

## PERSPECTIVES OF REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA

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**Abstract:** Croatia has a set of cultural, historical and natural attractions and also has a great tourism potential needed to be supported by the sustainability concept of tourism development. Current Local Agenda 21 processes emphasize a cooperative approach to identifying the community's goals for tourism. Article present example of sustainable regional project in Croatian tourism on the Town of Rovinj. In spite of difficulties involved in trying to find an acceptable definition for sustainability in Croatia, the example present how society develops along sustainable principles.

**Key words:** Tourism, Croatia, Town of Rovinj, Sustainable development, Regional tourism, Attractions.

### 1. Introduction

The integration processes in Europe have had different motives and a long history. A serious integration as the expression of the will of the people and their states started only in the second half of the 20th century. The development and survival of Integration depends, because of the many differences, on the creation and implementation of regional policies. The Union gives significant importance to multidimensional regional policies. Besides on integration, the success of the regional policy depends on the activity of member countries. The article aims to improve the communication and cooperation between stakeholder's communities in Croatian regions with the recommendations of supported actions. The government made a shift towards accession to the EU. Croatia signed the "Pact about stabilization and joining to EU" in 2001. From that time introducing sustainability as a guiding principle for local activities is generally supported from the side of the Ministry of Protection of Environment and Spatial Planning of Republic of Croatia. Recently the Ministry has made funds available for communities to start Local Agenda 21, but there is no funding to hire experts or trainers. That mean that there are problems with finances, human resources, training and education in the name of «Tourism sustainability» (Črnjar, M.: 2001). On the other side public participation on the local level is very low and there is also a little knowledge how sustainability can be achieved in practice.

The aim of «Croatian sustainability» was to develop co-operation between the interested groups in the Croatian tourism regions. Tourism regions (clusters) are still learning how sustainability can be achieved in tourism practice.

The goal of this paper is to explain two, interrelated concept. The first one is recognition the ability of society and the environment to absorb and benefit from the impacts of tourism in a sustainable way. On the other side is responsibility through the direction that tourism takes now, and will take in a near future.

## **2. Regional projects in tourism**

Croatia as a potential member has important tasks in that field in order to build a complementary regional model with the Union. The tasks comprise mainly the creation of a convergent regional organization, an information system and regional economic policy. In referring to the process – orientation of the new regionalism, it is important to distinguish this from the proceduralism of the old regionalism. The new regionalism uses process as an alternative to structure and, at times, as a mechanism for creating structure.<sup>1</sup>

Responsibility means the wise use of tourism resources from the governments and planners and local resident participants. On this meaning regional (sustainable) development will become more important the coming years because of complying with regulations on Structural and Cohesion Funds once acceded to the EU. Croatia can possibly foresee implementation of pre-accession schemes (PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA) similar as in the current candidate countries.

The improvement of communication and cooperation between civil organizations, local municipalities and other stakeholders will lead to plans for improving environmental and natural conditions in Croatian regions/communities. Some intentions are already made but with mixed results<sup>2</sup>.

The main problem of the Croatian tourism offer is the low season. The creation of a network and the production of new ideas from the point of view of the tourist offer will make more attractive those coastal areas which are not popular tourist resorts yet. Diversification of the tourist offer linked to the sustainability of the territory (region) and increased will improve the flow of visitors during the low season. The other project «Green Agenda» aims to improve the communication and cooperation between civil organizations, local municipalities and other stakeholders in eight communities in Croatia with positive effective results in Istrian region.

### **2.1. Overview of tourist traffic in the area of the Town of Rovinj and the Istrian Region in 2005**

Istrian County is covering an area of 2.820 km<sup>2</sup> or 4,98% of the Croatian's total territory (56.610 km<sup>2</sup>). According to the census from 1991 it has a population of 204.346 citizens living in 71.185 households or 4,27% of the Croatian's total population (4.784.265 citizens.). Rovinj is coastal city with very high population growth rate. On the other side in 1997 city of Rovinj had the export of 45,8 mil. USD, and the import of 58,2 mil. USD.

