatia. There is hardly a Croatian region without vine cultivation. Croatian wines are becoming increasingly higher in quality, and wine-related programs are multiplying wine roads, events, festivals, fairs, exhibitions, presentations, wine schools, and various cultural programs (Baran 2024).

Wine has greatly shaped Croatian culture. Wine traditions exist throughout Croatia. They are rich and diverse, supporting the idea of a pan-Croatian wine presence throughout the centuries. Wine motifs can be found in many art forms, from ancient times to the present. There are exceptional monuments in both material and intangible culture connected to wine. Intangible heritage abounds with literary, visual, and musical achievements. Literature has made remarkable contributions in oral traditions and in various literary forms shaped by authors. Visual arts are expressed in sculpture, painting, caricatures, photography, and more recently, applied art. Composers have also made their mark, as people have long sung about and with wine (Baran 2024).

2. Wine in Literature

On the very first pages of the Bible, the holy book that has laid the foundation for all European national literatures, both for its eternal themes and for its early translations into vernacular languages, we find the story of the vine, wine, and its effects. The patriarch Noah, who had preserved himself and his family from widespread corruption, was destined to be saved from the universal destruction of all life by the flood, which tragically cleansed the earth of evil through death. The first thing Noah did when the waters receded and the ark settled on dry land was to plant a vineyard. The vineyard grew, produced fruit, and Noah drank the young wine, lay on the ground, and exposed his nakedness. His youngest son, Ham, saw and mocked him. The other two sons, Shem and Japheth, covered their father and saved their descendants from the curse. When Noah woke up and sobered up, he severely cursed Ham. Thus, a family, at the beginning of a new era of history, was divided into the blessed and the cursed, the free and the enslaved, the happy and the miserable, the obedient and the wanderers. Those who cover shame and those who reveal it and take pleasure in doing so (Bratulić 2005, 5). This well-known account of Noah from the Book of Genesis reminds us that after the flood, Noah first planted a vineyard. This points to the value and importance of vineyards and wine in human life. Wine is foundational. The vineyard, as a rural motif, is tied to the origin of the world. However, Noah quickly became drunk, leading to the first depiction of drunkenness in history but also a warning about the severe consequences that intoxication can cause. Noah indicates a connection to the vineyard but also emphasizes the importance of moderation when it comes to wine. This is a guide that peasants, citizens, and the aristocracy alike were aware of throughout history, both in the world and in Croatian regions. Despite significant difficulties in the past related to various vine diseases or the disregard for vine cultivation by certain conquerors who penetrated Croatian regions, the Croatian people have become deeply connected to the vineyard over the centuries. The tradition of planting, cultivating vineyards, harvesting grapes, and enjoying wine has been present in Croatia since the Croats settled in the 7th century.

This is true for most areas across Croatia, as vineyards thrive in most parts of the country. In Croatian Catholic tradition, there is no Eucharist without wine. Since the Last Supper, wine has mystically been transformed into the blood of Christ during the celebration of the Mass. All of this points to the Croatian identity, which is, to a considerable extent, defined by wine. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that artists of all kinds have dedicated their works to wine, including numerous visual artists, musicians, and certainly literary figures.

Wine typically evokes feelings of togetherness. For this reason, it has always inspired creators across all artistic genres, including, of course, writers in all literary forms, but especially in poetry. Wine motifs can also be found in prose and drama, with a particular emphasis on dramatized wine-drinking customs and traditions, such as the baptism of new wine. Among the rhetorical forms used with wine, toasts dominate, while in smaller forms, wine is frequently mentioned in sayings, proverbs, and riddles. Both authorial and oral literary works related to wine complement and enrich one another, constantly intertwining (Baran 2024).

3. Wine in Authorial Poetry

Wine has been dedicated in verse by the most significant Croatian writers, less often in entire poetic collections and more frequently in individual poems where wine serves as inspiration, impression, memory, or comparison. Starting from the father of Croatian literature, Marko Marulić, to contemporary 21st-century writers, key contributions to Croatian wine poetry have been made chronologically by the following authors: Marko Marulić, Mavro Vetranović, Petar Hektorović, Marin Držić, Petar Zoranić, Nikola Zrinski, Ivan Gundulić, Ivan Belostenec, Juraj Habdelić, Juraj Križanić, Fran Krsto Frankopan, Pavao Ritter Vitezović, Antun Kanižlić, Andrija Kačić Miošić, Josip Keresturi, Matija Petar Katančić, Tituš Brezovački, Antun Nemčić, Ivan Mažuranić, Mirko Bogović, Luka Ilić Oriovčanin, Petar Preradović, Ante Starčević, August Šenoa, Josip Eugen Tomić, Franjo Marković, Eugen Kumičić, Ante Kovačić, Ksaver Šandor Gjalski, Josip Kozarac, August Harambašić, Stjepan Radić, Antun Gustav Matoš, Dragutin Domjanić, Vladimir Vidrić, Vladimir Nazor, Milutin Urbani, Milutin Nehajev, Izidor Poljak, Fran Galović, Tin Ujević, Slavko Kolar, Ivo Andrić, Miroslav Krleža, Nikola Pavić, Antun Branko Šimić, Gustav Krklec, Dobriša Cesarić, Đuro Sudeta, Drago Gervais, Nikola Šop, Vjekoslav Kaleb, Dragutin Tadijanović, Drago Ivanišević, Viktor Vida, Ivan Goran Kovačić, Mato Marčinko, Slavko Mihalić, Stjepo Mijović Kočan, Luko Paljetak, Andriana Škunca, Šimun Šito Ćorić, Mile Pešorda (Sučić 1994, 2005). Besides literary forms and genres, wine has been mentioned in legal documents, dictionaries, and records of folk customs since the earliest times. We follow it through the written word from the oldest likely Croatian text on wine, the *Rule of St. Benedict* from the 12th century, through medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicist, Romantic, and Realist works and authors, to modern and contemporary literature, up to words dedicated to wine today (Sučić 1994). From this, we can see that the development of Anacreontic poetry can be traced to the very beginnings of Croatian literature. Verses dedicated to wine were written in octosyllabic and decasyllabic meters, sonnets, rhymes, free verse, and shorter or longer poetic or prose forms in all Croatian dialects. Numerous rural themes were truly celebrated: wine, vineyards, wine cellars, grapes, vines, harvests,

presses, glasses, “bilikumi”, “bukare”, and other wine vessels, even the wine fly. Poets toasted with wine, calling for friendship, unity, Croatian harmony, love for God, the homeland, and women. Wine in Croatian literature, intertwined with rural motifs, stands always and forever as a lasting inspiration, a symbol and reality that does not fade, that endures.

Describing lavish feasts, Marko Marulić already taught how to honor a guest, although he moralistically rebelled against wine. Mavro Vetranović also speaks of esteemed Dubrovnik feasts, and Petar Hektorović does not shy away from the peasant cup. Marin Držić tells of dry throats and empty bellies, and even Gundulić toasts freedom with a glass of laughter. Hidden wine connoisseurs like Juraj Habdelić, Juraj Križanić, and Matija Antun Reljković thundered against the pleasures of wine. In contrast, Fran Krsto Frankopan sang of lost love and wine, raising toasts to non-existent knights. The pioneer of modern poetry with the original experience of an idyllic vineyard landscape is considered Matija Petar Katančić. His direct successor in poetry about idyllic vineyard panoramas, landscapes, and atmospheres is Franjo Marković, who, as a native of Križevci, enthusiastically celebrated the wine-producing hills beneath Kalnik. A slightly earlier-born son of Križevci, Antun Nemčić, hyperbolically described how much wine was drunk during religious festivals. Petar Preradović rejoiced in vines and wine, while August Šenoa directly advocated for wine, not only as a writer in verses and prose, even describing the Zagreb drinking society *Guild of St. Olympus* from the 18th century but also as a city senator protecting the interests of wine as a domestic product, used as medicine by all social classes. Wine did not escape Ksaver Šandor Gjalski, a melancholy elegist of Zagorje's manors and old rooftops, whose poetic atmosphere was significantly enhanced by friendly meetings over a cup of warm wine after an idyllic hunt or ceremonial sipping of attractive wine by the romantic crackling of fire in old fireplaces. Antun Gustav Matoš, and later Miroslav Krleža, also had close encounters with wine and its characteristics, giving readers an imposing scene in *Keglovichiana* of a *heavenly party* organized according to all the rules of aristocratic drinking society *Pinta* and the drinking regulations of feudal and bourgeois society. The rest of the Kajkavian dialect poetry mainly captures impressive wine cellar moods, as done by Dragutin Domjanić or, on the theme of vineyard settings and atmospheres, Fran Galović, expressing an elegiac evocation of transience. In contemporary Croatian poetry, the highs and voids of intoxicated states are vividly depicted by Tin Ujević. The poet of Zagorje vineyards, Gustav Krklec, sings of wine, Dragutin Tadijanović achieved an anthology of raptures over a glass of wine, and the native of Križevci, Zvonimir Balog, with a play on words in an ironic and critical way, answered the question of what is made from wine.

Among all Croatian authors, Fran Galović (1887–1914) stands out with a comprehensive opus dedicated to wine. He is a Kajkavian classic, with exceptional rural landscape images and a unique atmosphere. He sings of *vines*, *grapes*, and the *wine cellar*, or toasts to his friend Martin in memory. His famous collection *From My Hills... (Z mojih bregov...)* was written in a vineyard near Koprivnica. It was published in 1948, and the 1991 edition was illustrated with drawings by the renowned visual artist Ivan Lacković Croata, further enriching the experience. Naturally, the rural motifs in both Galović's verses and Lacković's drawings contribute to this. Galović's wine poetic landscapes and music are uniquely written in the poem *Grapes (Grozdje)* (Baran 2024):

The hills have turned golden,
In red leaves, the dewy grapes sleep,
The clusters are hidden between the rows,
Only here and there a peduncle peeks out.

By the vines, there's an old imbrina,
And šipelina beneath the cherry tree,
By the path, a thick belina,
And with it, three muscats intertwined.¹

Each vine is bent low,
A hundred-year-old head bowing to the ground,
The vines sway lightly on the stakes,
And the leaves barely cling to them.

I've filled my hat with grapes already,
And among the black, a muscat gleams...
I walk on, the path is still long,
In the hat, grapes still sleep in dew...
(Galović 1991, 32)

4. Wine in Oral Poetry

Oral tradition also carries its lyrical creations throughout Croatia. The language of oral lyric poetry is direct, brief, and stems from deep emotional origins, focusing on various aspects of reality. The creator of the text is a gifted individual from the people, endowed with a talent for spoken expression (Botica 1995, 17). People often expressed their thoughts about wine through verse, with most of the recorded examples dating back to the 19th century, when oral literature in Croatia began to be extensively documented. This was initially spurred by Bishop Maksimilijan Vrhovac, followed by Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, the Croatian Literary Society (Matica hrvatska), and finally the Committee for Folk Life and Customs of the then Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) (Baran 2022). In the collective memory, there is no wine-focused poetry without rural motifs. Folk songs, toasts, and drinking songs are present in all regions of Croatia. These songs and toasts are often set to music, making them easy to sing along with, and the queen of wine in oral literature is undoubtedly the toast. Toasts were written by both literate individuals and emerged organically from oral tradition. They are delivered on special occasions in a formal style with carefully chosen words, always conveying good wishes, emotional sentiments, praise, and figurative language. And invariably, with glasses in hand, followed by the inevitable: *Cheers!* Drinking wine always follows when toast concludes. They are performed at various events throughout the yearly life cycle, during weddings, and other celebrations. Toasts are also known as patriotic speeches.

1. Imbrina, šipelina and belina are old Croatian grape sorts.

There are numerous records of toasts from all regions of Croatia, not only within the country but also in Croatian communities abroad (Baran 2024, 186). One example is a *Toast for the Opening of the Grape Harvest (Zdravica za otvaranje berbe grožđa)*, recorded in Čitluk in 1987 (Botica 1995, 265, 266):

Greetings, dear guests,
and hosts,
dear people of Brotnjo,
good workers and farmers,
heroes of old,
always revelers.
Our songs sprang
from a glass of wine,
from the vine, from the stone,
from the hearts of wise people,
with broad chests.
May joy awaken.
Drink the sun in wine.
Carrying truth in the soul.
Cheerfulness and warmth.
Warming the surroundings
and every place.
Gladly greeting people
and toasting with joy.
Watering the vine,
soaking it in sweat,
with great effort
to yield better fruit
and reward the calluses
with sweet Blatina and Žilavka.
Celebrating the victories of work
and the grape harvest
throughout the Brotnjo region
and the rugged homeland.
Calling each other with song,
washed by the sun,
resting on the stone.
Pouring out joy,
gathering youth
through knowledge and work,
unity and harmony,
knowing how to preserve all values
and natural beauty.
Our industry flourished,
agriculture prospered,
and other sectors too.
We produced more and more,
fought for quality,

turned wishes into reality,
The land bent under the weight of work
and the rich sweetness,
filling barns and attics,
silos and cellars.
There was more food
in our time,
but with no flaws. (...)
We carried smiles on our faces,
proud of them,
like spring with flowers,
like a bee in flight,
like the sea with its vastness,
like Herzegovina with its heat,
like Brotnjo with its grapes and wine.
Cheers!
Admiring progress!

The most extensive collection of Croatian toasts for various occasions was published in the anthology *The Toastmaster and Speaker for All Life's Occasions. A Collection of Serious and Humorous Toasts and Speeches (Nazdravičar i govornik za sve prilike života. Zbirka ozbiljnih i šaljivih nazdravica i prigodnih govora)*, which was compiled by Ivan Josipov Šarić (1871–1936) and which has gone through several editions. The editor collected both authored and folk toasts, categorizing them by theme. The records vary in length and quality, and Šarić provided detailed insights into the material, along with advice and guidelines for delivering speeches, in the first edition published in Zagreb in 1890 (Šarić 1890/1994).

