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# The Challenges for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Region of S Primorska

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Prispevek tematizira vlogo turizma kot enega najpomembnejših gospodarskih sektorjev na Primorskem. Pomembna naloga za izboljšanje konkurenčnega položaja turističnih destinacij na Primorskem je izboljšanje trenutne organizacije turizma v smeri boljšega sodelovanja med zainteresiranimi strankami v regiji, in oblikovanju učinkovitega destinacijskega managementa. To je tudi izziv za turistično ponudbo v regiji; namreč razvoj novih in inovativnih izdelkov trajnostnega turizma, pri katerem dediščinski turizem igra pomembno vlogo.

*Ključne besede:* južna Primorska, Slovenija, dediščinski turizem, destinacijski management, participatorno načrtovanje, integrirani projekt dediščinskih poti

The paper addresses the role of tourism as one of the most important economic sectors in the S Primorska region. An important task for better competitive position of tourism destination of S Primorska is improvement of current tourism organisation towards better co-operation between stakeholders in the region, and formation of efficient destination management. It is also a challenge for the region's tourism offer to develop new and innovative products on the side of the sustainable tourism where heritage tourism could play important role.

*Keywords:* S Primorska, Slovenia, heritage tourism, destination management, participatory planning, integrated project Heritage Trail

The classic »sun and sand« tourism destinations in Europe are finding it increasingly difficult to hold onto their share of the market as new areas develop elsewhere in the world and become more affordable.

»Alternative« forms of tourism, on the other hand, are booming. According to figures by the end of millennium they are growing almost three times (8%) as fast as the classic tourism market. Recent market surveys reveal that more and more people are interested not only in trying out new places but also in discovering different forms of tourism. They are also placing greater emphasis on quality products, more environmentally conscious forms of tourism and on shorter but more frequent trips.

One way to meet these new challenges and to capitalise on changing market preferences in Europe and in Slovenia is to consider developing sustainable tourism based on rich natural and cultural heritage. With so many different landscapes, climates, cultural particularities and traditions, dialects and natural environments, Slovenia offers an ideal platform for these more specialised and increasingly popular forms of tourism. This also includes region of S Primorska, the most visited tourist region in Slovenia, when talking about tourism volumes in last decades.

## Facts and Figures in Europe – Challenge No. 1 for S Primorska?

The World Tourism Organisation predicts that most of the increase in European tourism receipts over the coming decade will come from alternative forms of travel not involving the classic 'sun and sand' tourism. This type of tourism is expected to account for over 20% of all travel in the next 20 years and is set to grow faster than any other market segment. Some of the growth will come from a greater volume of tourists, but a significant portion will result from a shift in tourist numbers between the different segments (Source: Eurobarometer, Flash EB No 258).

There may be several reasons for these shifting trends:

- people are becoming more experienced in travelling and discerning in their choice of destination, leading them to search for new places and new tourism products;
- they are more mobile - cross border travel is easier than ever thanks to the liberalisation of the airlines, construction of new roads and European integration;
- they are taking shorter but more frequent holidays throughout the year;
- they are more active whilst on holiday, seeking out different activities,
- the European population is getting older but staying active longer;
- and finally people are increasingly concerned about the environment.

From below figures 1 and 2 we can conclude that the sea is still popular choice, (20%) but a significant number of Europeans mentioned rest and recreation (36%) as a preferred destination (Figure 2). As to the criteria for choosing one area over another, not surprisingly the climate figures prominently (45%) but so do other factors such as scenery, historical interest and the environment, which are on a par with the cost of accommodation and travel (Figure 1).

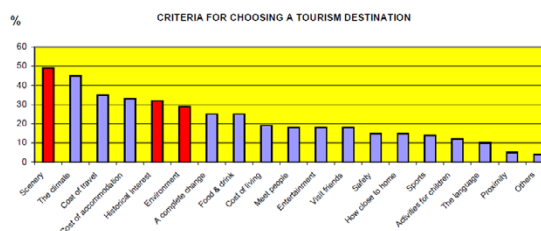


Figure 1: Criteria for choosing a tourism destination, Source: Eurobarometer Survey, Europeans on holiday, 1999.

