

The role of strategic planning in the evolution of rural tourism – A case study of Croatia

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Tourism has an important role in the development of economies in many destinations and many countries worldwide. New investments in tourism are reflected by the creation of jobs, enterprises, export revenues, and infrastructure development, and in the last 60 years tourism has become the fastest growing economic sector in the world (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism as an industry is a set of different economic activities which directly and indirectly affect the economy, society, culture, and environment in various ways. However, tourism as a set of activities is sensitive to other sectors, and thus it is important to monitor the development and influence of tourism activities and the effects it has on these different areas. The worldwide recognition of the importance of this topic is evident from the United Nations' declaration of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (PR No.: 15094).

In Croatia, tourism is a very important industry, as evidenced by the high share (17,2%) of GDP generated from tourism in 2014, ranking Croatia as first in Europe (Tourism statistics, EUROSTAT, 2016) In the last few years, Croatia has adopted strategic plans for the future development of tourism in general, as well as of rural tourism. In 2013, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2020, and in 2015 the Ministry of Tourism and the Croatian Chamber of Commerce published the National Catalog of Rural Tourism in Croatia, which included 317 households involved in some form of tourist activity in rural areas. Also, some tourism activities in rural areas can be supported through the Rural Development Programme for the period 2014–2020. Important measures for development of tourism are measure 6 - Farm and business development and measure 7- Basic services and reconstruction of villages in rural areas.

According to the changing preferences and desires of consumers (tourists), there are evident changes in rural tourism. Lane and Kastenholtz (2015) emphasised that the evolution of rural tourism practice is evident and that there is a need for new research approaches in rural tourism.² This paper gives an overview of the literature on the development of rural tourism, with an emphasis on rural tourism in Croatia, and the expectation of tourism in rural areas in Croatia in the context of the role of tourism in the development of rural areas. The paper aims to determine the way of development of rural tourism in accordance to existing strategic plans in Croatia, and emphasises the need for monitoring the impact of tourism on rural areas for the development of sustainable rural tourism.

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