

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

Italy – Croatia



Book of Abstracts

International Scientific and Professional Conference
Co-creating Sustainable Tourism
University of Zadar, Zadar, Croatia, June 18–19, 2026



IMAGES: UNIVERSITY OF ZADAR AND
ZADAR COUNTY TOURIST BOARD



KVARNER
Diversity is beautiful



University of Zadar
Universitas Studiorum
Jadertina | 1396 | 2002 |



REGIONE DEL VENETO



CONFARTIGIANATO VENETO FORMAZIONE



Impressum

Organizer
University of Zadar
Ulica Mihovila Pavlinovića 1
23000 Zadar, Croatia

Editors
Gabrijela Vidić, Tomislav Klarin, Božena Krce Miočić

Publisher
University of Zadar

Graphic Design and Layout
FG GRAFIKA d.o.o.

ISBN:
ISBN: 978-953-331-654-3

Zadar, 2026



Scientific Committee

Božena Krce Miočić, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Tomislav Klarin, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Gabrijela Vidić, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Marija Opačak Eror, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Vanja Krajinović, PhD, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb

Antonio Vlahov, PhD, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb

Daniela Angelina Jelinčić, PhD, Institute for Development and International Relations

Sanja Tišma, PhD, Institute for Development and International Relations

Antonio Vidal Matzanke, PhD, University of Valencia

Yoel Mansfeld, PhD, University of Haifa

Ruba Saleh, PhD, ICHEC Brussels Management School

Xavier Matteucci, PhD, Independent Researcher, France / Adjunct faculty at FH Wien der WKW University of Applied Sciences, Vienna, Austria

Silvia Aulet, PhD, University of Girona

Nancy Duxbury, PhD, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

Daumantas Bočkus, PhD, Klaipėda University

Gorazd Sedmak, PhD, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, University of Primorska

Giuliana Schiavone – Academy of Fine Arts in Bari, Academy of Fine Arts in Foggia

Organizing Committee

Gabrijela Vidić, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar, Chair of the Committee

Tomislav Klarin, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Borna Buljan, PhD, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Nikolina Jukić, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Ana Grgica Knežević, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Matea Raguž, Secretary of the Organizing Committee, Department of Economics, University of Zadar

Preface

Contemporary tourism faces increasingly complex challenges that extend beyond the boundaries of individual sectors, disciplines, and institutions. Growing pressures on natural and cultural resources, changing social and economic patterns, and the need to preserve the identity and quality of destinations call for new approaches to tourism development. In this context, sustainability has become a fundamental principle for considering the future of tourism and the kind of places, communities, and experiences that tourism should contribute to creating. Against this background, the international scientific and professional conference Co-creating Sustainable Tourism, held on 18 and 19 June 2026 at the University of Zadar, brought together researchers, professionals, practitioners, and representatives of different sectors to discuss key challenges and opportunities shaping the future of tourism. The conference was organised within the framework of the SOCRAT – Socializing Craft & Contemporary Art for Sustainable Tourism project, funded by the Interreg VI-A Italy–Croatia 2021–2027 programme.

The concept of co-creating sustainable tourism was at the heart of the conference. It reflects the understanding that meaningful and lasting tourism development cannot be designed solely from above or imposed externally. Destinations are living social and cultural environments shaped by their communities, knowledge, creativity, values, and everyday practices. Local communities and diverse stakeholders are therefore not merely recipients of tourism development, but active contributors to the identity, authenticity, resilience, and value of destinations. Their meaningful participation is essential for tourism development that is locally grounded, socially responsible, and capable of creating long-term value. The conference brought together interdisciplinary perspectives on destination management, innovative business models, cultural heritage, contemporary art, crafts, gastronomy, creative industries, community participation, human capital, digital transformation, and knowledge exchange. Its cross-border dimension further demonstrated the value of European territorial cooperation as a platform for dialogue, mutual learning, and the development of shared responses to common challenges. At the same time, sustainable tourism must remain rooted in the specific characteristics of each place and community. Local natural and cultural resources, social values, identities, capacities, and aspirations need to be considered when developing appropriate solutions. Meaningful and resilient pathways therefore emerge through dialogue between local knowledge and broader perspectives, as well as

through cooperation among those who shape and experience tourism.