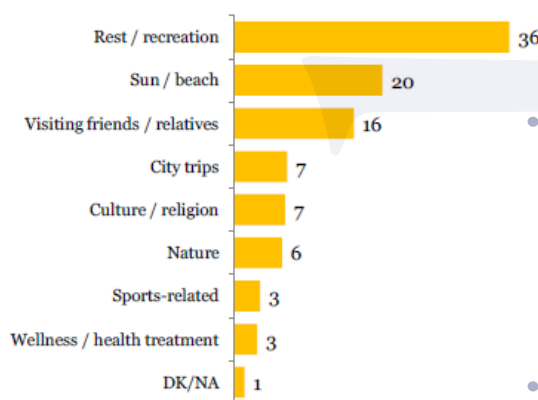


Figure 2: The major motivation for EU citizens' main holiday trip, Source: Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism, 2008.

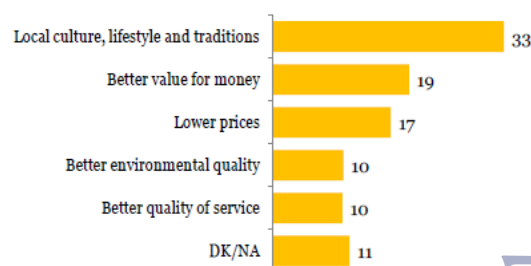


Figure 3: The main expectation from a non-traditional, emerging destination, Source: Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism, 2008.

Interesting findings shows, that the main expectations from non-traditional, emerging destinations see local culture, lifestyles and traditions as the primary magnets of non-conventional destinations of tourism in Europe, see Figure 3, below:

## Heritage Tourism – Tourism Profiles, Issues...

Creating a visitor profile of the kind of tourists interested in natural and cultural heritage tourism is very difficult due to their diversity of interests and the general lack of targeted market research. Thus, only general comments can be given here, based on the results of practical experience in different tourism destinations. Tourists in search of natural and cultural heritage seem to look for a wide range of different attractions and activities designed to satisfy different needs, be they for learning, relaxation, recreation or adventure, amongst others. The following are some examples of activities that can be developed using natural and cultural heritage and are related to cultural tourism:

- festivals and events, banquets;
- music, theatre, shows;
- village life and rural life (e.g. farms, Sunday markets,);
- gastronomy, visiting/tasting local products;
- general sightseeing, village buildings and 'atmosphere' ;
- visiting historic and religious monuments or vernacular buildings, ruins;
- famous people in the region.

It is also worth mentioning that nature and culture orientated tourists are also strongly influenced by the quality and type of accommodation and food on offer. It seems that tourists in search of nature or culture are rarely attracted to large luxury hotels. They will be much more interested in smaller establishments of good quality which provide a personal service and a certain level of comfort and quality - the demand for two and three star accommodation is generally very strong. There is also a small but growing proportion of tourists looking for character and »charm« in their accommodation. Rural accommodation, family hotels and pensions that use local quality crafts or are located in vernacular buildings are becoming increasingly popular.

There are, however, a number of additional factors that should be borne in mind when dealing with natural and cultural heritage (Source: Tourism in Europe – at a crossroads?):

- Cultural and the environmental heritage cannot be produced: They exist because of history and geography and cannot be created easily in the short term. This means that destinations need to work with what they have. If their intrinsic appeal is low or only moderate it will be very difficult for the area to gain a competitive edge over other destinations.
- Cultural and natural attractions are mostly a public resource: Tourists rarely have to pay to see nature and most of culture – e.g. to visit nature reserves, landscapes, village architecture.... It is therefore mostly the private businesses, who develop a derived product around this public resource, that reap the economic rewards. But there is no automatic mechanism for ensuring that some of this income is put back into maintaining and enhancing the cultural and natural heritage itself.
- Damage to natural and cultural resources are extremely difficult to measure: Tourism inevitably impacts on the natural and cultural resources of a particular destination but its interrelationship is extremely complex and very difficult to quantify. There is no universal formula for determining carrying capacities for sites (i.e. the number of people that can visit the site without causing significant damage to it) as so much depends on the particular circumstances of the area.
- Finally, the pricing structure of heritage-based tourism is not as clear as in other services or other forms of tourism. There is little guidance available in this area due to the lack of established benchmarks. Comparable attractions in other regions might exist but in a different economic climate which makes comparisons difficult. Consequently, businesses might be pricing themselves

out of the market, or more likely undercharging.