Oral songs about wine can be found throughout all Croatian regions. They are most often written in decasyllables. Folk songs generally lack titles and are instead recognized by their opening lines. Here is an example from Torjanci in Baranja:

She falls asleep, drowsy, my dearest one,
She falls asleep, drowsy, in her mother's arms
Holding a goblet, serving her godfather.
Where the goblet falls, the earth cracks open.
Where the earth cracks open, a maple tree grows.
Pearl steps, golden branches.
Pearls are scattered, falling into glass.
Drink, godfather, a glass for our love.
Drink, godfather, a second for lasting love.
Drink, godfather, a third for long happiness.

Oral songs dedicated to wine are rich in rural motifs. The song from Bačka, *Where the Goblet Falls, the Earth Cracks Open (Di kondir spusti, tu zemlja puče)*, while drinking a glass, also alludes to the sprouting of an apple tree, and on the golden root, and on the silver branches, and on the pearly leaves:

Where the goblet falls, the earth cracks open.
Where the earth cracks open, an apple tree grows.
Golden roots, silver branches,
Silver branches, pearly leaves.
Pearls fall, filling the glass,
Pearls are scattered, filling the glass.
– Drink the glass, for our love!
We will drink a glass, for your love.

Alongside the well-known Konavoska Toast (Konavoska zdravica) from southern Croatia, which is protected as an intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia², there are also lyrical oral verses dedicated to wine recorded in Konavle:

The old groom has a bearded pearl,
In each hand, a golden goblet.
The pearl crumbles, and the goblet fills.
Every goblet is worth a ducat,
And the beard alone is worth four towns!

Northern Croatia also celebrates joyful moments of wine enjoyment. An example is the verses from Jurketinec, near Varaždin:

In the evening, I will go to the wine hills
There I will wait until the white dawn
For the brother with his uncle suffers thirst so
Fill the goblet and quench the thirst.
Oh, happy cellar that holds the barrels,
Oh, happy barrel that holds the wine.
Oh, happy tap that pours the wine,
Oh, happy goblet that holds the wine!

The folk poet toasted wine in other Croatian regions as well. Some wine-dedicated songs have authors, but they became so popular among the people that they are considered folk songs. An example is the well-known song *Nothing in the World is More Beautiful* (*Nikaj na svetu lepšega ni*), written in the 18th century by Josip Keresturi (1739–1794). This song has also been set to music. It is often sung at the start and end of every wine celebration. It is perceived as a ritual part of folk customs during Martinje or Vincekovo. Few are aware that the song has an author (Baran 2024).

5. Croatian Wine Songs and Music

2. The Konavle Wedding Toast (Konavoska svadbena zdravica) is registered in the Register of Cultural Properties of the Republic of Croatia under registration number Z-7437 as an intangible protected cultural property. Available at: <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/eu-kultura/kulturna-bastina/registar-kulturnih-dobara-16371/16371>

A considerable number of verses dedicated to wine have been set to music. In Franjo Fancev's 1937 text *Croatian Goodwill in Songs, Toasts, and Drinking Songs of Past Centuries* (*Hrvatska dobrovolja u popijevkama, zdravicama i napitnicama prošlih vjekova*) from the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the Southern Slavs* (*Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena*), it is noted that almost 300 songs of the wine canon were collected, many with musical notation. These records come from various times and places, starting from the 16th century onward. Regardless of who wrote which song or when, they all share themes of goodwill, sociability, and brotherly unity (Fancev 1937). Special attention was given to collecting and analyzing wine songs by music writer and historian, melographer, folklorist, ethnomusicologist, and composer Franjo K. Kuhač (1834–1911), as well as by ethnomusicologist and melographer Vinko Žganec (1890–1976). Between 1878 and 1881, Kuhač published, mostly at his own expense, 16 volumes in 4 books, with around 1,600 folk melodies in his monumental work *South Slavic Folk Songs* (*Južno-slovjenske narodne popievke*), among which a significant number of songs are dedicated to wine. These are particularly prominent in his fourth book from 1881. Žganec initially studied folk melodies from his native Međimurje, and later expanded his melographic work to other Croatian regions (Bačka, Baranja, Dalmatia, Croatian Littoral, Hrvatsko Zagorje, Istria, Podravina, and Pokuplje). Similar recognition was given to the work of composer, actor, and director Đuro Prejac (1870–1936). He was a versatile artist, singer, choir conductor, librettist, and writer, composing operettas, and he is especially known as the author of music and lyrics for popular songs rich in rural motifs from Zagorje, such as *My Little Goblet* (*Peharček moj*) and *In the Blue Thorn Grove* (*Vu plavem trnaci*). These and other Prejac songs dedicated to wine have been published on several albums, performed by various artists. Although musically demanding, they are often sung by groups of better singers and are generally considered to have originated from the people.

Similar creations continue in modern times. The song *And Then You Won't Drink* (*I onda neš pil*) is well-known throughout the Kajkavian regions. The text, often framed or printed on canvas, decorates wine cellars and hospitality establishments. It is widely believed to be a folk song, but its author is actually the late Podravina writer Pajo Kanižaj (1939–2015):

Once I flew high
Long ago, I lost my wings!
And they broke my legs!
And then you won't drink!

It is what it is, I'm not lying!
I was even in the Party!
And twice at that!
And then you won't drink!

There was some good drink
But I mostly got bitter!
I smoked enough too!
And then you won't drink!

I wanted him
But he hit me hard!
With a stake from the hillside!
And then you won't drink!
You can't escape your skin
Where would you even hide!
Damn politics!
And then you won't drink!

I once dreamed so beautifully
I dreamed of flying alone
But last night, I dreamed of my own funeral
And then you won't drink!

I'm eating myself up from the inside
But I gained six kilos
You see how the kilo comes out of the liter!
And then you won't drink!

God alone knows
How much I've poured into myself
But the doctor won't let me drink
And then you won't drink!

Around my head they wander
Like a fairy dance round!
Pretty little white mice!
And then you won't drink!

They say I always drink
Since last night I haven't had a drop!
But the soul is always thirsty!
And then you won't drink!

Damn it, you won't drink!

Music for Kanižaj's text was composed by Pero Rogan, with arrangements by Siniša Leopold. The song was performed at the Kajkavian Song Festival (Festival kajkavske popevke) in Krapina in 2001. It quickly became a hit (Baran 2024, 252–255).

6. Conclusion

Wine, as an integral part of life for most people in Croatia, from the time of Croatian settlement in the region to the present, has always inspired artists to express themselves in their respective genres. This includes winemaking, viticulture, and cellar management, as well as artistic depictions of wine-related customs that occur throughout the year.

Among the numerous motifs, rural themes dominate, as wine is primarily produced in rural areas.

In Croatia, valuable artistic representations of vineyards, grapes, harvests, wine vessels, wine houses, taverns, wine cellars, and various wine traditions have been created. These have been depicted in the visual arts, sculpture, painting, photography, caricature, applied arts, and music. Certainly, wine has also been a prominent theme in literature, the art of words.

Both Croatian-authored and oral poetry are rich with wine motifs. A considerable number of writers have created a true wine canon, especially in the form of lyrical poems dedicated to wine. In fact, there is hardly a significant Croatian poet, from the beginnings of Croatian literature to modern times, who hasn't written at least one poem focused on wine. Fewer have written entire wine-themed poetic cycles, but such writers do exist. Folk artists also extensively dedicated themselves to wine in their literary expressions, spanning the entire Croatian territory. Since vineyards flourish in most Croatian regions, it is logical that oral literature developed in all Croatian regions and was passed down from generation to generation, often evolving with changes and variations, as is characteristic of oral traditions. In both authored and oral wine literature, lyric poetry dominates, though prose and dramatic works, as well as a rich canon of sayings, riddles, and proverbs, have also been created around wine. Lyrical verses are often set to music, especially those written in rhyme and with a metric structure suitable for musical adaptation. Some songs have become so deeply ingrained in Croatian culture that they are often treated as folk songs, even though they were written and signed by a specific author.

Wine, which predominantly carries rural motifs, is not just a part of the past. The potential of wine in literature remains relevant today. This expansion continues. Many contemporary authors, both older and younger, are impressed by wine in their literary writings. Among them are established writers, as well as those who are still developing and shaping their poetic discourse. Folk wine poets are also continually ready for new poetic bravures. A further enhancement to Croatian wines would be the stronger integration of wine-dedicated literature with the wine itself, intertwining the wines with Croatian wine-related verses. This is currently lacking. For instance, an Istrian Malvasia wine with a label featuring folk verses dedicated to wine from Istria would certainly attract attention. Similarly, the vineyards of Podravina enriched with wine-themed verses by Fran Galović, Hvar's wine varieties paired with the verses of Petar Hektorović, or Slavonian wine successes wrapped in labels with the wine-themed Bećarac verses or poetry by Dragutin Tadijanović, could undoubtedly contribute to the development of a successful wine brand. Modern consumers enjoy connecting what they taste with the identity of the region where the wine was produced. Literature, whether authored or oral, is certainly one of the pillars of the identity of every Croatian region. Just as language, not only standard Croatian but also dialects and local speech from the geographical area where a certain wine is produced and where the verses were written, serves as a cultural foundation. In this sense, the connections between Croatian wines and Croatian literary art, especially wine literature, are currently sporadic, individual, and an exception rather than the rule. Yet the possibilities are endless, considering both the wealth and diversity of Croatian regions and the large number of wine varieties on Croatia's small territory

on the one hand and the richness of Croatian wine-related literature, which remains largely unappreciated aesthetically and certainly underutilized, on the other hand. The future will reveal whether wine and wine literature in Croatia will better acquaint themselves and recognize each other.

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MIGRATION, TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY: HOW FOREIGN WORKERS SHAPE CROATIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

Review paper

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Abstract:

This paper examines the topic of sustainable economic growth through the integration of foreign workers and explores whether this integration represents a temporary trend or a long-term necessity. The Republic of Croatia has experienced the second-fastest economic growth in the European Union between 2021 and 2023, fostering the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and family farms. Tourism emerges as a key sector, contributing significantly to income generation and employment, while simultaneously creating demand for low-skilled and seasonal labor. The key aspects of this research include analyzing the dynamics of economic growth in relation to economic conditions and assessing the impact of crises on economic processes. The methodology involves a comparative analysis using data from Eurostat, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, and the Croatian Employment Service. The results indicate a decade-long negative emigration trend but a positive migration balance of 11,685 inhabitants in 2022. Despite the stagnation during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sharp increase in immigration. Similarly, while employment in tourism declined during the pandemic, growth was observed in 2022 compared to 2019. This paper contributes to understanding the sustainability of economic growth in the context of specific challenges, including crises, labor shortages, and the integration of foreign workers.

Keywords:

Sustainability, tourism, economy, foreign workers.

1. Introduction

Sustainable economic growth is a key challenge for modern economies, with the role of foreign workers becoming increasingly important in the face of global demographic and economic shifts. As one of the youngest members of the European Union, Croatia has experienced significant economic growth, primarily driven by tourism, construction, and industry. However, the country simultaneously faces demographic decline, emigration of the working-age population, and an increasing need for both skilled and unskilled labor. In this context, the integration of foreign workers emerges as a crucial factor for sustainable economic growth and social stability.

The primary goal of this study is to examine Croatia's reliance on foreign labor and to analyze the dynamics of their integration into the economy. The specific objectives include analyzing migration trends, unemployment by sector from 2021 to 2024,

determining the number of vacancies in high-demand sectors, investigating permits issued for foreign workers, and assessing tourism's contribution to GDP.

The research is based on qualitative methodology, with the application of comparative analysis of data collected from official sources such as Eurostat, the State Statistical Office, the Croatian Employment Service, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia. Data on population migration, the number of employed and unemployed, issued work and residence permits, as well as the share of tourism in the national GDP were analyzed. The findings are interpreted to provide insights into long-term trends and their impact on Croatia's economic sustainability. This paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-economic effects of migration and the integration of foreign workers, offering recommendations for policies that support sustainable economic growth.

2. Economic growth and the impact of the crisis

With Croatia's entry into the European Union in 2013, there is marked stability, export growth, increased consumption and investment, but also economic growth (Butorac 2019; Vujčić 2017; Hina 2018). Croatia joined the European Union on July 1, 2013, and its gross domestic product has changed significantly positively since then. According to the latest data from the CNB (Central bank), in the period from 2012 to 2023, Croatian GDP in EUR million grew from EUR 44,641 million (current prices) to EUR 75,855 million (current prices), which is 69.92% (CNB 2024). Despite the positive trend and the increase in GDP, by increasing exports, the openness of borders contributed to the easier displacement and employment of the domestic workforce outside the borders of the Republic of Croatia. Thus, from 2012 to 2021, we lost 415,000 inhabitants, which led to a shortage of labor in the sectors of construction, tourism, industry, transport and trade, as well as the need to import foreign labor (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021a ; Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021b).

The pandemic has severely affected health, transportation, economy, and industry in various regions (Padhan and Prabheesh 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic caused a global recession, but the accelerated economic recovery in 2021 led to a sharp increase in energy demand. As a result, energy prices began to rise and global supply chains faced serious difficulties. The situation was further aggravated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which destabilized the European energy market. Russia, one of the world's largest exporters of oil and gas, faced sanctions that further reduced the availability of these resources on the global market (Gajdzik et al. 2024). The authors Padhan and Prabheesh (2021) point out that in the second quarter of 2020, world GDP fell by more than 4.9% due to economic disturbances, as well as that developing countries had reduced investments and productivity and a significant capital outflow. In Croatia, in the first five months of 2020, the number of registered business entities - trading companies, craftsmen and independent businesses, decreased by 43.1%, and the number of registered ones increased by 11.2% compared to the same period in 2019. (Giba et al. 2021). Italy, as the first European country affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, also suffered a drop in exports by 17.8%, while imports decreased by 19%. The economic consequences of the pandemic had a different impact on certain sectors of the economy, especially the

service sector, where the continuous dislocation of the workforce is visible (Kadlec et al. 2021).