Rovinj is a harbor divided in two parts: north port and south port. South port is mainly developed for passenger's traffic and anchoring because it is well protected from the waves. North port is used for cargo traffic. North port is well dimensioned according to its needs but there is a lack of space in south port. It is obvious decrease of traffic in last ten years mainly due to the war events. The table shows the number of arrivals and stays of tourists in the area of the Town of Rovinj in 2004 and 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> Wallis, A. (2000): 'The New Regionalism', MuniMall: the University of Alberta

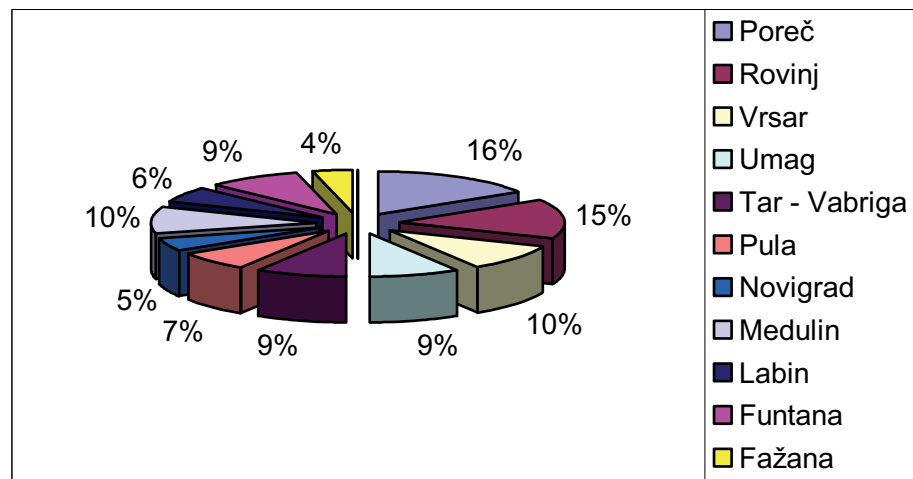
<sup>2</sup> Until now Local Agenda 21 was tried only in Croatian town Delnice.

Table No 1. Number of arrivals and stays 2005.

TOURIST TRAFFIC	2004	2005	INDEX 05/04
<b>TOTAL ARRIVALS</b>	362.449	362.678	100
Croatian	25.873	24.457	95
foreign	336.576	338.203	100
<b>TOTAL STAYS</b>	2.418.461	2.464.496	102
Croatian	97.301	106.777	110
foreign	2.321.160	2.357.719	102

Source: Town of Rovinj

The increase in the number of stays of 10% in relation to last year did not significantly affect the structure of realized stays this year in relation to the previous. In fact, in the structure of realized stays Croatian tourists contribute with 4%, and foreign with 96%. The share of Croatian tourists in the total realization of stays has remained unchanged since 2001. According to data of the Tourist Community of the Istrian Region, based on the number of realized stays, Poreč and Rovinj are the leading tourist destinations.



Source: Tourist Community (TC) of the Istrian Region, February 2006.

Figure No 1. Istrian tourism destinations (clusters)

The share of Rovinj in the total of stays in the Istrian Region in 2005 is 14,2%, and of Poreč 14,4%, while the share of other tourist communities is below 10%. According to data of the Tourist Community Rovinj, in the course of 2005 the town was visited by the total of 362.678 tourists. Croatian tourists realized 24.457 arrivals, which is 5% less than in 2004, while the number of foreign tourists of 338.203 arrivals stayed at the same level. The total number of stays in 2005 was 2.464.496, which is 2% more than the previous year. The number of stays of Croatian tourists was 106.777, which is 10% more in relation to results realized in 2004, while foreign guests realized 2.357.719 nights or 2% more. In 2005 the most numerous guests in our town were German guests with 773.153 stays, which makes up 31% of the share in the total number of stays, followed by Italians (413.352 nights) and Austrians (296.062).

## 2.2. Areas of special cultural value

Wider coastal area of the City Rovinj is rich with the archaeological localities dating from the antique time to the upper middle age. Especially valuable are complexes of late-antique rustically villas and economic complexes; preantique castles and necropolis; well preserved remaining of antique buildings mixed with traditional Istrian stile.

Localities are:

- Archaeological localities: Rovinj-Sošići-Maklavun – prehistorically bronze tumuli,
- Sacral localities: Rovinj – church Sv. Trojstva, Sošići – church of Marija Magdalena,
- Civil buildings: Rovinj – lighthouse Sv. Ivan na pučini.