This Book of Abstracts presents a selection of the scientific and professional contributions shared during the conference. It reflects the diversity of approaches, disciplines, methodologies, and experiences that characterised the event, united by a common interest in exploring how tourism can become more responsible towards places, more respectful of communities, and more attentive to present and future generations. We sincerely thank all authors for their valuable contributions, the Scientific and Organising Committees for their expertise and dedication, and all participants whose discussions and experiences enriched the conference. We are also grateful to the project partners, institutions, and individuals whose support made the event possible. We hope that this publication will serve not only as a record of the conference, but also as an invitation to further dialogue, research, collaboration, and innovation. Co-creating Sustainable Tourism seeks to provide a space where diverse forms of knowledge and experience can meet and contribute to tourism development that respects places, empowers communities, values cultural diversity, and creates lasting value.

Editors

Content

Thursday, June 18, 2026 | University of Zadar

Location: University of Zadar, Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV. br. 2, 23000 Zadar, Great Hall

Keynote Speaker: Daniela Angelina Jelinčić

Turning Sustainability into Action: Practice-Based Pathways for Cultural/Creative Tourism Development

Gabrijela Vidić & Tomislav Klarin

Presentation of the SOCRAT Creative Living Labs

Josip Vrsaljko

Interview with a Chef – Culinary and Co-Creative Sustainable Tourism

Session 1

Nikolaos Manos & Nikolaos Tsimas

Wine as Experience: Leveraging Cultural Heritage and EU Funding for Sustainable Wine Tourism in the Cross-Border Area of Greece and North Macedonia

Marija Vukadin Milojević, Kristina Košić, Tatjana Pivac & Anđelija Ivkov Džigurski

Sustainability, Recommendation and Revisit Intentions at a Traditional Wine Festival – Experience from Serbia

Petra Marinko

Putting the Value of Health and Care on the Table: An Overlooked Dimension of Sustainable Tourism

Natalia Kushcheva

Smart Tourism in Finland: Welcoming a New Generation of Travelling

William McCarthy

Sustainability and Temporal Orientation at Dubai Expo 2020: An Inductive Content Analysis of All 192 Country Pavilions

Smiljana Pivčević

From Concept to Practice: Governance, Capacity and Stakeholder Perspectives on Regenerative Tourism

Friday, June 19, 2026 | University of Zadar

Location: University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Splitska 1, 23000 Zadar, Room 5 & Room 8

Session 2

Ariana Ergović, Katarina Štavlić & Katarina Potnik Galić

Assessing Digital Competitiveness of Tourist Boards: Comparative Evidence from Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia

Ljudevit Pranić & Marija Vuković

Near or Far, Does It Matter? Destination Familiarity and Cross-Market Differences in Rural Tourism Demand

Marta Borić Cveniћ, Marija Šain & Karla Žulj

The Role and Importance of Cultural and Creative Tourism in Sustainable Destination Development with Particular Emphasis on the Opinions and Attitudes of Respondents

Anna Paterek

Beyond Aid: Sustainable Tourism as a Strategic Field in German Development Policy

Jelena Đurkin Badurina

From Co-Design to Co-Creation in Developing Inclusive Tourism Experiences

Ivona Mikulandra Volić & Marija Opačak Eror

Construction of Perceived Authenticity Through Experiential Evaluation in Travel Vlogs: The Case of Zadar as a Non-Iconic but Mature Destination

Session 3

Jasna Potočnik Topler

Stakeholder Inclusion and Co-Creation in Sustainable Destinations: Cases from Slovenia