3. Labor shortage

In January 2023, Croatia had 3,850,894 inhabitants (Eurostat 2024), while in March 2024, the number of employees was 1,665,717 (CPII 2024). In order to solve the problem of labor shortage, the Government of the Republic of Croatia made it possible for pensioners to work until the age of 68 and to be employed part-time without losing their pension. However, the safety of such work is questionable, as shown by the fatal accident of a 70-year-old man on a construction site (Jutarnji 2024). In March 2024, the number of pension beneficiaries was 1,227,689, with a ratio of pensioners to employees of 1:1.36. Data from the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute (2024) show a constant workforce deficit and an increasing proportion of insured persons and pensioners from 2021. While stagnation in 2019-2020 was a consequence of the COVID pandemic.

4. Sustainability of economic growth

The integration of foreign workers can boost economic growth in countries with demographic challenges, such as aging populations and labor shortages. First, increasing the labor force fills gaps in sectors with a shortage of domestic labor, such as tourism, which accounts for 20% of Croatia's GDP (Ministry of the Interior 2024; Ministry of Tourism and Sport 2024). Second, foreign workers bring new knowledge and skills, which can increase productivity (Joppe 2012). The Croatian Chamber of Commerce and the Edward Bernays Polytechnic launched the "Welcome to Croatia" education program for the integration of foreign workers (The Croatian Chamber of Economy 2024a), which lasts only 30 school hours and is actually extremely poor for any serious integration of foreign workers into society. Thirdly, by encouraging innovation, the competitiveness of the economy is improved, to which foreign workers contribute by bringing new ideas and technologies. Fourth, increasing tax revenues: foreign workers contribute to public finances by paying taxes (Tax Administration 2024), which helps finance public services and infrastructure and reduce budget deficits.

4.1. Challenges in the integration of foreign workers

The integration of foreign workers can present challenges and requires appropriate policies for sustainable and beneficial integration. Programs for language learning, familiarization with culture and laws, and support in integration are needed (Stošić 2023). Currently, the working conditions of foreign workers in Croatia are poor, with frequent exploitation and poor social conditions (Vidaković 2024). Croatia must protect foreigners, provide them with a decent life and the same rights as domestic workers, and tighten controls on employers. A migration policy that promotes integration and control of migration flows is needed (Jurišić et al. 2024). Along with the integration of foreign workers, it is important to invest in the education of the domestic workforce in order to reduce the dependence on foreign labor (Čavrak 2013). Sustainable growth requires a balanced approach through the integration of foreign workers, taking into account the

needs of workers, employers and society as a whole. Considering that in Croatia there is a specific foreign staff coming from Asian countries who now represent something new in our environment, we encounter negative reactions when something is not familiar to us, and because of this, foreign workers are perceived as a threat (Stošić 2023 according to Gregurević).

4.2. Trends in employment of foreign workers

According to the Croatian Chamber of Economy research (2024b), the import of foreign workers is 20% more expensive than domestic workers due to the costs of demand for workers, training, permits and translators. According to Eurostat data, 5.1 million foreigners immigrated to the EU in 2022, twice as many as in 2021. The highest immigration rates were recorded by Malta, Luxembourg, Estonia, Ireland and Germany, while Slovakia has the lowest (Korda 2024). The number of foreign workers in Malta has increased by 500% in the past 10 years, when the number of them amounted to 18,700 workers, while in 2023 it amounted to 107,000 workers, making up 35% of the workforce, mostly from India and Nepal (Borg and Debono Drury 2024). The majority of Maltese (63% of respondents) believe that immigration is more of a problem than an opportunity, while 84% of them believe that migrants help fill hard-to-find jobs (Special Eurobarometer 469 2024).

It is important to note that not all immigrated foreigners are employees of that country at the same time, which results from the data that in Germany as many as 63.1% of foreigners receive state support for citizens (Bürgergeld), the condition for receiving which is 5 years of residence in Germany (Deutsche Welle 2024a). From the results of Bernd Raffelhüschen's analysis for the Foundation for a Market Economy, it shows that immigration does not strengthen public finances due to the low share of highly qualified workers. Creutzburg (2024) states that migration is not considered to be the main issue, but state support for unemployed citizens and immigrants. Germany has 570,000 job vacancies, mostly for highly skilled workers, and expects a shortage of 7 million workers by 2035. As in Croatia, most employed foreigners (30%) are employed in the economy sector (Deutsche Welle 2024b).

An OECD survey of 46,000 foreign workers shows that racism is the biggest obstacle for foreign workers in Germany, but they are satisfied with their interactions with the police and schools. The country of origin of the respondents is mostly Turkey, India, Colombia, Egypt, Algeria and others, and in 75% of cases it is a highly educated workforce (Becker 2024). An example of successful integration is the Indian Vishnu Gairola, who progressed from assistant cook to shift chief (TV/Labirint/HRT 2024).

5. Research methodology and results

The main goal of this work is to examine the need of Croatia to import foreign labor, divided into five research goals: to determine population migration and the balance of migration in Croatia, analyze registered unemployment by activity of previous employment from 2021 to 2024., determine the number of job vacancies with registered unemployment from 2021 to 2024., to investigate the number of issued work and

residence permits for foreigners from 2017 to 2024, the countries of origin of foreigners and the activities in which they are employed, to determine the contribution of tourism to the GDP of Croatia. The working hypothesis refers to the fact that H1: The Republic of Croatia has a need to import foreign labor H1a: The Republic of Croatia does not have enough qualified labor for activities in which it is lacking. The paper used a comparative analysis of data collected from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the Croatian Employment Service, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. The methodological part of the paper states the application of qualitative analysis, with special emphasis on comparative analysis. However, the application of this approach in work goes beyond classical qualitative research and includes the processing of quantitative data such as statistical indicators on migration trends, employment and the number of work permits issued to foreigners. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology enables a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena, such as the integration of foreign workers and the sustainability of economic growth. This is confirmed and researchers such as Krippendorff (2004) emphasize that content analysis can be applied not only to textual data, but also to statistical indicators and other quantitative data, thus expanding the scope of application of this method. Similarly, Mayring (2014) points out that qualitative content analysis can involve the quantification of certain elements of content, providing deeper insights into the research problem. Such an approach enables the synthesis of narrative data and numerical indicators, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of research results. In this work, comparative analysis is used as a framework for the interpretation of quantitative indicators obtained from different statistical sources, whereby quantitative data are not viewed in isolation, but as an integral part of a wider narrative that describes the dynamics of migration and integration of foreign workers into the Croatian economy. Data on population migration, the number of employed and unemployed by activity and year of Croatia, the issued/extended permits for foreigners to work and stay of Croatia, and the share of tourism in the GDP of Croatia were analyzed on the aforementioned websites. According to data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, from Croatia's entry into the EU in 2013 until 2021, Croatia had a negative migration trend with more emigrants than immigrants. Despite this, Croatia recorded economic growth, which was recognized by residents of less developed countries, leading to a positive migration balance of 11,685 inhabitants in 2022 and stopping the negative trend (Table 1).

Table 1 External migration of the population of the Republic of Croatia in 2022.

Year	Immigrants from abroad	Moved abroad	Migration balance
in 2013	10 378	15 262	-4 884
in 2014	10 638	20 858	-10 220
2015	11 706	29 651	-17,945
2016	13,985	36 436	-22 451
in 2017	15 553	47 352	-31 799
2018	26 029	39 515	-13 486
in 2019	37 726	40 148	-2 422
in 2020	33 414	34 046	-632
in 2021	35,912	40 424	-4 512
in 2022	57,972	46 287	11,685

Source: adapted according to <https://podaci.dzs.hr/2023/hr/58061> (February 15, 2024)

Like most countries, Croatia was affected by the COVID pandemic in 2020, which led to migration stagnation and a sharp increase in immigrants in 2021 and 2022. Despite the positive migration balance, the number of immigrants from Croatia increased by 203.28% since 2013, while the number of immigrants from abroad increased by 458.60% (Stolnik and Zebec 2023). A large percentage of immigrants also raise questions about the origin and employment of this workforce, as well as Croatia's real need for foreign labor. At the same time, the Statistics of the Croatian Employment Service (2024) show a significant difference between vacancies and available staff. Analyzing the construction sector and the activities of providing accommodation and catering, in which foreign labor has become the most represented (Table 2), in 2023, a shortage of 15,573 workers is visible in the construction sector, while the activities of providing accommodation and catering had a shortage of 13,972 workers. However, the processing industry sector still had the biggest deficit of almost 17,000 workers. It is important to note that it is almost impossible to hire all the available workers in the Republic of Croatia who have experience in the mentioned activities. Due to the high demand for labor, the statistics of issued residence and work permits from 2017 to 2024 are presented, which show a significant increase in employed foreigners in Croatia (Table 2).

Table 2 Statistics of issued residence and work permits

Year								
Sector	in 2017	2018	in 2019	in 2020	in 2021	in 2022	in 2023	Until April 30, 2024.
Construction	3.704	10,349	21,685	23,727	-	53,772	68,912	25,237
Tourism and catering	120	6,664	17,668	7,827	there is none	32.306	45,868	22,631
Industry	-	-	-	-	data	16,932	24,034	9.181
Traffic and connections	275	1.066	2.052	1.787	-	7,336	11,497	5.110
the market	-	-	1,595	736	-	-	5.126	2,662
				The year of COVID				
TOTAL issued permits (regardless of the sector)			72,523	66,655	81,995	124.121	172,499	72,872

Source: adapted according to <https://mup.gov.hr/gradjani-281562/moji-dokumenti-281563/stranci-333/statistika-169019/169019> (March 15, 2024); <https://lidermedia.hr/biznis-i-politika/rekordan-broj-stranah-dozvola-u-2022-najvise-iz-zemalja-u-okruzenju-i-nepalaca-148385> , (15.02.2024)

Tourism has a large share in Croatia's GDP, which increases the need for foreign labor in the tourism and construction sectors. These jobs generally do not require a higher education, so low-skilled labor is imported from less developed countries, but also with

a tendency for them to go to even more developed EU countries after obtaining a work permit. From 2021 to 2023, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia received the most work permits. In the last two years, the number of foreigners from outside the region has been growing, such as Nepalese, whose share has increased by 400%, and Indians (Table 3).

Table 3 Nationalities of foreigners who received a work permit

Country of origin of foreign workers	in 2024	in 2023	in 2022	in 2021
BIH	14,280	38,236	36,783	30,721
SERBIA	9,692	24,028	19,176	13,579
NEPAL	13,741	23,493	12,222	4,724
MACEDONIA	4,861	13,412	10,053	5,926
KOSOVO	2,811	9,922	8,979	7,913
PHILIPPINES	5,165	10,999		
INDIA	6,914	15,627		
TOTAL PERMITS ISSUED	72,872	172,499	124,121	81,995

Source: adapted according to <https://mup.gov.hr/gradjani-281562/moji-dokumenti-281563/stranci-333/statistika-169019/169019> (March 15, 2024); <https://lidermedia.hr/biznis-i-politika/rekordan-broj-stranih-dozvola-u-2022-najvise-iz-zemalja-u-okruzenju-i-nepalaca-148385> , (15.02.2024); <https://www.hgk.hr/produzuju-se-dozvole-za-strance-s-jedne-na-tri-godine-za-sezone-sa-6-na-9-mjeseci>, (15.02.2024)

Zagreb County had the greatest need for foreign workers, issuing 42,541 employment permits in 2023, which is 24.66% of the total permits issued in Croatia. Split-Dalmatia County leads the way in seasonal employment, with 4,772 permits, which is 25.30% of the total number of seasonal permits issued. By the end of February 2024, 32,725 work and residence permits were issued, and around 196,000 permits are expected by the end of the year, which is a significant increase compared to 2019, when 72,523 permits were issued (Ministry of the Interior 2024). The peak of employment in tourism was in 2019 with 94.6 thousand employees (UN Tourism 2024), which was followed by a decline due to the pandemic. In 2022, the number of people employed in tourism almost returned to the level of 2019, reaching 91.4 thousand, which is 5.6% of the total employment in Croatia (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2023). Foreigners accounted for 35.35% of those employed in tourism in 2022, with 32,306 out of a total of 91,400 employed (Lider 2023). Seasonal employment in tourism contributes significantly to Croatia's income and GDP, which can be seen in the following table (Table 4).

Table 4 Tourism in figures from 2019 to 2022.

Income from tourism	in 2019	in 2020	in 2021	in 2022
GDP (in millions of EUR)	53,983	50,224	57,232	67,390
INCOME FROM TOURISM (in millions of EUR)	10,539.10	4,813.50	9,121.80	13,113.80
SHARE OF TOURISM IN GDP (in %)	19.5	9.6	15.9	19.5

Source: adapted from https://mint.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2022_dokumenti/Turizam%20u%20brojkama%202021.pdf

(March 15, 2024) ;
https://mint.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//2023_dokumenti//230804_turizam_u_brojkama_2022_hrv.pdf, (March 15, 2024)

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (2022 and 2023), income from tourism fell significantly in 2020 due to the pandemic, but in 2021 it increased by 1.06% compared to 2019. By 2022, the share of tourism in GDP returned to 19, 5%, whereby GDP in 2022 was 24.84% higher than in 2019. Table 4 shows the importance of tourism in the overall economic development of Croatia.

6. Research limitations and recommendations for further research

Research limitations include insufficient programs for the integration of foreign workers in Croatia. For example the aforementioned education program "Welcome to Croatia" (The Croatian Chamber of Economy 2024a) with the aim of integrating foreign workers into the business community and society is insufficiently effective. lasting 70 hours (The Croatian Employment Service 2024). The mentioned vouchers can be used in certain Universities in Split, Zadar, Zagreb, Vukovar, Vinkovci, Ivanec, Varaždin and Bjelovar, and it is evident that in Istria, as the second largest region in terms of "seasonal" employment, there is not a single University that would provide the mentioned education to foreign workers with the use of vouchers (Ministry of the Interior 2024). Foreign workers rarely join unions due to fear of employers, and often do not have paid contributions for health and pension (Ministry of the Interior 2024). Workers turn to the Office of the Ombudsman for rights violations, such as working without a permit, overtime, unpaid wages and denied vacations (Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia 2024). Kardum (2024) points out that only employers benefit and the immediate filling of the pension fund.