## The Case of Heritage Trails of Slovenian Istria and Dolina

In 2001 the municipalities of Piran, Izola and Koper, and many public and private organisations in Slovenian Istria, have expressed enthusiasm for the concept of a Heritage Trail. They were fortunate in being able to observe what has been achieved in the pioneer Heritage Trail in Dolenjska & Bela krajina (presented in the Case Study No. 1). It should be recognised, however, that there is no standard model of Heritage Trail. The initiative in each area should be suited to the character of that area.



Figure 4: Map of Slovenia Istria with its coastal and hinterland part.

Seen from a European perspective, Slovenian Istria is a compact rural area of very distinctive character. It is green and fertile, with Mediterranean climate and vegetation. It has a remarkable structure of deep valleys and flat-topped hills, with plateaux which offer very fine views west to the sea, north into mountainous Slovenia, and south into Croatian Istria. The profile of these hills is accentuated by the location of many villages on the plateau rim, with church spires marking the end of each ridge. The villages, hamlets and isolated buildings are mainly of strong traditional character, built of local limestone or blue-stone, with tiled roofs and many graceful features. The plateaux and the valley bottoms contain cultivated fields and pastures. The slopes are gra-

ced by rich and varied woodland, and by terraces with vines, olive trees, maize fields and orchards.



Figure 5: Village of Padna in Slovenian Istria.

The overall effect is of a fine and distinctive landscape. The area is rich in wildlife, and in features of cultural heritage, including fine churches (some with remarkable frescoes and other features), vernacular buildings, water-powered mills and other monuments. It has traditional local products of high quality, notable a variety of good wines; a distinctive regional cuisine; and a local dialect and tradition of customs, dress, music and decorative arts which are remembered and valued by the older local people.

This territory is served by a complex network of roads and tracks. The roads which serve the main villages are generally paved, and wide enough to take lorries or buses. Elsewhere many of the roads are narrow, suited only to light traffic, and many of them are dirt roads rather than paved highways. There are green tracks suited to horse-riding, cycling and walking. The roads within some of the villages are quite narrow, with very limited space for roadside parking.

## Heritage Trails Consultancy

The main implementation institution for the project beside three already mentioned municipalities of Koper, Izola and Piran was Regional Development Centre of Koper, which was supported by regional institutions on the field of natural and cultural heritage. Partners & stakeholders in the project were institutions from public, private and NGO sector in this part of Slovenia.



## Methods

First of all, shared opinion among experts, which were responsible for the development of the concept was, that the Heritage Trail in Slovenian Istria must take account of this distinctive character of the territory. It must take account also of the area's location, immediately behind and above the zone of coastal tourism, and adjoining the Croatian part of Istria, to which it is linked by history, character and a pattern of inland roads and tracks. It can build on the existing pattern of tourist enterprises and of flows of visitors.

These factors imply that a Heritage Trail in this area will be different from that in Dolenjska-Bela krajina in two crucial ways:

- It must be aimed at two distinct types of visitor, namely:
  - i. day visitors, coming from the adjoining coastal resorts and from Trieste and the surrounding areas of Slovenia and Croatia
  - ii. people staying overnight within the area.
- It must relate to two different scales of activity, namely:
  - i. larger groups of visitors, for example parties of 20 - 30 or 50 people arriving in a coach (although this are fewer than some years ago): such groups need to be focused only on those roads, and those facilities, which have the capacity to take them
  - ii. smaller groups, such as families or parties arriving by car or minibus, who can use the narrower roads and the smaller facilities.

These points were taken into account in the design phase of the Heritage Trail. This phase included the elements of analysis which were pioneered in the Dolenjska & Bela krajina Heritage Trail. In this analysis, team of experts suggested that there should be particular emphasis upon three issues, namely:

- The character and physical capacity of the focal points (villages, churches, restaurants,

monuments etc) and of the roads and tracks through the area, with a clear distinction between those which can take the larger and the smaller scales of activity stated above.