Klara Klapan, Laura Duić & Gabrijela Vidić

Choose to Reuse: Transforming Waste into a Tourist Experience on the Zadar Islands

Gabriela Šepac & Vanja Krajinović

Managing Community-Based Tourism Development – Insights into Challenges and Opportunities

Nikola Kadoić

Human-Centred Tourism: Integrating Design Thinking Across Digital, Sustainable, and Experiential Domains

Rikard Bakan, Mirna Leko Šimić & Dejan Tubić

Understanding the Identity–Image Relationship in Emerging Gastrotourism Destinations

Eli Marušić, Katija Kovačić & Maja Račić

Tourism Market Dynamics and SME Performance: The Role of Strategic Response in Coastal Areas

Session 4

Otto Regalado-Pezúa & Sylvie Christofle

Reconnecting Event Tourism with Community Values: A Regenerative and Narrative-Based Approach to Authenticity

Velizar Petrov

Developing an Integrated Territorial Storytelling Framework for Sustainable Tourism: Evidence from the Plovdiv Region, Bulgaria

Bendjedid Rachad Sanoussi, Omar Benjelloun Andaloussi & Mohamed Amine Marhraoui

Co-Creating AI-Enabled Tourism Experiences: Cultural Perspectives from Visitors in Morocco

Matteo Legović, Nataša Urošević & Kristina Afrić Rakitovac

The Role of Local Community in Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism – Experiences from Istria County (Croatia)

Ivana Tonković Pražić & Marija Baburić Vranešić

Valorisation of Authentic Local Resources for Sustainable Tourism Development: Evidence from Smiljan

Marija Dušević

TOURAL Project: Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism Through Culture, Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement

Session 5

Nedjima Mouhoubi, Zeyneb Aya Khoualed & Manel Ouaret Ladjouze

Tourism 4.0 and Authenticity-Led Light Architecture: Community Co-Creation of Nocturnal Urbanity in Place Gueydon and the Historic Core of Bejaia, Algeria

Božena Krce Miočić

Creativity and Creative Atmosphere of a Tourist Destination: The Case of the City of Zadar

Ljiljana Najev Čačija

Human Capital Development for Sustainable Tourism: A Competence-Based Perspective on Value Co-Creation

Tomislav Klarin

From Growth to Sustainability: Rethinking Tourism Development on Croatian Islands

Ana Grgica Knežević & Nikolina Jukić

Development Opportunities for Special Interest Tourism in Diversifying the Tourism Offer of the Zadar Islands

Keynote lecture

Turning Sustainability into Action: Practice-Based Pathways for Cultural/Creative Tourism Development

Daniela Angelina Jelinčić

Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia
daniela@irmo.hr

Abstract

The keynote lecture examined how cultural and creative industries can contribute to transforming tourism toward models that are simultaneously sustainable, authentic, and of high value for both visitors and local communities. Drawing on a comparative analysis of practical examples, the lecture identified key factors that distinguish successful from unsuccessful interventions in the development of cultural and creative tourism, ranging from the degree of local community integration and the pace at which tourism offerings adapt to authentic practices, to the existence of a long-term governance model independent of external funding. At the methodological level, the lecture presented the concept of interdisciplinary platforms for the participatory co-creation of tourism products and governance strategies, in which public administration, academia, industry, and residents jointly develop solutions grounded in both scientific knowledge and everyday local expertise. The lecture further synthesized the fundamental premises of sustainable practice in cultural tourism: financial diversification and resilience, the empowerment of local stakeholders as active decision-makers, the grounding of tourism offerings in the authentic values of the community, and governance policies that position destination management organizations as facilitators rather than controllers of development. In its concluding section, the lecture connected these insights to experience design theory, demonstrating how creative industries, through the management of visual, auditory, and symbolic elements of experience, directly shape visitors' perception and emotional response, thereby indirectly influencing destination loyalty and the long-term sustainability of tourism development. The central thesis of the lecture was that sustainability in tourism does not result from the belated incorporation of creativity, but from its embeddedness in every stage of tourism product development from the very outset.