First, the research relies heavily on secondary data sources (Eurostat, State Statistical Office, Croatian Employment Service and the Ministry of the Interior), which may result in limitations regarding the timeliness and accuracy of the data. Furthermore, the research was conducted in a specific time frame (2021–2024), which is why the results may not reflect long-term trends in migration and integration of foreign workers. Also, there is a limitation in access to primary data, such as direct interviews with foreign workers or employers, which would provide an additional in-depth perspective. Additionally, comparative analysis, while useful for analyzing broader economic and social phenomena, has its limitations in terms of interpreting quantitative data. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was not fully optimized in this work, which may limit the comprehensiveness and clarity of certain findings.

But it is necessary to investigate the working and living conditions of foreign workers in Croatia and their economic consumption, which can certainly be the subject of new research and contributions to this topic. It is proposed to improve the employment policy and sustainable solutions, develop a migration policy that promotes the integration of foreign workers, and invest in the education of the domestic workforce in order to reduce dependence on foreign labor.

For future research, primary research in the field is recommended, e.g. future research should include qualitative interviews with foreign workers, employers and representatives of relevant institutions in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities of foreign worker integration from different perspectives. The implementation of long-term longitudinal research is also recommended, which would enable a better understanding of changes in migration trends, the integration of foreign workers and their impact on the economy over time. One of the possibilities is the analysis of specific sectors, where the focus of future research could be on individual sectors with a high proportion of foreign workers, such as tourism, construction and industry, in order to identify sector-specific challenges and opportunities. Comparing Croatia with other countries with a similar economic and migration profile can provide useful insights into successful models of integration of foreign workers. As well as an assessment of the impact of policies aimed at the integration of foreign workers and their social and economic impact. Therefore, understanding the limitations and addressing them in future research is crucial for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of migration and its role in the sustainable economic development of Croatia.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the role of foreign workers in the sustainability of economic growth in Croatia through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. Using qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis of data from secondary sources, such as Eurostat, the State Statistical Office, the Croatian Employment Service and the Ministry of the Interior, the research covered key economic sectors with high demand for labor and dynamic migration trends. The analysis of the data showed that the import of foreign labor is a necessity, especially in sectors such as tourism, construction and catering, where domestic labor does not meet the existing needs of the labor market. Also, an increasing diversification of foreign workers' countries of origin has been observed, which creates additional challenges in the integration process, including language barriers, cultural differences and working conditions. The research identified key challenges in the process of integration of foreign workers, including the lack of effective integration programs, poor working conditions and lack of systematic support at the institutional level. Programs like "Welcome to Croatia" proved to be insufficiently structured and content-poor for the long-term integration of foreign workers. Constructive conclusions derived from the analysis point to several key recommendations: it is necessary to improve programs for the integration of foreign workers, with special emphasis on linguistic and cultural adaptation, political measures should be aimed at reducing the exploitation of workers and ensuring equal rights and working conditions, and a long-term employment strategy and migration must include a systematic assessment of labor market needs and better coordination between state institutions and the private sector. In conclusion, the conducted analysis confirms the hypothesis that the import of foreign labor is crucial for the sustainability of the Croatian economy, but this process requires carefully planned and effective measures in order to achieve long-term sustainability. Future research should be focused on a more detailed analysis of individual sectors and on the evaluation of the effect of existing policies in order to improve the process of integration of foreign workers and ensure the economic stability of Croatia.

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RURAL TOURISM – CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Review paper

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Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to point out the capacity of rural tourism to contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals and thereby contribute to the overall development of the local community. The paper identifies the potential contributions of rural tourism from different aspects (economic, social, environmental) to achieving sustainable development goals. Therefore, in the second part of the paper, the contribution of rural tourism to the achievement of each individual goal of sustainable development is elaborated. Rural tourism is one of the priorities of the World Tourism Organization, but also of the tourism development of Croatia, since it brings economic benefits and significant social contributions.

Keywords:

sustainable development goals (SDGs), rural tourism, tourism planning.

1. Introduction

The paper explains the importance of rural tourism for the development of the local community in such a way as to contribute to the sustainability of the rural destination. In particular, the connection between rural tourism and achieving the goals of sustainable development is pointed out, based on the literature and the results of previous research.

The paper is based on the analysis of previous research and the attitudes of authors who investigated sustainable rural tourism, based on which the potential contributions of rural tourism to the achievement of sustainable development goals are summarized. In doing so, previous conclusion on the contribution of tourism to the goals of sustainable development were taken into account (Dwyer, L, 2022), which were then focused and adapted to the potential of rural tourism.

2. The importance of rural tourism for local community

UNWTO defines rural tourism as “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide spectrum of products linked to nature activities, agriculture, ways of life and rural cultures, fishing with canes and visiting places of

interest. Rural tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) settings with the following characteristics:

- low population density,
- landscapes and land use planning where agriculture and forestry prevail, and
- social structures and traditional ways of life.” (UNWTO, 2019)

Tourism contributes significantly to the economic development and quality of life of the local population in rural areas: it helps revitalise rural communities, reduces migration to urban areas, opens up opportunities for new entrepreneurial projects, has a positive impact on the preservation of local culture, traditions and heritage, creates markets for agricultural and other products, stimulates investments in infrastructure, initiates a growing demand for different products and services. (Travel & Tourism Analyst, 2007).

The key drivers of development of rural tourism are the people living in these areas, who have to build a whole range of partner and related relationships by building tourist infrastructure and strengthening the tourist offer appropriate to the expectations of tourists. Developing and investing in the contents of the tourist offer of rural areas increases the possibilities of generating local population income, increases the level of expected entrepreneurial activity, self-employment and creates a network of institutions, tourist organisations and agencies focused on the intensified tourist development of rural areas. In addition to economic effects, the development of rural tourism certainly influences the more advanced social development of the environment. (Smolčić Jurdana, D., Soldić Frleta, D., 2012) Tourism in rural areas can particularly benefit traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women - who make up 54% of the workforce in the tourism sector compared to 39% for the whole economy. (UNWTO, 2020) Youth who live in the rural areas are also under the pressure of improving the quality of living by finding new employment opportunities and better conditions for everyday life (health services, education..).

Creating new opportunities for jobs and economic activities in rural areas through tourism requires a holistic approach that engages all other sectors and activities in the tourism value chain and promotes Public- Private-Community partnerships. (UNWTO, 2020) The demand for services in rural tourism and a growing desire of people to spend time in the outdoors, take part in traditional customs, and taste indigenous food are encouraging more and more entrepreneurs to start their own businesses in rural areas. Entrepreneurship (micro and small) is seen as a promising way of developing rural areas (Fuller-Love et al., 2006, Skuras et al., 2003) and a tool for creating jobs for residents and improving their quality of life (Irvine and Anderson, 2004), all the more so because of the general upward trend in the share of self-employed persons in entrepreneurship in rural areas (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998).

The basis for successful entrepreneurship in tourism in rural areas is seen in taking advantage of opportunities for further diversification, strengthening partnerships, and embracing and providing education on new technologies that can help to create

an approach to winning new markets and, consequently, building competitiveness (Fuller-Love et al., 2006).

Therefore, plans for the recovery of rural areas and the development of rural tourism have a very broad scope of activities; from improving infrastructure, creating favorable financing conditions, attracting new investments, improving education and skills of the local population, as well as a set of special measures aimed at vulnerable groups (women, youth).

It is especially important when developing rural tourism to try to preserve the traditional economic activities that took place in rural areas. The significance is multiple. First of all, all these traditional economic activities contribute to the authenticity of the tourist offer of rural tourism. Furthermore, what is particularly important, this ensures the resistance of the rural community to possible market changes, since tourism is extremely sensitive to the external influences of various factors (economic crisis, health crisis-pandemics and others). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the development of rural tourism as an integral part of the development of rural communities, as a new opportunity for the local population without suppressing other segments of the local economy.

Rural tourism is considered of the great importance for future development of tourism in Croatia, especially when taking into account the strategic goals of Croatian tourism until 2030: 1) Year-round and regionally balanced tourism, 2) Tourism with preserved environment, space and climate, 3) Competitive and innovative tourism, 4) Resilient tourism. (The Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030, 2023) Goals are accepted as a basis for tourism policy measures which are defined in National Plan for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2027. In this document special emphasis is given to rural tourism which must be developed in Croatia on the basis of the concept of sustainable development that promotes controlled growth and development with maximum conservation and rational use of resources. The concept of sustainable tourism development, its goals, principles and active participation of all entities and stakeholders in tourism development planning has the task of reducing these potential negative impacts of tourism to the smallest possible extent, and for the development of rural-agro tourism significant measures are to raise awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability of tourism, to improve systematic and sustainable planning through tourism development based on reception capacity and implementation of circular economy. Administrative and parafiscal relief, access to sources of financing, as well as modernisation of the categorisation system for accommodation capacities and service levels, while encouraging investments in high quality accommodation suitable for rural areas will contribute to the growth of tourist traffic and tourist consumption and consequently to the economic sustainability of the concept of sustainable tourism. (National Plan for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2027, 2023)

3. Contribution of rural tourism to SDGs

There is a significant scientific publications which are analyzing the sustainability of rural tourism. An & Alarcon examined the understanding of sustainability in rural tourism sector by analyzing articles in journals published 2009-2019, SSCI and SCIE-class papers which were searched on the Web of Science. They identified 564 articles with the key words „sustainable rural tourism“ or „sustainability of rural tourism“. (An, W., Alarcon, S., 2020) Shevchenko & Petrushenko have analyzed the relationship between the structure of the rural tourism goals and the sustainable development goals on the example of Ukraine. (Shevchenko, H., Petrushenko, M., 2021) Some of the papers and investigations are focused to analyze how rural tourism, in line with the sustainable development goal 8 – decent work and economic growth – can serve to sustainably develop the most depopulated rural areas. (Lopez-Sanzu, J.M. et al., 2021)

Today, the goals of sustainable development are integrated into all development agendas, so tourism is also seen in the context of the contribution it can make to their realization. Tourism activities should respect the ecological characteristics and capacity of the local environment in which they take place. All efforts should be made to respect traditional lifestyles and cultures. (The Berlin Declaration, 1997) When discussing rural area as a component of natural and cultural resources, ground point is the understanding that this is an area of multi-usage, tourism included, and therefore limited and sensitive. The beginning of exploit is possible only after careful planning and the decisions made by the resource management, with the aim of limiting and minimizing the possible conflicts and ensuring the sustainable exploit. (Pančić Kombol. T., 2000)

Being involved in rural tourism, local residents can benefit from the sale of accommodation units, operation of experience programs or activities, the sale of agricultural products and food and so on (Lee B. C. & Kim D., 2009). Consequently, rural tourism and demand for labour-intensive products such as crafts, agricultural products will lead to increased employment. Rural tourism goes beyond simply complementing traditional activities such as agriculture, and can act as a catalyst for a whole range of new entrepreneurial activities, partnerships and networks (Oliver & Jenkins, 2005).

Based on previous research on the potential contribution of tourism to the SDGs, a focused analysis was performed on the potential contribution of rural tourism to the SDGs.

Table1 SDGs and potential rural tourism contribution

Sustainable Development Goal	Potential tourism contribution	Potential specific rural tourism contribution*
1 No poverty	tourism creates jobs and income at local and community levels; tourism has the potential to enhance the livelihoods of the least	rural tourism offers new entrepreneur activities, self-employment; offers the possibility of engagement of the local community in jobs of

	skilled, poorer members of society	various characteristics, thus providing employment opportunities for local residents of different levels of education
2 Zero hunger	tourism spurs agricultural production in general and via gastronomic tourism; tourism generates income and jobs in agriculture; agri-tourism (farm tourism) generates additional income for industry and local communities, promoting a more resilient agriculture sector.	rural tourism influences the development of local agricultural production; rural tourism enables the affirmation of small agricultural producers who sell their products on the spot
3 Good health and well-being	tourism development establishes health and public health structures required for tourists and from which local communities also benefit; tourism related activities promote resident physical and mental health; tourism provides facilities to improve health and well-being	development of tourism in rural areas contributes to improve health facilities which will serve to local inhabitants and tourists, too; facilities which can be build for tourists contribute to well-being of local inhabitants
4 Quality education	tourism requires a skilled workforce; tourism education provides employment opportunities for youth, women, and minority groups; in-house training courses and skills development can transfer knowledge to wider society	rural tourism gives opportunity for employment (women, young people...); for the purpose of rural tourism local inhabitants have a chance to improve skills and knowledge
5 Gender equality	tourism creates jobs and earnings for marginalized groups; tourism provides opportunities for women to better engage in the workforce	rural tourism creates job opportunities for women
6 Clean water and sanitation	tourism related infrastructure helps to achieve water access and security, and pollution control technology	the development of rural tourism is an incentive for the improvement of infrastructure, which includes water access and construction of water purification devices
7 Affordable and clean energy	tourism promotes investments in clean energy sources, helps to reduce greenhouse gases, mitigate climate change and contribute to access of energy for all	the development of rural tourism is an incentive for the investments in clean energy sources and encourages the local population to use incentives for renewable energy sources

8 Decent work and economic growth	tourism .supports economic growth, locally, regionally and nationally; tourism is an important export earner globally; tourism provides decent work opportunities; diversification through tourism value chains reduces income inequalities.	the development of rural tourism creates a whole spectrum of different entrepreneurial initiatives and employment opportunities with the aim of forming a tourist offer
9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure	tourism supports community infrastructure development, making it more sustainable, innovative, resource-efficient, and reducing carbon footprint	rural tourism is a stimulus for the development of infrastructure in order to develop according to sustainable principles
10 Reduced inequalities	tourism development engages local populations; tourism contributes to urban renewal and rural development; tourism facilitates economic integration and diversification.	the development of rural tourism works to reduce the differences in development between urban and rural areas; reduces inequalities between people as it opens up new possibilities for affirmation
11 Sustainable cities and communities	tourism advances urban infrastructure and accessibility, promotes regeneration and preserves cultural and natural heritage assets; investment in green infrastructure promotes smarter and greener cities for residents and visitors	rural tourism promotes a sustainable rural community in different aspects;
12 Responsible consumption and production	tourism can adopt sustainable consumption and production modes; green tourism identifies environmentally friendly tourism activities; eco-tourism promotes conservation and delivers socio-economic benefits	rural tourism is strongly connected with eco-tourism and promotes conservation and contributes to the short food supply chains
13 Climate action	tourism can play a leading role in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies	rural tourism can raise awareness about climate change
14 Life below water	coastal and maritime tourism supports healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable use of marine resources; tourism as part of Integrated Coastal Zone Management helps conserve fragile marine ecosystems.	the development of rural tourism on the coast can stimulate the local community's awareness of the value of the sea and the protection of seas and waters in general
15 Life on land	tourism can help to conserve and preserve biodiversity and generate revenue as an	the development of rural tourism on the coast can stimulate the local community's

	alternative livelihood to local communities	awareness of the value of biodiversity
16 Peace, justice and strong institutions	tourism that engages local communities can foster tolerance and understanding between persons of different cultures	rural tourism creates an opportunity for the local population to meet other people of different cultures and value systems, thus contributing to tolerance and acceptance of diversity
17 Partnerships for the goals	improved tourism governance strengthens private/public partnerships and engages multiple stakeholders to collaborate to achieve the SDGs	rural tourism takes place in small communities and its successful development is only possible with the partnership of all stakeholders

Source: Dwyer, L., 2022; United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2020; Laimer, P., 2017; UNWTO, 2018

*Prepared by the author.