Urban area of the city Rovinj with remaining of permanent settlements dating from the preantique and antique period to the recent time.

## 3. Goals of the regional sustainable Action

City of Rovinj is the integral part of the Istrian coast. According to the quality of the soil, and other natural parameters, on this area it can be grown:

a) Agricultures on the whole area; irrigation is needed, specially for vegetables  
b) Grapes, olives and other sub Mediterranean and moderate climate fruits can be grown on the whole area. The overall goal is sustainable development according to the principles of "Agenda 21" document. Reasons and goals for the protection of Istrian natural coastal values<sup>1</sup>:

- Protection of woods and agricultural areas which are in close contact to the sea
- Protection and revitalization of the traditional building of rocky-fences (suhozidi) around the fields; protection and revitalization of the rural architecture (kažuni)
- Protection of the woods of Mediterranean Holm-oak (*Quercus ilex*)
- Revitalization and maintenance of the young forests on the coast, mainly conifers
- Stopping of the further coastal construction, except in much needed cases taking into consideration possible devastation and changes of the coast.

For the protection of the local biodiversity it is necessary to establish as much as possible number of protected areas.

During building and constructions it is necessary to avoid cutting and dividing of the important habitats; it's important to ensure passages for animals.

According to the Plan it is estimated the population of 14.000 – 15.000 in 2010. Church of St. Eufemija in Rovinj has national and regional importance and it can be reconstructed only according to the detail Plan documentation and projects.

Seawater quality in the port Valdibora is III. Category. It can remain on this quality until 2005; till the end of 2010 it is necessary to ensure all the infrastructure conditions to fulfil the criteria for the II. category of seawater quality. It is necessary to

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<sup>1</sup> [www.zelena-istra.hr](http://www.zelena-istra.hr)

build waste water pipes for the north part of the city with the wastewater treatment plant with long pipes outlet in the sea.

#### **4. Directions for the Istria County plan realization**

According to the community and city's plans, areas assigned for ecological agriculture have to be specially valorized, after the verification of the study from the clause 1, article 149 of the law.

Carrying capacities in ports of nautical tourism are made according to the following plan:

- a) Rovinj-Valalta; category marina; minimum 250; maximum 350 boat places,
- b) Rovinj harbor I; category marina; minimum 150; maximum 200 boat places,
- c) Rovinj harbor II; category marina; minimum 380; maximum 650 boat places.

In the Istrian coastal area following landscape categories are recognized:

- Lim fjord, sea and underwater, and steep coasts with Mediterranean black oak communities (*Quercus ilex*) on the north exposition and white hornbeam and honey-oak on the south exposition,
- Rovinj coast with many small islands and cliffs covered with Mediterranean vegetation,
- Marsh "Palud" with its thick vegetation; on the other side it's continuing in agricultural fields.

In the period 2000-2010, in the second and third water-protected-zone, all illegal dump sites have to be cleaned, specially those with dangerous waste; waste from these dump sites has to be disposed on the legal dump site nearby, which should be under strict control of communal companies.

With this decision it is regulated the obligation to develop programs, studies and other documents which are necessary for carrying out the Plan:

1. County's agro-ecological bases – necessary for the development of ecological agriculture
2. Studies of seismological zoning of the Istrian County
3. Studies of developmental and spatial possibilities of County's bordering area
4. Integral Coastal Management Plan

Acceptance of the document from the amendment 1. of this article will conduct representative body of the County. Special measures of development are determined for four different characteristicly parts of Istrian County: Coastal area (Cities: Umag, Novigrad, Poreč, Rovinj, Pula and Labin; communities: Vrsar, Bale, Vodnjan, Medulin, Ližnjan, Marčana, Barban, Kršan i Raša), Bordering area, Central developing area, Wider area of the accumulation Butoniga. It is suggested:

- Reduction of communal contributions and communal amends in the area with land planed for building, in which the quantity of buildings does not exceed 10% of the whole area;
- Establishment of special zones of payment of communal contributions and communal amends for residential-tourist settlements and extended parts of building areas of settlements, after this Plan comes into force;

- To build industrial, trade and market buildings in economic zones pointed by this Plan with the help of lower credit politics and lower communal contributions and communal amends;
- It is suggested to use city's/community's budget for solving of proprietary-legal relations in building the roads and infrastructure.