Presentation of the SOCRAT Creative Living Labs

Gabrijela Vidić

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
gvidic@unizd.hr

Tomislav Klarin

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
tklarin@unizd.hr

Abstract

The presentation introduced the SOCRAT Creative Living Labs model as an approach to tourism diversification along the Adriatic coast, designed to overcome excessive seasonal dependency and strengthen co-operation between artists, artisans, and local communities. At the core of the project were creative laboratories that connected local artisans and creative industries with contemporary artists and civil society organizations, with an emphasis on the materiality of traditional crafts and on horizontal, inclusive, situation-based collaboration among all stakeholders. Thirteen pilot laboratories were carried out across the Italian and Croatian coasts, and the examples presented included cultural experiences grounded in local botany and gastronomy, applied ceramic works inspired by archaeological heritage, thematic interpretive routes that used local dialect and oral tradition as a narrative framework, and interdisciplinary research connecting traditional food production with the biodiversity of the landscape, confirming the model's functionality across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. The evaluation of the labs indicated high satisfaction with networking and the quality of the results achieved, while sustainable financing and institutional governance were identified as the systematically lowest-rated aspects. Notably, prototypes with tangible outcomes, such as ceramics and thematic routes, proved more sustainable in the long term than intangible formats dependent on continuous external support. It was concluded that the Creative Living Labs model effectively fosters community activation and creative contribution to the tourism offer, but requires further development at the implementation stage. Operational measures were proposed (an onboarding package for stakeholders, clearer participant profiling), along with structural measures including financial and business literacy training and the formalization of a post-laboratory phase through mentorship and further testing, aimed at the long-term integration of the model into regional development strategies.

Interview with a Chef

Culinary and Co-Creative Sustainable Tourism

Josip Vrsaljko

Hotel, Tourism and Catering School Zadar, Croatia
jvrsaljko54@gmail.com

Abstract

A conversation with a professional chef raised the question of how contemporary culinary practices can contribute to more responsible and sustainable destination development, and to what extent gastronomy can be understood as a form of creative and cultural expression. In contemporary tourism, gastronomy increasingly transcends its basic function and is becoming an important space where culture, creativity, local identity, and the tourist experience intersect. At the centre of the discussion was the relationship between gastronomy and the local environment. The use of local and seasonal ingredients, cooperation with farmers, fishers, and local producers, and the valorisation of traditional dishes represent important elements in preserving gastronomic heritage and strengthening the identity of destinations. At the same time, introducing visitors to the origins of food and the ways in which it is produced creates opportunities for developing deeper and more authentic tourism experiences. Particular attention was given to the environmental dimension of culinary practices, including reducing food waste, making efficient use of ingredients, and applying the principles of the “farm-to-table” approach. Such practices demonstrate how the kitchen can become a tangible setting for putting sustainability principles into practice, while also serving as a space for education and raising awareness among both tourism professionals and visitors. The conversation therefore opened up a broader perspective on the future of gastronomy. Sustainability is increasingly being understood not as an added value, but as an integral component of the professional responsibility of chefs, the hospitality industry, and the wider tourism sector. Within this process, gastronomy becomes an important means of connecting local communities, traditions, creativity, and contemporary tourism experiences, while contributing to a more responsible and sustainable vision of destination development.