There is no doubt that rural tourism can make significant contributions to the goals of sustainable development, primarily at the local level. Concept of sustainable development promotes controlled growth and development through maximum preservation and rational exploitation of resources. This would provide a long-term economic and social development that would, in the long run, lead to the well-being of community. Due to the multidisciplinary character of tourism, and especially rural tourism, a multidisciplinary approach is required in sustainable development of tourism engaging the interests of economists, sociologists, geographers, ethnologists, philosophers, linguists, culturologists, ecologists and members of other fields of science.

UNWTO conducted a survey among its full member states from October 2022 and January 2023. It is interesting to see which SDGs are considered when planning for or implementing rural tourism initiatives in their countries. (UNWTO, 2023). The most focused SDGs have been: SDG 8, SDG 1, SDG 11. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2 Countries considering SDGs when planning for or implementing rural tourism initiatives (number of countries, %)



Note: 79 member states out of 79 answered this question

Source: Tourism and Rural Development: a Policy Perspective, UNWTO Member States Survey on Tourism for Rural Development, 2024, p. 39.

Research has showed that rural tourism contributes to all SDGs, and therefore it contributes to well-being of the local community, but also has a global positive impact. In the conditions of growing urbanization and depopulation of rural areas, rural tourism provides an opportunity for the sustainable development of local communities.

Rural tourism development should be in accordance with the sustainability (Hall, 2000; Smolčić, D., 2015). Sustainable tourism intends to (Sagustín Fons, Moseñe Fierro & Gómez y Patiño, 2011): (a) Provide optimum use of environmental resources that are a basic element for developing tourism, preserving essential ecological processes as a contribution to care and preserve natural resources and biological diversity; (b) Be respectful with social-cultural authenticity of host communities, preserving their cultural, architectural, life assets and traditional values, in order to get better understanding and inter-cultural tolerance; (c) Ensure long term, viable economic activities, providing all agents with widely distributed socio-economic benefits, where new opportunities for stable employment should arise. Social services could bring a benefit for the host communities, as a means to reduce poverty or get better life quality.

4. Conclusion

Tourism as a propulsive economic activity develops in different locations. Along with the process of urbanization, and especially after the pandemic, the interest of tourists in staying in rural areas is growing. Such a trend in tourist demand opens the possibility for new entrepreneurial opportunities, self-employment, infrastructure improvement and overall economic and social development of rural areas. Especially in the context of sustainability, rural tourism is important because it creates the conditions for young people to stay in the countryside, as well as the possibility of employment and affirmation for all groups of people, including vulnerable groups. The paper was prepared based on the analysis of scientific literature and expert studies that focused on the contribution of tourism to the achievement of sustainable development goals, as well as on the findings of authors who dealt with rural tourism. Rural tourism makes significant contributions to the goals of sustainable development, primarily at the local level and contribute to the well-being of the local population from different perspectives – economic, social and environmental. When planning the development of rural tourism, it is necessary to more clearly define measures and activities that will utilize the potential of rural tourism to achieve sustainable development goals at the local level.

The shortcoming of the paper is a lack of primary research. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct primary research in further analyses of this topic, and it would be particularly challenging to compare research results in rural destinations in different tourism development phases.

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THE CHALLENGES OF BRANDING A RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION IN CROATIA USING TRADITIONAL RURAL MOTIFS

Review paper

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Abstract:

The role of traditional rural motifs is an important element in the branding of a rural tourism destination and products. Traditional rural motifs in the promotion of rural tourism in Croatia were, and still are, mostly related to promotion through folk costumes, culinary arts, architecture, and the production of traditional items for souvenir purposes. The modern age, fast lifestyle, fashionability and the desire for prestige present challenges for rural tourism in general, and especially recognition of heritage motifs in the tourist offer. Thus, the branding of a destination through traditional rural motifs must find its market niche and modern approaches to today's tourists. The question arises whether the use of rural motifs in the branding of a destination has a future, and what are the guidelines for further development and adaptation to the modern tourist. With this paper, we aim to answer these questions and present the challenges faced today by destinations that are branded using traditional rural motifs. Furthermore, the paper will present a historical overview of the use of rural motifs in the branding of a destination, and the role of women will be emphasized. The historical overview contains available promotional material for the advertising of rural tourism events, as well as postcards, brochures, travelogues, tourist guides, magazines, and other relevant content that was and is being used in the branding of rural tourism destinations. The results of existing research indicate that national heritage is more recognized by foreigners than by local people, and traditional elements are a specific value and an important aspect of tourist branding through rural tourism.

Keywords:

Croatia, Rural Heritage, Rural Tourism, Tourism Branding, Traditional Rural Motifs

1. Introduction

More than 80% of the territory of the Republic of Croatia is characterized as rural or dominantly rural area according to the urban-rural typology of the European Union (EUROSTAT, 2024). Regarding to this characterization of space, the question arises as to how rural tourism destinations are branded and whether they use traditional rural motifs.

Rural tourism destinations in Croatia are insufficiently explored, neglected and in the shadow of popular tourist destinations. Therefore, rural destinations face many challenges, while at the same time it leaves space for progress of the tourist offer. This means that rural destinations offer should not only be food and drink, but the offer should also be complemented with cultural content. Rural areas in Croatia have their heritage

and culture to offer visitors. At the same time, rural tourism is facing challenges like unattractiveness to the tourists, but also to young people in general.

Furthermore, climate change is an increasing threat to tourism, especially in cities where the temperature rises more than in rural areas. In addition, the fast-paced lifestyle and everyday work encourages the desire of vacation in rural areas. On such occasions, rural tourism can be improved. However, rural tourism in Croatia is mostly based on locally grown food and drinks while the presentation of local customs, culture and architecture is neglected. Rural tourism should not be only gastro tourism, it should include other types of tourism. To conclude, research objectives of the paper suggest that rural heritage represents a great potential for further development, especially due to the fact that the development of rural tourism based on the activation of local heritage is one of the guidelines of the World Tourism Organization in the domain of sustainable year-round tourism and benefit for the local community.

Rural areas or villages are last motive for visiting Croatia - only 4,6% tourists in coastal regions and 7,8% in continental regions visit Croatia due to rural tourism (Tomas, 2023). Rural tourism challenges are related to the fact that the sea and nature are the two most important motives for visiting Croatia. Croatian National Tourism Board promotes rural Croatia through narrative of active tourism, healthy home-made cooking, top-quality drinks but also through cultural heritage (Croatian Tourist Board, 2024). This is the part of national strategy of widening the tourist offer. Promotion of rural areas as unexplored and slowly becoming modern is catch for tourists desired undeveloped destinations.

There are several associations in Croatia with the aim of strengthening tourism in rural areas. Croatian Association for Tourism and Rural Development "The Village Membership Club" was founded in 1997 and is most recognizable association in domain of rural tourism promotion and development. The association deals with rural and regional topics, advisory assistance to entrepreneurs and producers in rural areas and their education to improve the quality of supply and demand at the international, national and local level. The other important association with similar activity is "The Croatian Rural Tourism Association". This association certainly has a big flywheel in the popularization and promotion of rural tourism, but they prioritized the gastronomy in regard to cultural heritage. Rural tourism is not only food and drink, wine roads and family farms, but also rural heritage that needs to be revived and offered to visitors. The goal of our scientific paper is to highlight the importance of local heritage and the presentation of the opportunities that Croatia has and needs to be used.

Nowadays, on global level, local heritage is one of the prominent tools in tourism branding. *UN Agenda for Sustainable Development "Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage"* is one of the main documents for more sustainable and inclusive development and societies. United Cities for Local Government (2018) follow the given guidelines from the UN and put effort to protect worlds cultural and natural heritage. In terms of tourism, the goal is to use heritage as an opportunity for branding a tourist destination through folk motifs in order to connect the destination with the application of a specific identity. The development of rural tourism is the subject of the policy of many European countries with the aim of improving the social and economic development of rural areas that mostly suffer from negative trends

of deagrarianization and depopulation. At the same time, the development of rural tourism encourages the plan of the European Union, which seeks to encourage local and small economies and sustainable development, reducing the impact of climate change.

This paper was based on the hypothesis that rural heritage is a great potential that is not sufficiently valorised. Namely, the paper presents the potential of rural heritage that has not yet been used in promotion, as well as the challenges and opportunities for connecting the culture and tourism sectors. Apart from classical methods in scientific work such as inductive and deductive methods, methods of analysis and synthesis, abstractions and concretizations, methods of generalization and specializations, this chapter will use historical approach and method of classification, method of description, method of compilations.

2. Historiographic overview of folk motifs in clothing

An important role in the development of cottage industry was played by raising and organizing home handicrafts in the 19th and 20th centuries. Home crafts include weaving, carpet making, embroidery, lace, basketry, woodcarving, painting, gourd, making toys (Petrović Leš, 2006). The commercialization of folk art in Dalmatia, and especially folk costumes, began in the 19th century during the Austrian rule. Using the national heritage as art of affirmation at the beginning of the 20th century included its cultural politics. In the service of projecting the uniqueness of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was understood as archaic a form of high art, and as such corresponded to bourgeois aesthetics ideals. Folk art is valued as a "primitive" artistic expression, unencumbered by European styles, which corresponded to art nouveau currents (Vojnović Traživuk, 2006). Folk handicrafts in Croatia have a centuries-old and rich tradition, and lacework and the use of folk motifs in clothing stand out. Interest of European nobility and upper classes of society rises in 19th century when this area became accessible to them. In that period, foreigners were mostly interested in embroideries, costumes, dishes, jewellery and especially lace. Merchants from whole Europe and even Constantinople were constantly visiting the country and redeemed the item for nothing (Piplović, 2000).

The historical overview of folk motifs in clothing contains available promotional material for the advertising of rural tourism events, as well as postcards, brochures, travelogues, tourist guides, magazines, and other relevant content that was and is being used in the branding of rural tourism destinations. Some of the most used means of traditional rural motifs promotion in tourism purposes in Croatia are related to promotion through folk costumes, culinary arts, architecture, and the production of traditional items for souvenir purposes.

Figure 1 Women in folk costumes in Slavonia and Dubrovnik



Source: From left to right – old postcard Slavonia and Dubrovnik. Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research

Some of the examples of the use of rural motifs are in the food industry where traditional rural motifs were used to associate the food with a certain area. Examples of dairy industry *Zdenka*, meat industry *Gavrilović*, bottled mineral water *Jamnica* and production of *Maraska* liqueur are also interesting. All of them used rural motifs in their promotion in order to bring the products closer to consumers. The insurance company *Croatia osiguranje* used women dressed in rural folk costumes to get closer to the numerous peasants as clients.

Figure 2 Graphics (from left to right): *Zdenka*, *Gavrilović*, *Jamnica*, *Maraska*



Source: web page of Zdenka, Gavrilović, Jamnička kiselica and Maraska

3. Branding of rural destinations

The branding of rural tourist destinations is topic which was dealt with only by rare authors from the scientific side. In Croatia, Završki and Horvat (2020) dealt with importance of new media in branding rural destinations in Osijek-Baranja County. They conclude that Rural tourism in the continental part of Croatia, despite poorly developed resources, it shows exceptional development potential.

Rural destinations in continental part of Croatia, but also in Dalmatian *Zagora*, Lika and Gorski Kotar are relatively neglected areas of tourism branding in Croatia in relation to big cities, costal area, and popular destinations. Rural destination branding should go in the direction of recognition and exposure of heritage motifs in the tourist offer. Branding of a destination through traditional rural motifs makes such destinations recognizable and attractive to visitors. Rural motifs in the branding of a destination have a future, but there is a huge need of guidelines for further development and adaptation to the modern tourist.

Branding of rural tourism destinations is primarily achieved through - connecting sectors to complete the offer and comprehensive use of resources (education, agriculture, culture, and tourism work together in the same direction). *Table 1* presents challenges and potentials faced today by destinations that are branded using traditional rural motifs according to every activity segment.