- The present pattern of tourism activity, with a focus on the types of visitor (see above) and their profile (nationality, point of origin etc), since this will provide crucial clues to the early stages of developing and marketing the Trail.
- The existing or potential links between different features on the prospective Trail: this will provide the starting-point for creating and marketing distinctive 'products' within the total concept of the Trail. For example, the establishments connected with horse-riding may be linked to a network of horse-riding routes within and beyond the area.

These elements were taken into account when developing a model for the Heritage Trails in 2001 in Slovenian Istria, namely:

- First, there was and still is rising demand, throughout Europe, for rural tourism. Such tourism includes both day visits into rural areas from cities and coastal resorts, and overnight stays by holiday-makers and others. Visitors may be drawn to the rural areas by attractions such as heritage sites; by activities such as walking, horse-riding, cycling and scenic driving; or by opportunities to eat and drink in agreeable surroundings. The accommodation that they use may vary from simple campsites through bed-and-breakfast establishments and farm guesthouses to hotels, spas etc. Slovenian Istria is already quite rich in such attractions, and has human, natural and cultural resources through which these attractions can be further enriched. The existing pattern of visitors shows that there are lucrative categories of tourists who can be further attracted to use those resources.
- Second, the existing tourism trade on the Slovenian coast can benefit from the deve-

lopment of inland attractions. Tourists today can choose among a rapidly growing number of coastal tourism resorts in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, South Asia and elsewhere. There is, and will be, intense competition among these coastal resorts. If it is to survive and thrive in this competitive climate, the Slovenian coast must maintain high standards and it must use its distinctive assets. One major, and currently under-used, asset is its rural hinterland. This hinterland can offer activities – such as scenic driving, horse-riding, cultural tourism, and dining out in a quiet and spectacular setting – which are complementary to the beach-based activities, water sports, casino and entertainments on the coast.

- Third, the rural part of Slovenian Istria needs the development of rural tourism, in order to boost its rural economy and to sustain its heritage and its settlements. This is by tradition an agricultural area. But it suffered a decline in farming activity and in the farm-based population after World War II. During the last two decades, there has been some revival of farming, with a focus on wine, olives, maize, vegetables, fruit and livestock. But the farm economy is not robust yet; and it was adversely affected, when Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004, by competition from farmers in the present Union and by the demands of EU regulations. For this and some other reasons (i.e. small scale and scattered farm units for agricultural production), local farmers would benefit greatly from opportunities to sell more of their products directly to tourists or to hotels, guesthouses and restaurants in the area. Farm families, and other families resident in this rural area, will benefit also from the employment and added value which growth of rural tourism will bring. Existing and new attractions, based on the natural and cultural heritage, will benefit from spending by visitors. Tourism may permit new uses to be made of the under-

sed and often derelict houses and other structures which are common in the villages of this rural area.

- Fourth, an initiative in sustainable tourism in this area can build on the past and future interest of the Government and the EU in rural development. Since its independence in 1991, Slovenia has pursued the CRPOV programme of integrated rural development. Much has been learned from the many small projects assisted by CRPOV, and notably from the more ambitious area-based projects such as Wine Routes and Heritage Trails: one of the Wine Routes passes through Slovenian Istria. The rural areas of Slovenia have also benefited from PHARE, SAPARD and other pre-accession programmes of the EU in case of Slovenian Istria also from CBC with Italy.

Finally, a model was drawn in order to illustrate all these elements and justify why the concept of the Trail was structured in the method proposed.

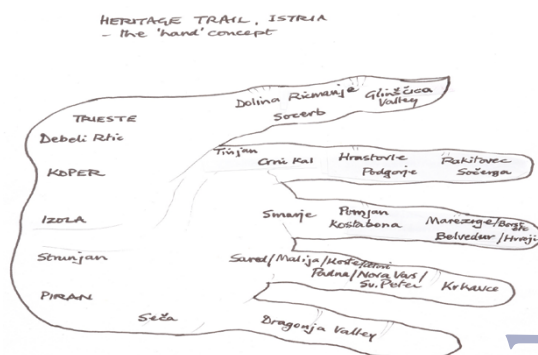


Figure 6: The “hand” model, author Dower, M., RRC Koper, 2001.