Paper Presentations

Wine as Experience: Leveraging Cultural Heritage and EU Funding for Sustainable Wine Tourism in the Cross-Border Area of Greece and North Macedonia

Nikolaos Tsimas

National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture, Greece
tsimas@gmail.com

Nikolaos Manos

National Technical University of Athens, School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, Greece
nmanos902@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present and critically reflect on the WINE-UP project, co-funded by the Interreg IPA CBC Greece–North Macedonia 2014–2020 Programme, as a practice-based example of how EU Interreg-type funding can enable sustainable tourism development cross-border areas by transforming wine production into a holistic cultural “experience.” The project was implemented in the territories of Pella (Greece) and Negotino (North Macedonia), which share a strong vinicultural tradition and emblematic cultural assets, including the Tikveš wine basin and the archaeological heritage of Ancient Pella with the House of Dionysus (Ancient Greek God of wine), linking contemporary wine culture with ancient symposia traditions. The main findings indicate that a two-layer intervention model combining (a) targeted small-scale investments in public and heritage spaces (redevelopment of historic public squares, enhancement of landmark surroundings, and development of an on-site digital application with 3D visualization) with (b) stakeholder activation and capacity-building actions (wine festivals, cross-border wine tasting tours, training workshops for unemployed people, especially youth, knowledge transfer to wineries on ancient wine-making practices, and creative workshops inspired by archaeological artefacts) can effectively enhance destination attractiveness, mobilize local enterprises, and create the conditions for new tourism-related employment. The project succeeded in engaging more than 20 local enterprises in joint actions and fostering cross-border cooperation among local authorities,

wineries, tourism professionals, and heritage experts, contributing to place branding and to the emergence of local “wine experience ambassadors”. Limitations and implications concern the relatively short duration of EU-funded projects, which constrains the ability to fully capture long-term impacts on employment and business sustainability, as well as the dependency of experiential tourism products on continued local governance commitment, moreover, the transferability of the model requires adaptation to different institutional capacities, heritage contexts, and market maturity levels in other regions. The conclusions drawn highlight that EU territorial cooperation funding can move beyond fragmented tourism promotion when it strategically integrates cultural heritage, agri-food value chains, digital innovation, and skills development within a coherent experiential tourism framework, thereby supporting more resilient local economies in wine-producing regions; the WINE-UP case provides a replicable approach for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enable sustainable funding and revenue streams in tourism through place-based, cross-border, and heritage-driven development strategies.

Keywords: wine tourism, experiential tourism, cultural heritage, cross-border cooperation, EU Interreg funding

Sustainability, Recommendation and Revisit Intentions at a Traditional Wine Festival – Experience from Serbia

Marija Vukadin Milojević *

University of Novi Sad, The Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, Serbia
marija.vukadin@dgt.uns.ac.rs

Kristina Košić

University of Novi Sad, The Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, Serbia
kristina.kosic@dgt.uns.ac.rs

Tatjana Pivac

University of Novi Sad, The Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, Serbia
tatjana.pivac@dgt.uns.ac.rs

Anđelija Ivkov Džigurski

University of Novi Sad, The Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, Republic of Serbia
andjelija.ivkov@dgt.uns.ac.rs

* Acknowledgement

The author is a recipient of a scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Abstract

Traditional festivals have an important role when it comes to promoting sustainable tourism and local support, especially when it comes to small communities and rural areas. The aim of this study is to analyse visitors' perceptions regarding sustainable aspects, community impacts and return intentions at the traditional wine festival Oplenačka Berba, Topola, Serbia. Data for this study were collected via an online survey. In total, 162 festival visitors completed the survey and rated statements related to sustainability and recommendation intention on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were employed to describe the profile of respondents (age, income, education, residence) and to summarize visitors' perceptions, while exploratory factor analysis assessed the underlying structure of the survey items. Group comparisons were conducted to explore differences across gender, age and visitor type using Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test. The data employed in this research are part of a broader dataset that has been analysed in a sep-