Table 1 Challenges and potentials of rural destinations

	CHALLENGES	POTENTIALS
CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Uncoordinated culture development plans at the local, regional, and national level • Financial funds • Educated staff at the local level that would initiate and revive the heritage • Non-recognition of interest association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multidimensional view of the potentials of traditional rural motifs and production of traditional rural motifs
TOURISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of institutional support • Low awareness of traditional rural motifs as a tourism development resource • Attracting tourists to rural areas • Willingness of people in rural areas to engage in tourism • Lack of rural tourism development strategy • Inadequate marketing activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of traditional rural motifs as tourist attractions - to include traditional rural motifs into rural tourism development
AGRICULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Insufficiently developed awareness of traditional rural motifs as agricultural heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of agricultural goods in tourism promotion - connecting local farmers and tourism workers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest of local farmers in cooperation. • The number of people who want to engage in agriculture is decreasing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking traditional rural motifs with agricultural activities.
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural areas are areas of emigration - insufficient interest in educational activities. • Education requires logistics and financial resources. • Lack of institutional support • Inadequate statistical base • Lack of educational programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of the local community through educational activities on local heritage. In addition to the education of young people, it could be used for the education of adults related to folk customs such as knitting, embroidery, crocheting, painting, pottery, crafting, etc.
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in tourist activity entails an increase in waste and the use of resources such as water and electricity. • Infrastructural construction should be adapted to sustainable development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional construction using local materials, activation of rural heritage in accordance with sustainability as well as environmental awareness

Source: Created by authors

3.1. Toponyms – use in destination branding and storytelling

Numerous places in Croatia are named after some specific feature characteristic of their geographical affiliation. Toponyms represent a great resource for use in destination branding, especially in storytelling. Today, the use of toponyms in branding and storytelling is neglected and underutilized. Toponyms are most often linked to fruits, animals, types of trees, and flowers.

Višnjevac (from fruit „višnja“ – „sour cherry“)
 Gušćerovec (from animal „guska“ – „goose“)
 Patkovac (from animal „patka“ – “duck”)
 Voloder (from animal „vol“ – „ox”)
 Košutarica (from animal „košuta“ – “hind”)
 Kukuruzari (from cereal „kukuruz“ – „corn”)
 Hrastovac (from tree „hrast“ – “oak”)
 Bršljanovac (from tree “bršljan” – “ivy”)
 Jelenovac, Gornje Jelenje (from animal “jelen” – “deer” or “hart”)
 Farkaševac / Farkaševac (from Hungarian word for animal “farkaš” – “wolf”)
 Konjsko (from animal “konj” – “horse”)
 Ružica grad (from flower “ruža” – “rose”)
 Kupinovac (from fruit “kupina” – “blackberry”)
 Jasenovac (from tree “jasen” – “ash”)
 Jabukovac (from fruit “jabuka” – “apple”)

3.2. Role of women

The role of women in tourism branding of a destination has changed over time, but it has always played an important role, same as in the promotion of rural destinations. Women were mostly depicted in traditional folk costumes. Using available promotional materials such as guides, travel books, postcards, as well as promotional campaigns for some food products the role of women is described.

The demand for heritage related to rural Croatian women appeared in the 19th century, but it was affirmed and used more significantly in the 20th and 21st centuries. The recognition and use of rural heritage has changed over time, and with the establishment of the "Society for the promotion of lace and homemaking industry in Dalmatia" archduchess Marija Jozefa became one of the main promoters of Dalmatian folk art, especially lacemaking. In 1908 the Society organized lectures and exhibition about Dalmatian heritage in Vienna. It included traditional music, craft and art, and the purpose was to arouse the interest of wide Austrian population in the beauty of Dalmatia, its historical monuments, folk life, lace, and craft (Piplović, 2000).

Natalia Bruck-Auffenberger mentioned that the Berlin magazine for fashion *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung* first became interested in traditional embroidery in Dalmatia. Around 1880, it published some South Slavic techniques and their application to modern embroidery. The publishers of the paper were the baron and baroness von Lipperheide, collectors of vintage women's handicrafts (Bruck-Auffenberg, 1912).

4. Examples of good practice

Małopolska Wooden Architecture Route is great example of branding a rural tourism destination in Poland using traditional rural motifs. This Route is consisted of 251 historic wooden buildings in Małopolska region: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches, tall belltowers, Old Polish manor and detached houses and heritage parks. The Route, established in 2001, is invaluable legacy of folk culture and four wooden churches entered UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List in 2003.

Etno Village Novo Čiče is located in an area of Velika Gorica. This village offers a special and unforgettable *Turopoljska* atmosphere ambience. Their offer includes local products according to the old one's recipes, but they also show their local heritage - the life it was and customs.

The Centre for Sustainable Development of Lovas was established with the aim of demographic and economic revitalization of the municipality, as the main instrument for economic, social, and cultural development. The Centre makes jewellery, clothes and

household items decorated with local motifs. This kind of production is a good foundation for further development, as an outstanding basis for branding the municipality of Lovas as a rural tourist destination.

5. Conclusion

Rural tourism is one of the drivers of the economic and demographic revitalization of Croatia but in relation to other member states of the European Union, it has been visibly neglected and has not been dealt with systematically.

Regardless of the characterization of Croatia's space, it can be concluded that traditional rural motifs are insufficiently used for branding rural tourism destinations. One of the reasons that folk culture was considered a lower culture during the past. With this paper, we have shown that rural heritage, but also national heritage in general, is more recognized by foreigners than by local people, and traditional elements are a specific value and an important aspect of tourist branding through rural tourism.

Training of guides and animators organized by the tourist board (or local self-government unit) who will be educated about local customs, rural motifs (architecture, agriculture, gastronomy, ethnology) is strategical measure that is necessary to activate rural heritage. The trainings will be led by agronomists, cultural workers, art historians or ethnologists, depending on the need and local specifics.

The recognition and use of traditional rural motifs represent in any case challenges for branding the rural destination. Preservation of heritage includes modern technologies such as keeping records and making policy makers aware of heritage importance. Policy makers need to know how to recognize it and use it in tourism. Each destination or region should research recognizable and/or specific content that can be linked to different sectors (culture, tourism, agriculture, education, sustainable development) so that the community can recognize and present it more correctly, but most important, to use it for different types and forms of tourism.

For example, in the gastronomic offer of corn-based dishes, tourists and visitors should be provided with information about its heritage in local area. It is necessary to connect the dishes with characteristic types of corn, but also with the preservation of corn in characteristic corn boxes and commemorative souvenirs. Therefore, it is also necessary to connect future research with application in practice, and to create manuals and organize workshops.

With this paper, we want to provide a contribution to the development of rural tourism through recommendations and guidelines for the use of rural motifs in branding. Also, the importance of a stronger connection between the culture and tourism sectors is emphasized, and the opportunities that the Republic of Croatia has and should be used are stated.

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FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT LOCAL LEVEL

Professional paper

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Abstract:

The objective of this study was to demonstrate that involving stakeholders in the process of revitalizing the economy in local rural communities can contribute to the collective identification of priorities, opportunities, and the development of revitalization models that consider stakeholder interests. By including stakeholders in the process of local economic revitalization, local government units in rural areas can identify challenges, opportunities, and developmental priorities, shaping economic revitalization models aligned with stakeholder interests. In the past two decades, local government units in rural areas have begun transforming their communities into attractive investment areas capable of meeting the needs of businesses, tourists, and residents, thereby ensuring a higher quality of life. Under this assumption, conditions are constantly created to retain existing residents and attract new ones, with the attraction of new investments being equally important. In this process, it is crucial to enable the local community to participate in sustainable development planning. Such a community consists of stakeholders operating in a specific area, including local government. When shaping the development strategy of the local community, it is essential to consider the needs of all local stakeholders and recognize the needs of investors.

Keywords:

Sustainable development, rural areas, integrated local development, local communities.

1. Intruduction

Long-term sustainable development of rural areas presents a challenge for many communities worldwide, including Croatia. Although the basic legal framework is aligned with the EU acquis, the understanding of rural development features in Croatia is not at a satisfactory level. Efforts by the Ministry, together with state agencies, regional and local development agencies, and business sector organizations, often remain limited to county centers and larger cities, struggling to reach rural inhabitants. The utilization rate of various rural development support funds is low and growing slowly, indicating a need for better informing and encouraging the local population. Diversifying the economy by promoting ecotourism, crafts, and small and medium-sized enterprises can significantly contribute to the economic resilience of rural areas. Improving basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, water, and internet, and introducing sustainable technologies like solar panels and irrigation systems, are crucial prerequisites for rural development. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and protecting biodiversity further strengthen the ecological sustainability of rural areas. Connecting rural

communities into partnerships for joint development has proven to be a long-term process requiring a well-designed approach, systematic expert guidance, and direct financial support. According to Črnjar (2009), the concept of sustainable development combines scientific principles and human values. When human activities impact ecosystems and natural processes, various values are applied to assess benefits and harms. Sustainable development acquires social significance and is interpreted according to different societal or group interests.

2. Sustainable development of rural areas

According to the definition by the UN Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, sustainable development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is a fundamental aspect of rural area development and involves continuous alignment of decisions and solutions in the economic, environmental, and social spheres. The European Union is increasingly investing in rural development, expecting these areas to evolve into environmentally friendly habitats with essential urban infrastructure. Implementing sustainable development requires frequent review, control, and alignment of developmental components and achieving consensus at all levels. Sustainability is a critical component of the developmental process due to the necessity of balancing societal, economic, and environmental development, leading to stable and continuous development without endangering any integral element of the process. Managing sustainable development assumes multidisciplinary cooperation among stakeholders from various scientific fields. The ultimate goal is a clearly defined developmental path that will lead to economic, social, and political changes to improve the quality of life for the entire rural population. Sustainable development aims for responsible business practices that satisfy the needs of current and future generations by preserving and wisely using natural resources. By applying the concept of sustainable development, rural areas can address developmental challenges to benefit current and future generations.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, a variety of definitions emerged to describe rural territories or areas. Many of these definitions have a subjective aspect, often focusing on factors such as quality of life, pollution levels, or the amount of leisure time available to residents. However, beyond these subjective elements, there are also measurable indicators like the percentage of the workforce engaged in agriculture, population density (measured in inhabitants per square kilometer), and the proportion of undeveloped green spaces within a given area. While these indicators help clarify what constitutes a rural area, they are most effective when applied together. For instance, relying solely on the proportion of individuals working in agriculture could categorize an area as rural, even if its identity is predominantly agricultural rather than rural in nature. In a rural area the main problems derive mainly from depopulation ie the exodus of a large number of people from the "campaigns" for the cities. Often, this migration is composed of qualified young people who can not find any source of income in rural area.

2.1. Development of Rural Areas in the Republic of Croatia

Before Croatia's accession to the European Union, research on agriculture and rural development indicated that the potentials of Croatian agriculture were underutilized. Croatia possesses valuable natural resources and relatively fertile land, among the best-preserved in Europe, which, along with quality water resources, forests, and coastal areas, enables the development of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and all forms of rural tourism. However, despite such potential, Croatian agriculture is deemed uncompetitive on an international scale due to low yields, undeveloped market infrastructure, inefficient distribution channels, insufficient vertical integration, disorganization of farmers in the value chain, undeveloped land market, small farm sizes, and diverse production primarily for personal needs (Ministry of Agriculture, 2020).

Regional policy is a significant part of the European Union's development policy and, consequently, Croatia's development policy. It focuses on specific areas and events to balance and harmonize the development of individual spatial economic units - regions. It emphasizes the benefits of two fundamental goals: increasing national economic efficiency and balanced development of specific areas, an important factor in traditional regional policy. Addressing regional development, policy, and planning issues requires an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach and cooperation between various entities (EIZ, 2019).

Regionalization of the national territory is a fundamental prerequisite for regional economic policy and addressing interregional economic disparities. In Croatia, regionalization was mainly based on three classic criteria:

- 1) Homogeneity criterion – based on regionalization according to a specific characteristic (geographical, demographic, historical, etc.);
- 2) Gravity criterion – activities are directed towards a larger urban center;
- 3) Functionality criterion – the region is functionally oriented inward (movement of capital and goods within the region) (Cavrak et al., 2016).

2.2. Characteristics of Local Government

The European Charter of Local Self-Government, as an international treaty, was concluded and confirmed in accordance with the Constitution and forms part of the internal legal order of the Republic of Croatia, having a legal status above laws. By the Act on the Ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, Croatia accepted part of the Charter's provisions in 1997, effective from February 1, 1998. By the Act on Amendments and Supplements to the Act on the Ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, Croatia accepted and committed to respecting the remaining provisions, effective from October 1, 2008. Thus, Croatia fully ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. According to the 2008 Charter, local units should be enabled to manage local affairs. Local government units in Croatia are municipalities and cities, while counties are units of regional (county) self-government. Municipalities, cities, and counties are established by law. A municipality is a local government unit established, as a rule, for the territory of several populated areas that constitute a natural, economic, and social whole, connected by the common interests of the population (Act on Local and Regional Self-Government, 2020).

Croatia has 555 local government units: 428 municipalities, 127 cities, and 20 regional (county) government units. The City of Zagreb, as the capital of Croatia, has a special status as both a city and a county, so Croatia has a total of 576 local and regional government units (Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, 2019).

3. PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM THROUGH AGRITOURISM

In recent years, structural changes in agricultural production in Croatia have weakened the rural economy, creating a need for additional income sources for farmers in rural areas. Many farmers have found an additional income source in agritourism. Over the past twenty years, agritourism in Croatia has become increasingly popular in rural areas, attracting more consumers, primarily from urban areas.

Rural and agritourism in Croatia are underdeveloped, a consequence of long-term neglect of rural areas and family farms and a focus on mass tourism on the Adriatic coast. To develop supplementary activities in rural areas, the European Union has developed support schemes that encourage earning from non-agricultural activities. This is especially important for family farms, where hosts can offer tourists indigenous food and drink, traditional and cultural customs, and comprehensive services that include meals, accommodation, and participation in daily chores. The goal of introducing agritourism on family farms is to enhance agricultural activities, thereby increasing farmers' income and improving the marketing of their products. Additionally, this aims to motivate younger members of family farms to live and work in rural areas, elevating agricultural activities and preserving the culture and traditions of rural areas.