#### **5. Recognition and responsibilities of development in Istrian peninsula according to the European Union**

The advisory team will give advice, training and assistance throughout the project period to the implementing organizations of Green Agendas. The implementing organizations can request specific on-site sessions from one of the trainers and lawyers. Members of the advisory team will regularly visit the organizations to improve the quality of the projects. In return the advisory team will gather experiences from the pilot projects that will be used for developing the Green Agenda method according to local, Croatian circumstances. The project coordinator and local coordinator of Milieukontakt will pay regular on-site visits to the Croatian implementing organizations in order to provide practical assistance and advice and ensure quality of the activities.

The following type of assistance and training will be provided:

- always as a start: assessment of needs for defining support plan and define the targets to be achieved;
- assistance for planning phase and writing of project proposal;
- advise and assistance on execution phase (e.g. stakeholder analysis, organizing first meeting, forming a working group);
- facilitation of meetings with stakeholders or local working group meetings;
- held practical training sessions on specific issues for members of the NGO or the local working group (f.e. effective meetings, project management, accounting, work with media, volunteer management, communication);
- advise on development or writing of environmental action plans;
- advise on interpreting legal provisions, regulations and laws related to public participation or environment and nature protection;
- review local environmental action plans on existing laws and regulations;
- legal advise on concrete questions, such as filing petitions, making statutes, municipal responsibilities;
- assist and advise the communities on rights, duties and responsibilities in relation to national and regional structures.

Civil servants, local politicians, council members and mayors need practical tools for local cooperation, knowledge and awareness on (legal) possibilities and duties concerning public participation and sustainable development. There is a general need to improve skills and experiences of local personnel, as well as finances and measures to implement policies and adhere to regulations and laws.

The Croatian civil sector is largely pre-occupied with the efforts to survive in, to a great extent, changed conditions. It is an important reason why the environmental awareness among the public is rather low. On the other hand, Croatian citizens put priority to protection of Croatian natural assets. since the beginning of the Nineties a

general mistrust is built up towards policy makers and politicians. Citizens are not used to participate in democratic processes. The most successful projects of NGOs since the Nineties proved that citizens can be actively involved in public actions, such as signing of petitions, joining demonstrations and participation in public activities.

The national government is faced with serious problems concerning economic reforms and social issues (e.g. to deal with returning refugees). External actors, like NGOs, are still needed to push the government to take more action on sustainability and democratic practices. Cooperation with NGOs is improving, but still needs investments to develop it towards real partnership. The government has difficulties to fulfill its (legal) obligations and to enforce laws and regulations.

## **6. Assessment and evaluations of the project**

Despite all negative influences since the beginning of the year, according to estimates of tourist economy, the year 2005 was successful for Rovinj. The advisory team will meet frequently to discuss progress and contents of the project and plan upcoming activities. The team will guarantee the quality of the activities.

Starting from achieved results in 2005 and taking into consideration the realistic quality of our tourist product considering further increase of tourist traffic, along with our attribute of a safe and attractive destination, we also need to enrich our offer with additional contents (wellness, swimming pools, golf courts, bike paths and other), prolong our tourist season, remodel the existing and build new high quality facilities (4 and 5-star category) improving the structure of accommodation facilities.

Times of passive approach to tourism are far behind, times characterized by lack of particular efforts. Today we live in the world of competitiveness in which we have to fight for every single guest. Advantages of Croatia were recognized a long time ago, advantages placing us at the very top of attractive tourist countries; preserved natural resources, clean sea and air, geographic position, climate and other, and all these are still not enough to make the guest satisfied. All natural beauties need to be boosted with attractive offer, which will additionally enrich our guests' experience.

## **7. Conclusion**

The platform acts as a kind of think-tank for developing good practice on this topic in Croatia, as well as a vehicle for advocacy towards national decision-makers for concrete steps for improvement. The working group will initially consist of members of the training group who will take over the initiative of the support group during the course of the project and beyond. Green Agenda in Croatia is Improvement of local democracy and applying sustainability in practice.

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