arate study currently under review. The present study differs in its aims, methodology and interpretation of results, while the sample remains the same. Descriptive findings show high mean values for support of local producers ($M = 4.03$), recommendation intentions ($M = 4.00$) and perceived contribution to the local community ($M = 3.97$), indicating generally positive visitor attitudes. Results indicate that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure ($KMO = 0.832$) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 443.807$; $p < 0.001$) confirm the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. The results indicate a single-factor solution explaining 52.47% of the total variance, suggesting a unified construct of overall perceived sustainable impact and revisit and recommendation intentions. Group comparisons reveal no significant differences, suggesting that the sustainability message and festival advocacy resonate broadly across all visitor segments. However, a statistically significant difference is identified in the variable "I would recommend the festival to friends and acquaintances" ($U = 2957.5$, $p = 0.034$), with local visitors from Topola Municipality reporting higher mean ranks. This study suggests that the traditional festival Oplenačka berba successfully integrates sustainability and community-oriented values into a visitor experience. The findings suggest that domestic visitors demonstrate stronger behavioural intentions in terms of word-of-mouth promotion. One possible explanation is their background and understanding of the cultural and social context of the festival, which possibly enhances their willingness to recommend it. This study confirms that visitors are aware of the importance of Oplenačka berba festival regarding sustainability and recommendation and return intentions. In general, the results indicate a high level of consistency across different visitor groups, with minor differences observed. The absence of significant differences across visitor groups indicates the broad appeal and inclusivity of the festival. These insights provide guidance for festival organizers aiming to enhance sustainable practices and increase long-term visitor engagement. This supports the conclusion that the festival delivers an inclusive experience, while also highlighting an opportunity to strengthen engagement among visitors from other communities, especially when it comes to recommendation behaviour.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, visitor perception, behavioural intentions, wine festival, wine tourism

Putting the Value of Health and Care on the Table: An Overlooked Dimension of Sustainable Tourism

Petra Marinko

Avenia-M d.o.o. - Non Tox Uni Kum / Non Tox Hub Institute, Slovenia
petra@nontoxunikum.com

Abstract

Contemporary discussions on sustainable tourism commonly focus on carbon reduction, circular economy, green mobility, and certification systems, while the impact of built environments on human health remains largely overlooked. Buildings are frequently renovated and labelled as sustainable, and interiors are designed as green or responsible, yet they often continue to rely on materials that release harmful substances and silently affect those who occupy them. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of health and care within sustainable tourism and to position indoor environments as key spaces where sustainability is experienced in everyday life. Health is approached not only as a medical concern, but as a spatial and material condition present in the air of a hotel room, in the finishes of cultural venues, and in the surfaces of public spaces. The research builds on practice-based work developed through the Non Tox Uni Kum movement and the Non Tox Hub in a post-industrial context shaped by a legacy of environmental and material toxicity. This context provides a relevant testing ground for exploring how spatial and material interventions can address long term exposure to harmful substances while supporting healthier environments. The study investigates how principles of healthier material use and spatial design can be translated into concrete interventions that support human health and wellbeing. The research design combines case study and action research, focusing on spatial interventions and adaptive reuse as testing environments that allow continuous observation, evaluation, and refinement. This approach enables a closer understanding of how design decisions perform in real life conditions and how users interact with space over time. Particular attention is given to spatial quality as an integrated condition shaped by material choices, indoor air quality, and sensory experience. Within this framework, material selection follows an informed process, complemented

by external expertise through collaboration with Healthy Materials Lab EU, while also considering indoor environmental quality and the impact of elements such as textiles, cleaning systems, and everyday operational choices that shape the overall experience of space. A key example is the “Healthy Public Living Room” project in Trbovlje, Slovenia, where an abandoned commercial space was transformed into an open, community-oriented environment. The project functions as a living lab for observing how spatial and material conditions influence user behaviour, comfort, and patterns of social interaction. The intervention enables continuous observation and feedback, offering insight into how spatial environments are used, adapted, and perceived over time. The findings indicate that spaces designed with attention to material and its impact on human and environmental health are perceived as more comfortable, supportive, and pleasant to use. In addition to reducing exposure to harmful substances, this directly influences duration of stay, patterns of use, and social interaction. These effects extend beyond individual wellbeing and point to a broader shift in how spatial conditions shape how users experience space. The results suggest that attention to health within spatial design contributes not only to improved environmental quality, but also to more meaningful and engaging forms of use. In this sense, also tourism can be shaped by spatial conditions that influence how people use space, how long they stay, and how they interact. The findings suggest that this approach can be applied in tourism practice, not only newly built structures, but also in the regeneration and adaptive reuse of existing spaces. By focusing on the health quality of indoor environments, material choices, and overall spatial experience, tourism providers can influence what impact the space has on guests, how guests use spaces, how long they stay, and how they experience a destination. This is particularly relevant in the context of smaller scale interventions, where targeted improvements can lead to significant changes in user experience without requiring extensive investment, beyond the one already planned. The main implication of the research is that also relatively small-scale interventions and informed material and operational choices can significantly improve both environmental quality and user experience. The study is limited by its focus on a specific context and case-based approach, while also opening opportunities for further