According to Ćurić, "There is still no precise definition in Croatia for terms such as rural tourism, farm tourism, and agritourism. Despite this, many family farms have recognized agritourism as an additional income source, introducing various forms of tourism activities alongside primary agricultural activities. Rural tourism, including agritourism, remains an underutilized potential in Croatia's tourism offer." Rural tourism in Croatia is slowly but steadily growing. In Croatia's total tourism revenue, rural tourism accounts for only 1%. This is far below the potential of rural tourism. According to Croatia's Tourism Development Strategy, the future development of rural tourism should focus on enriching the offer of family farms, primarily by establishing local and regional human-made attractions such as wineries, recreational facilities, viewpoints, theme parks, and similar. The priority should be to group farm offers (clustering) around various themes (e.g., family farms, organic production, equestrian programs, cycling tourism, etc.). Creating a foundation for promoting rural tourism as an essential part of the overall tourism offer aims to develop a competitive and market-recognizable tourist product. Therefore, it is necessary to address identified problems such as insufficient education, bureaucratic inefficiency, and weak coordination of state, regional, and local administration, which are also reasons for poor fund allocation. To better utilize co-financing opportunities from European funds for rural tourism, quality projects that will contribute to economic improvement and growth need to be developed (Bartoluci et al., 2018).

4. Opportunities for sustainable development and revitalization

With regard to the topic of the work, which includes the participation and involvement of the public in the processes of proposing and making decisions during the preliminary decision on conducting this empirical research, it was necessary to define as precisely as possible in advance which is the target group for which the research in question is intended, that is, which is the significant share which could influence the direction of future development. The activities with the greatest influence of agriculture and tourism were selected. The subject of this work, which encompasses public participation in the processes of proposing and making decisions, requires a precise definition of the target group for the empirical research, specifically identifying the significant stakeholders who could influence future development directions. The research was conducted among stakeholders involved in tourism, identified through the Tourist Board of Vodnjan-Dignano and the Association of Tourist Renters of Vodnjan-Dignano and stakeholders involved in agriculture identified through Association "Agroturist" in Vodnjan. The empirical research was carried out using survey and interview methods. The purpose of the conducted research was to collect information and public opinion in the observed area of the City of Vodnjan - Dignano in order to confirm the fact about the importance of cooperation between local self-government units and stakeholders in the process of revitalization and sustainable development of rural areas.

Considering one of the goals of this work, this research sought to collect information in order to analyze the role of the observed local self-government unit for the purpose of developing that rural area, all with an emphasis on the implementation of participatory decision-making models through information obtained through public collection. Through the data collected through the conducted research, it is possible to identify the development limitations as well as the development possibilities of the observed area. The purpose of this empirical research was to highlight the importance of the synergy between local government and stakeholders in the process of revitalization and sustainable development in rural areas, using Vodnjan as a case study.

Table 1 shows the structure of the sample according to gender and age. With regard to the gender structure, the largest share of women is found in the group of respondents who are members of associations, while the majority of men are in the group of farmers members of Association "Agroturist". The gender structure of respondents from tourism is even (50:50).

The research instrument was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, divided into two parts. The first part (15 questions) was the same for both stakeholder groups, while the second part consisted of specific questions for each stakeholder group. More precisely, the questions were divided into three groups: general informational questions, questions about the level of satisfaction with the current state of the city, and questions about opinions and proposals related to the future direction of the city's local development.

Table 1 presents the sample structure by gender and age.

Group		Age groups					Total
		18-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60 +	
Agriculture, Tourism	Women	2	1	9	2	1	15
	Men	3	1	5	4	2	15
	Total	5	2	14	6	3	30

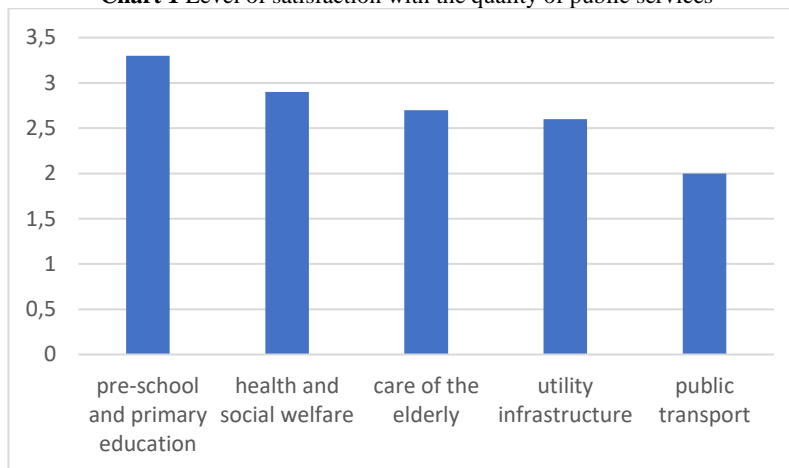
Source: Author's work

4.1. Research Analysis

Following the sample characteristics, the question related to the level of satisfaction with the quality of public services in the city. Respondents were offered a Likert scale ranging from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent). The public services evaluated were: healthcare and social care, care for the elderly and disabled, communal infrastructure, public transportation, and preschool and primary education.

As shown in Chart 1, the highest level of satisfaction among respondents was with preschool and primary education services, rated at 3.3. This was followed by healthcare and social care at 2.9, care for the elderly and disabled at 2.7, communal infrastructure at 2.6, and public transportation at 2.0.

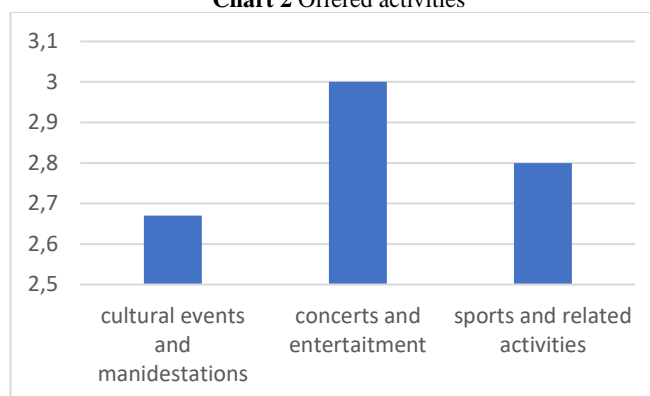
Chart 1 Level of satisfaction with the quality of public services



Source: Author's work

The next question related to the availability of activities in the city. The evaluated activities were: cultural events and manifestations, sports and related activities, and concerts and entertainment. From Chart 2, it is evident that the highest rating was given to the availability of cultural events and manifestations at 3.5, followed by concerts and entertainment at 3.0, and sports and related activities at 2.8.

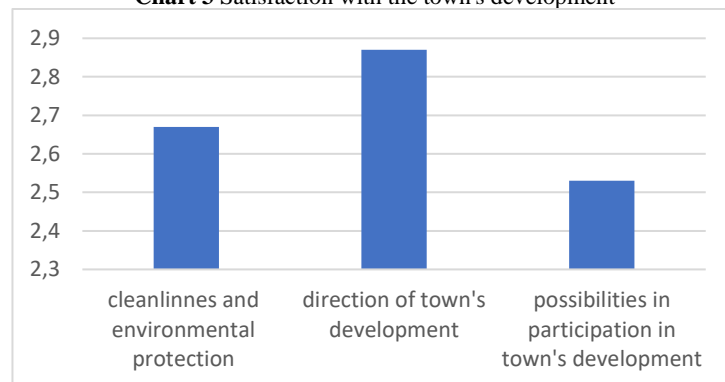
Chart 2 Offered activities



Source: Author's work

The following question focused on satisfaction with the cleanliness, maintenance, and environmental protection in the city, with an average satisfaction level of 2.67. Satisfaction with the development of Vodnjan over the past ten years was rated at an average level of 2.87. When asked about the perceived opportunities for stakeholder involvement in development, respondents rated it at 2.53.

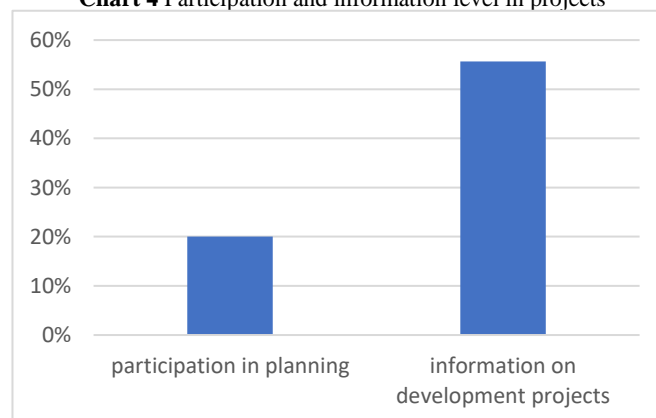
Chart 3 Satisfaction with the town's development



Source: Author's work

The next question concerned the possibility and ways of participating in city development planning. Observing the overall sample, 20% of respondents participated in development planning through their respective organizations, allowing them to express their suggestions. When asked about their awareness of activities, projects, and opportunities related to tourism development, 56.67% of respondents stated they were informed about these aspects.

Chart 4 Participation and information level in projects

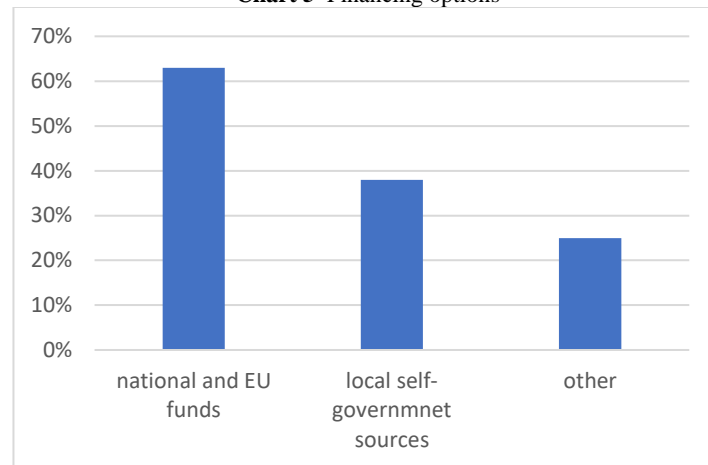


Source: Author's work

The following question concerned the knowledge of funding opportunities for further development of their activities. Respondents were offered three types of funding sources: local government funding and other funding opportunities. Each respondent had to express their knowledge of each specific funding source.

The research showed that more than 60% of respondents were aware of funding opportunities from national and EU funds, while a smaller portion was aware of funding opportunities from local government and other sources.

Chart 5 Financing options



Source: Author's work

From the survey questionnaires, the general opinion prevails that the area of Vodnjan-Dignano has significant potential and diverse opportunities that have largely remained untapped. Key development potentials include agriculture, tourism potential, sacred heritage, culture and traditional customs, the old town core, and the local population. The prevailing opinion is that these existing potentials have not been sufficiently valorized and presented to the wider public, especially tourists and visitors. Therefore, the individuals who participated in the surveys suggest stronger promotion and marketing in these areas. Identified weaknesses include the inefficiency and slowness of certain institutions and organizations, and insufficient involvement of young people in the overall development process.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to collect information and public opinion in the area of the City of Vodnjan – Dignano to confirm the importance of collaboration between local government units and stakeholders in the process of revitalization and sustainable development of rural areas. The aim of the conducted empirical research showed that involving stakeholders in the economic revitalization process in local rural communities can contribute to the joint identification of priorities, opportunities, and the development of revitalization models that are aligned with the interests of stakeholders. By involving stakeholders in the local economic revitalization process, local government units in rural areas are enabled to identify challenges, opportunities, and development priorities, as well as shape economic revitalization models that meet the interests of stakeholders. Experiences of local government units show that through the process of involving stakeholders in shaping the strategy and its subsequent implementation, alongside

available financial resources, sustainable rural development can be improved. Based on the conducted empirical research and experiences of other local government units, guidelines for the development of a model for future sustainable development in Vodnjan can be proposed. The research results provide local government units with data on the wishes of local stakeholders for the future, as well as their opinions on the current state. These results can also help potential investors in making decisions regarding future investments in the area of local government. The obtained results are applicable as a basis for further research within local and regional government units, as the research contains statistical data that can be used as sources for specific analyses and data processing on the topic of sustainable development at the local level. The research, which emphasizes the importance of involving the local community in planning the process of sustainable rural development, provides key insights into achieving successful and sustainable outcomes in rural development.

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RURAL AREA IN THE CONTEXT OF A DESTINATION FOR BUSINESS MEETINGS: ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' PREFERENCES

Professional paper

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to identify the preferences of business meeting participants regarding the location of event venues, as well as to examine the potential of rural areas as destinations for hosting business events.. The theoretical framework utilizes document analysis, alongside methods of analysis and synthesis, complemented by primary research conducted through a survey questionnaire. The intentional sample consists of members from the scientific academic community, with data processed using descriptive methods. The findings indicate that while most participants do not currently perceive rural areas as preferable venues, a significant minority value such settings for their eno-gastronomic offerings, tranquility, and natural beauty. Key advantages of rural venues include opportunities for leisure, relaxation, and experiential learning. However, challenges remain, particularly the lack of congress infrastructure in rural regions. The paper highlights the importance of destination marketing, particularly through social media, and suggests that rural business tourism has untapped year-round potential. Future research should explore specific rural locations and assess readiness and profitability from the perspective of venue owners.

Keywords:

Communication competence, congress tourism, organization competence, preferences of participants, rural area.

1. Introduction

Business travel dates back to the Middle Ages, with the most famous business-tourism route being the "Silk Road." This route exemplifies how business-tourism movements led to the development of advanced support systems for travellers and the formation of large stops that turned into trading cities like Istanbul (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). In literature, the term congress tourism is often synonymous with MICE tourism ("Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions"), which promotes and creates foreign exchange, increases trade and investment, ensures employment, strengthens local economies, and promotes destinations (Disimulacion, 2020). According to Geić (2011),

congress tourism is a specific form of tourism whose primary motivation is not leisure, but active or passive participation in meetings and events of various kinds. When considering the development of business meetings, it is essential to consider current trends, including holding meetings in innovative, stimulating, and "different" environments and in destinations that can offer various opportunities for outdoor activities alongside adequate meeting capacities. In this context, rural areas can be considered as prospective destinations for organizing business meetings on one hand, and as sources of attractiveness, authenticity, and additional content that can be crucial when choosing a business meeting location on the other.