This model presents historical movements from inland rural parts (fingers) of the territory which supplied main towns on the coast (palm). In the context of sustainable tourism development product, as Heritage trails should be structured, the model anticipated a range of integrated tourism products. This included an interaction in terms of the tourism offer comprised

as an ideal product mix between the coastal and the rural elements, which may be seen as sustainable in the longer term perspective. Furthermore, such a plan will have the intrinsic capacity in helping to revitalise the rural part of Slovene Istria, which to a degree has suffered from a level of peripherality from the more intensive touristic development of the coastal region. The main aim of the project was therefore to stimulate tourism development in the hinterland of the Slovene coast. This aim should be pursued by offering support to rural business initiatives, by improving the infrastructure and by intensive marketing activity with focus on rural hinterland of Slovene Istria.

## Stages of Commercial Product Adaptation and Implementation

For a change from Heritage Trails in Dolenjska and Bela krajina, Heritage Trails in Slovenia Istria was, sadly, never officially launched, neither on the domestic nor on the international market. The reason for this failure lay in the fact that tourist stakeholders in this coastal region, which was traditionally and remains now the most visited tourism region in Slovenia, were fixated in the past achievements of tourism activity. As a result, in the current contemporary environment, which holds greater challenges and demands, they have been unable and to a degree unwilling to make that critical step forward to co-operate, to engage and to agree an efficient and long-term public-private partnership & co-operation, which will perform as Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Such a DMO would and should act on behalf of all tourist stakeholders in the region and by the synergies thus created dynamise the entire tourism offer for this region. Regrettably, such an organisation does not exist in this region of Slovenia and unfortunately it is the only Slovenian tourism region which is without such an important capacity. This is kind of paradox, but on the other side a painful reality which already reflects in some tourism figures and statistics (see below).

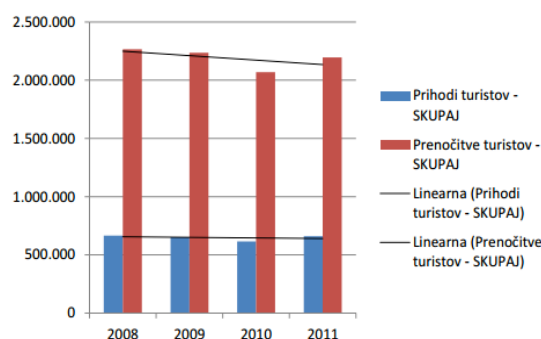


Figure 7: Tourist arrivals (blue) and overnights (red) with trends, Source RRC Koper, 2015.

This figure shows, and we can interpret it as such, that the traditional sun, sea and sand product (3S), is not in trend anymore and that its life cycle is declining. Unfortunately it was a lost opportunity to launch a Heritage Trail and to focus more on the rural offer some years ago when the opportunity was ripe for such actions. It is not our intention to speculate and insist that this will change the figures presented above, but we believe that a Heritage Trail type structure would open immense opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and offer them new challenges for new jobs in their home-yards in rural Istria. Certainly the evidence presented in Case Study 1, shows how such a potential can reach a realistic and achievable end.

## Tourism Destination and DMO – Challenge No. 2 for S Primorska?

A tourist destination is defined as a “geographical area, territorial-administrative unit or an important attraction that is trying to offer its visitors experiences which can range from acceptable to unforgettable.”<sup>1</sup> From a conceptual point of view, that is if we take into consideration the manageability of a destination, it is far more efficient to regard a destination as a geographical region that has its necessary critical mass or as a cluster attraction, so that the destination can

<sup>1</sup> Bornhorst, T., Ritchie, J.R.B., Sheehan, L., “Determinants of tourism success for DMOs & destinations: An empirical examination of stakeholders’ perspectives”, *Tourism Management*, Article in Press, July, 2009, 1.

offer its visitors tourist experiences that attracted them into that area. A destination can be regarded as a combination (or even as a brand) of all products, services and ultimately experiences provided locally. "It also enables us to assess the impact of tourism regionally, as well as manage demand and supply in order to maximise benefits for all stakeholders."<sup>2</sup>

A successful destination management, in addition to a unifying strategy (the Master Plan of Tourism Development), demands also an appropriate operational management model which will allow a close cooperation between public and private sector of a particular destination.

And it would be a task of DMO to provide opportunities to all tourism stakeholders in the Slovenian Istria to collaborate in a range of areas that can boost business performance and productivity. By coming together local businesses can create something that is greater than the sum of parts, collaborating to strengthen external promotion, but also internal improvements.

DMO can and should therefore provide packages of shared products, be it coastal, be it rural and above all shared services to tourism businesses operation in well-defined geographic area such as Slovene Istria is. For example, a DMO acting as a shared service co-operative could provide such facilities as marketing, bookings, travel services, web presence etc. to a group of local hotels, restaurants, tour operators and guides. These have particular value in connecting up tourism opportunities in both rural and urban areas of Slovene Istria.

As has been noted many small businesses in the tourism sector struggle to access training in order to improve skills and processes. DMO can provide business networks that are useful source of ideas, support and encouragement. They can also facilitate employee training across a number of businesses in order to create a critical mass of trainees and manage costs for employers.

As collaborative bodies in nature there is a case for DMO's to be established as co-opera-

tives owned by the enterprises that are members. In the past, strong public sector involvement in financial support may have discouraged a co-operative model. However, in changing economic circumstances local authorities and other public bodies are looking at how their role develops at a time when, in many cases, the case for collaboration among interested parties has been proven.

There is strong evidence that DMO's in general will promote and assist in generating a more commercial in focus in member organisations. There is equally strong evidence that engagement in DMO's helps participants to adopt new models along the lines of the public service mutualisation that has been seen in other parts of the public sector. A co-operative model may help to harness private sector support through ownership as well as membership for DMO's.

## Learning Points and Conclusions

- It is evident from the Case Study that the heritage-resource tourism in this part of Slovenia has huge opportunities to be developed far more than it is at the moment. Many excellent products and offers of cultural tourism exist and remain but these are insufficiently developed and inefficiently presented on major tourism markets at both a national and international level. Currently it appears that the overall tourism offer is dominated by the interests of some large hotel chains, which are not local and who are neither interested nor motivated to put forward local interests and engage local resources. Beside this it is unlikely that they really understand the concept of a DMO, despite the fact that just a few kilometres distant exists an extremely successful DMO - namely Croatian Istria with excellent experience and results.
- It is also obvious and clear that sustainability of the product, in our case cultural tourism, must be secured. Without detailed carrying capacity research of sites which potentially would become resource-zones

<sup>2</sup> Buhalis, D., "Marketing the competitive destination of the future", *Tourism Management*, Vol.21, February, 2000, 98.



in the Heritage Trails and without involvement of rural community from the very early stage of initiative, the entire process will fail to operate as ideally as they should. Namely, the rural community, which is involved and committed to tourism, must and should be responsible, in co-operation with professional institutions for cultural and natural heritage, for site management and should also gain added value from their involvement in the rural tourism.

- Slovenian Istria is a known tourist destination, not only on the domestic market but as well on some immediate international markets - particularly Italian, but also Austrian, German and lately (despite decline in 2014) Russian market. But its identity is still greatly dependent on the 3S product. Unfortunately very little has been done in recent years to open up the rural hinterland by offering new, innovative and exciting tourism products in rural area that has high potentials for tourism development of superb class. For a successful destination offer it would be imperative to create a unique mix of characteristics, which are determined by its geographical location, culture and history. This should be a focus of those who are responsible for the destination management and wish to influence the experiences of both visitors and residents.
- The failure, which has extended over the last ten and more years, in creation of efficient DMO is one of the most painful elements and reasons, why Slovenian Istria did not perform as coherent, modern tourist destination and uses its best tourism potentials to be offered on both domestic and international markets. Lack of co-operation and trust between key stakeholders, which are driving their own interests rather than work together on promotion of destination, development of integrated tourism products and performing through well-organised destination management framework seems to be a long and lonely path towards eviden-

ced decline of the most successful tourism destination in the country.