2. Characteristics and Trends in Congress Tourism

Congress tourism typically occurs outside the tourist season (Šušić & Mojić, 2014). Besides contributing to the development of year-round tourism, congress tourism also contributes to destination development as "conference participants tour sights, visit local cultural landmarks, and taste local cuisine while at the destination" (Vila et al., 2020). Besides combining work and leisure and being less vulnerable to seasonality, other characteristics of congress tourism can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Characteristics of Congress Tourism

Simultaneously attending gatherings in a short period of time	Ensuring the most efficient and high-quality stay at the destination	Arrival in groups
Higher expenditure in business tourism	Growth of investment and better infrastructure	Tourist and urban centres
Encouragement of full-time employment	Duration of 3 to 5 days (in most cases up to 2 days)	Business people with greater purchasing power

Source: Adapted from Geić, S. (2011): Management of Selective Forms of Tourism. Split: University of Split

Table 1 illustrates the trends in congress tourism, highlighting the growing incorporation of online business meetings and the integration of modern technological factors.

Table 1 Trends in congress tourism

TREND	DESCRIPTION
Continuous Uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cancellation of business meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic - Encouraging organizers to adopt hybrid events (technology will play a crucial role in the future) - Predictions for the full economic recovery of the event industry by 2024
Asynchronous is In – Traditional Boundaries of Time and Place are Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to organize and follow events live at different times through on-demand content delivery (various time zones)
Engagement Throughout the Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Besides on-demand content, there is also a trend towards community and engagement unrelated to the day of the live event - Helps build an engaged community based on online information gathering from participants before the event itself
Technological Advancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pandemic has contributed to event technology using real machine learning and artificial intelligence, not just sophisticated algorithms - More technology vendors for better participant experiences (the best tool for each event element)
Entering the Golden Age of On-Demand Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants crave content, especially where science is embodied in recordings (scientific and medical conferences)
Participant Engagement Based on Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By tracking participant engagement data, it is possible to continuously adjust and improve each event to increase engagement
Combination of Hybrid Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants can freely move between personal or virtual engagement using devices, regardless of their physical location
Increasing Number of Mergers and Acquisitions of Technology Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 out of 20 technology vendors will continue to acquire others as a lot of capital is currently available - Data is becoming an increasingly valuable commodity, so companies need to be clear about their data policies (large amounts of data are changing owners)
Movement Towards the Metaverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Characteristic of video games - The decision to hold events in the metaverse will depend on how immersive the online experience is suitable for a particular event - Although it has significant potential, it will not work for all types of events
Connecting and Collaborating for a Hybrid Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The hybrid workforce brings new challenges in collaboration, communication, and maintaining a healthy company culture for individuals, teams, and entire enterprises - In the future, hybrid meetings will have the power to level the playing field, bridge geographical differences, and create valuable experiences regardless of location and time zone, creating a greater need for asynchronous communication

Source: Adapted by the authors based on Business Tourism

<https://www.poslovnitimizam.com/brojke-trendovi/11-trendova-kongresne-i-event-industrije-u-2022/3725/> (13th October 2023)

In addition to the mentioned trends, the Institute for Tourism provides the following trends through the Action Plan for the Development of Congress Tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Sports):

- **"Creative Budgets"**: Organizers of business meetings are under great pressure to "do more with less." Budgets are being significantly limited, not only in the private sector or corporate meetings but also in the otherwise more resilient association meetings market.
- **From "Global" to "National" and "Regional"**: As a result of uncertainty and budget pressures, there is a noticeable shift towards holding meetings at closer destinations.
- **Growth of Smaller Meetings**: The average size of meetings is decreasing, and the number of meetings with up to 500 participants is growing faster than large ones.
- **"Dependence" on Technology**: Mobile telephony, social networks, fast and increasingly free Internet are changing the nature of communication and participation in meetings.
- **Ecological Sensitivity**: "Green" concepts are becoming present in all aspects of business meeting products, from the technology of designing facilities to measuring the "ecological footprint" of activities.
- **Innovation and Stimulating Environment**: Traditional meeting rooms are being replaced or supplemented with "different" spaces, such as outdoor spaces, by the bar, by the campfire, etc.
- **Growing Importance of Destination**: Destinations that, in addition to capacities intended for meetings, can offer various opportunities for recreation and learning in a relaxing atmosphere are preferred. Destinations with overall high value for money are preferred over exotic locations.

The necessity of exploring the potential for hosting business meetings in rural settings is emphasized by Cai, Bai, and Morrison (2001), who also highlight in their study that rural areas can benefit such as through increased revenue from organizing smaller business gatherings. The same authors underline the importance of marketing activities and the need to explore leisure opportunities to encourage participants to extend their stay in rural regions. Demonja and Baćac (2012) recommend family-run farms as suitable venues for business meetings accompanied by lunch, thereby promoting return visits to the estate and the independent organization of such events.

3. Empirical research

3.1. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to identify the preferences of business meeting participants regarding the location of event venues, as well as to examine the potential of rural areas as destinations for hosting business events. In line with this objective, the following key research questions were formulated:

- To what extent is the availability of additional amenities/attractions in the destination important to respondents when selecting a business event?
- To what extent is the attractiveness of the event destination a decisive factor for participation in a business meeting, compared to other possible reasons?
- What are the respondents' attitudes toward holding business meetings in rural areas?

To address the posed questions, empirical research was conducted on a purposive sample of 68 members of the academic community who participated in a conference, congress, symposium, or professional development within the last year. Data were collected from April 29 to May 20, 2024, using the survey method through the Google Forms tool. The data collection form consisted of 26 closed-ended questions grouped according to the previously stated research questions. Data analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel employing descriptive statistical methods.

3.2. Research results

Sample structure is described in Table 2.

Table 2 Socio-demographic profile of respondents (N=68)

Gender		
Female	44	64,71
Male	24	35,29
Age		
19-26	4	5,88
27-35	12	17,65
36-45	24	35,29
46-59	21	30,88
60 and more	7	10,29
Level of education		
Secondary school	2	2,94
Higher education	66	97,06
Region		
		%
Adriatic	13	19,12
Continental	55	80,88

Source: research results

The analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents indicates that the majority are highly educated individuals, aged between 36 and 59, coming from the continental part of Croatia, with a predominance of females.

According to the respondents' opinions, 98.53% believe that business conferences should last 2-3 days and be held in the spring (63.2% of respondents). Regarding participants' behavior when choosing a business conference, the research shows that the most important factors for respondents are good communication with the organizer (AM=4.57, SD=0.6979), additional activities to fill free time (AM=4.35, SD=1.0187), the safety of the destination (AM=4.35, SD=0.9688), and the transportation accessibility of the destination (AM=4.10, SD=1.0387). Comparing the statistical parameters, it can be stated that the majority of respondents rated these statements with a 5, with the average scores being relatively close. However, it should be noted that respondents had a more similar opinion on the importance of good communication with the organizer (lowest variability, SD=0.6979) than on the impact of the transportation accessibility of the destination on their choice of business conference (SD=1.0387). The least significant factor in choosing a business conference for respondents is the availability of additional activities/attractions at the destination (AM=3.38, SD=1.1594), with most respondents rating it a 3 (Table 3).

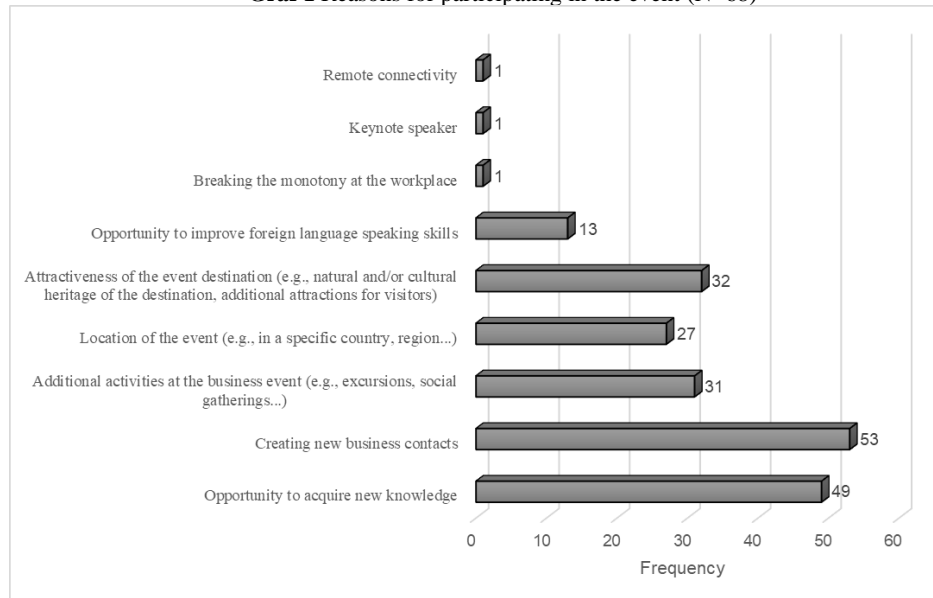
Table 3 Preferences of participants of business meetings

Question/statistical parameter	Median	Mode	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Good communication with the organizer is an important criterion for me when considering attending a business meeting again.	5	5	4,57	0,6979
A business meeting is more attractive if it offers additional activities that complement leisure time.	5	5	4,35	1,0187
Holding the meeting in a foreign language (English) is not an issue for me.	4	5	3,97	1,2575
The transportation accessibility of the destination significantly influences my choice of a business meeting.	4	5	4,10	1,0387
The safety of the destination significantly influences my choice of a business meeting.	5	5	4,32	0,9688
Additional activities/attractions at the destination are crucial when choosing a business meeting.	3	3	3,38	1,1594

Source: research results

The respondents were most attracted to participating in a business event by the opportunity to create new business contacts (N=53), the possibility of acquiring new knowledge (N=49), the attractiveness of the event's destination (N=32), and the additional accompanying activities of the business event (N=31). The least attractive factors were the opportunity to improve foreign language skills (N=13), the keynote speaker (N=1), and breaking the monotony at the workplace (N=1) (Graph 1).

Graf 1 Reasons for participating in the event (N=68)



Source: research results

Regarding respondents' attitudes towards the preference for holding business events in rural areas, the majority indicated they have no opinion on the matter (48.53%), as well as on the fact that a congress, conference, or event organized in a rural area would be an advantage and a better choice for them as individuals (50%). Most respondents have predominantly participated in events in urban areas so far (91.18%). However, some respondents (N=23) stated that they would choose a rural area due to the eno-gastronomic offerings (34.78%), the feeling of calmness and less rush (30.43%), natural beauty (21.74%), and less traffic congestion (13.04%) (Table 4).

Table 4 Attitudes towards business gatherings organized in rural areas

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Do you prefer choosing a business event that is held in a rural setting?		
Yes	19	27,94
No	16	23,53
I have no opinion on that	33	48,53
What are your reasons for choosing rural settings (If you answered yes to the previous question)?		
Natural beauty	5	21,74
Less traffic congestion	3	13,04
A sense of calm and less hustle	7	30,43
Wine and gastronomy offerings	8	34,78

So far, I have participated more in:		
Business events held in urban areas	62	91,18
Business events held in rural areas	6	8,82
A congress, conference, or event organized in a rural area represents an advantage and a better choice for me.		
I agree with the stated claim	22	32,35
I disagree with the stated claim	12	17,65
I have no opinion on that	34	50,00

Source: research results

Regarding the media habits of the respondents, most believe that the presence of a business event on social media is important (55.88%) and prefer communication via email (AM=4.59, SD=0.7772).

4. Conclusion

The results of the empirical research indicate that, in general, respondents do not hold a clear opinion regarding the organization of business meetings in rural areas, nor do they perceive congresses, conferences, or meetings held in rural settings as a particular advantage or a better choice for them personally. Nevertheless, a portion of respondents expressed a preference for rural areas due to the appeal of eno-gastronomic offerings, a sense of calm and reduced pace, and the natural beauty of the surroundings. These elements can be considered key advantages of using rural areas for business gatherings. Furthermore, these findings support theoretical claims that family-run farms are particularly suitable for hosting business meetings, primarily due to their culinary offerings.

A key challenge in rural areas is the lack of congress centers or appropriate spatial capacities to accommodate larger events (up to 500 participants). However, several current trends favor the consideration of rural areas as viable congress destinations. These include the growth of smaller-scale meetings, the replacement of traditional meeting rooms with “alternative” venues in inspiring environments, and the increasing importance of destination appeal—especially destinations that, in addition to having facilities for meetings, offer diverse opportunities for recreation and learning in a relaxing atmosphere. Respondents in this study, as well as the theoretical framework, emphasized the importance of additional amenities at the destination to enrich participants’ leisure time.

Promotional aspects must also be considered when planning business events, as both the theoretical and empirical sections of this paper highlight the importance of effective communication—particularly through social media—regarding available business meetings and opportunities.

Although the Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030 identifies business tourism as a key tourism product, it also acknowledges that it remains underrecognized in source markets and has room for growth. At present, there is no valid Action Plan for the development of congress tourism in Croatia, which suggests a need for a national-level plan that addresses the development of this tourism segment while taking into account all Croatian regions, especially considering the expressed interest of respondents in organizing business meetings in rural areas.

Respondents also indicated a preference for holding business events in the spring, suggesting potential for this tourism form to operate year-round, which provides a solid foundation for integrating rural areas into strategic planning.

Future research may explore which specific rural areas are suitable for hosting business meetings, including an overview of their core characteristics. Additionally, studies could focus on the perspectives of rural property owners regarding the adaptation of their venues for business events and the perceived profitability of such endeavors.

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