- In the light of above, continuity of personnel in DMO would be extremely important. In the region exists a number of experienced managers possessing professional expertise and skills, which are important to be invited and used in the process of establishment of efficient DMO. Beside these characteristics, it would be also important that DMO management will gain trust and support from key tourism stakeholders, namely hotel chain owners, which are at the moment not responding to the initiatives for creation of a regional DMO. Therefore both the economic and political environment must find consensus for acceptable destination management.
- In this region, as well as other tourism stakeholders, is a Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica and other Faculties and their departments, which are active on the field of tourism research, have sufficient expertise, are experienced in development and management of cultural tourism products and above all willing to assist the process of establishment of sustainable, transparent and efficient DMO in the region. Such expertise and energy should be used in the process of creation of DMO.

The tourist sector is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, but also the one where there is the greatest competition. In present times of globalization, liberalization and deregulation, tourist subjects are facing fearsome competition. That is the reason why the success of a destination depends on the overall level of services quality, which represents the function of a whole series of variables which are united under the same denominator of the destination management (DMO- Destination Management Organization). Slovenian Istria is not an exemption. Key players in tourism will need to urgently agree how to organize regions tourism management unless they want to face further tourism

decline and as consequence also other negative economics trends in tourism.

## Povzetek

Eden glavnih gospodarskih segmentov gospodarstva Južno Primorske regije je turizem. Ta se, tako kot celotni slovenski turizem, srečuje z izzivi za zagotavljanje ustrezne ponudbe, ki bo spoštovala parametre trajnostnega razvoja in ne nazadnje tudi s čedalje večjo konkurenco s strani razvitih turističnih držav v regiji.

Ena od pomembnih nalog za povečanje globalne konkurenčnosti turizma na tem območju, je potreba po izboljšanju turistične organiziranosti pri upravljanju te obmejne destinacije in vzpostavitev učinkovitega destinacijskega managementa. Gre kar za nekakšen paradoks, saj najbolj razvito turistično območje nima skupnega upravljanja oziroma vzpostavljene regijske destinacijske organizacije - RDO-ja.

Izziv za turistično ponudbo v regiji bodo tudi novi, inovativni izdelki, ki bodo okrepili trajnostni značaj turizma in poudarili naravno in kulturno ter živo dediščino območja), zlasti za lokalne podjetnike v ruralnem zaledju slovenske Istre. Prav tako bodo pomembne tudi nekatere druge naloge, ki jih bodo morali udeležiti deležniki v turistični ponudbi te regije in sicer bolj razviti turistično in podporno infrastrukturo ter storitve (še posebej tiste segmente le-te, ki bodo okrepili trajnostni značaj turizma in poudarili naravno in kulturno ter živo dediščino območja).

Drugi del pričujočega prispevka predstavlja case-study »Dediščinskih poti po slovenski Istri in Dolini«, pri kateri smo zasledovali cilj trajnostnega s pomočjo celovitega pristopa v smislu startup-a, implementacije in razvoja. Sklepi, do katerih smo prišli v tem primeru, nam bodo po pričakovanjih pomagali pri strukturiranju prihodnjih podvigov na področju trajnostnega turizma na področju J Primorske.

## Summary

One of the most important economic sectors in the region of S Primorska is tourism. It is challenged as it is overall Slovenian tourism with adequate offer, which will be in trends of sustainable development as well as to the respond on growing competition from developed tourism offer in the neighbouring international regions.

Important task for better competitive position of tourism destination of S Primorska is improvement of current tourism organisation towards better co-operation between stakeholders in the region, and formation of efficient destination management. This is, which is a kind of paradox, evidenced by fact, that S Primorska is the only statistical region in Slovenia - with the highest volume of tourist arrivals - which has not formed Regional Destination Organisation - RDO.

It is also a challenge for the region's tourism offer to develop new and innovative products on the side of the sustainable tourism where heritage tourism could play an important role, particularly for the local entrepreneurs in rural hinterland of Slovenian Istria.

One of the beneficial methodologies for developing and expanding a level of tourism to that which is sustainable and enhances the totality of local and regional environments is using a multi-stakeholder approach. The second part of this paper presents a case-study of the "Heritage trails through Slovenian Istria and Dolina", in which sustainable rural development was pursued by using an integrated approach in terms of start-up, implementation and development. Lessons learned and presented from this case could hopefully help in structuring future action in the field of sustainable tourism development in the region of S Primorska.

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