research to explore how these principles can be transferred and adapted across different tourism sectors and larger spatial contexts. The originality of the paper lies in introducing health and care as a central dimension of sustainable tourism and in linking spatial design, healthier material selection, and user experience as interconnected elements of sustainability. In doing so, it brings health and care back into focus as an essential, yet often overlooked, component of tourism development and opens new possibilities for healthier, more inclusive, responsible, and meaningful forms of tourism practice.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, material health, built environment, spatial design, adaptive reuse

Smart tourism in Finland: Welcoming a new generation of travelling

Natalia Kushcheva

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK), Finland
Natalia.Kushcheva@xamk.fi

Abstract

Smart tourism is transforming the travel industry through innovative technologies, creating personalized and sustainable experiences. Smart advancements not only improve visitor experiences but also position Finland as a leader in smart tourism. South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK) is one of the leaders in the Finnish tourism and hospitality education. This research is based on a survey suggested to the students in the framework of two courses “Digital skills in hospitality service” and “Future service processes”. The purpose of this document is to enhance and facilitate the general experience of young people in using smart services of the Finnish tourism providers. Case companies presented in this research provide services for youngsters and were visited by students or presented on the courses online. Students could be considered as tourists because they are highly digital technology savvy and prefer using up-to-date smart services. The survey was recently conducted among the 37 tourism students using an online questionnaire of 6 closed and 8 open questions. 3 Finnish case companies were used as examples of smart services. Central diversity factors like money, convenience to use, personal experience was touched on. The implications of the results of the motivation and satisfaction of smart services of the destination are discussed. This study highlights the experiences of students as young tourists in smart tourism enterprises. By sharing the results of this research, the author hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the new generation of travelling and tourism development in Finland.

Keywords: smart tourism, digital technologies, young tourists, tourism experience, Finland

Sustainability and Temporal Orientation at Dubai Expo 2020: An Inductive Content Analysis of All 192 Country Pavilions

William Mccarthy

Zayed University, College of Communication and Media Sciences,
Dubai, UAE
wmccarthy9@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the first in London 1851, world expositions have been prominent occasions for countries to construct self-representative identities. The mega event transmits idealized forms of national identities as state instruments shaped by modernity. An expo national pavilion is therefore an extension of public diplomacy for countries to conscientiously brand themselves on a platform expressing ambitions and proposing their future vision to a global audience. Since each of the 192 countries at Dubai 2020 was afforded its own individual pavilion, self-representation became a conscious decision for every national government and organizing committee. This study addresses two gaps in world exposition studies. First, no study has extensively examined more than a dozen pavilions at a particular expo or world's fair. Second, multimedia displays were present at every national pavilion, except Afghanistan, at Dubai 2020, thus outmoding previous studies. With technological displays no longer useful as a differentiating code of modernity and tradition between national pavilions, the study looks at new signifying predictors and codes such as sustainability for country self-representation and temporal orientation. The researcher visited the Dubai Expo 32 times and coded all 192 country pavilions twice. Inductive content analysis was used for concept development and model building through a subjective interpretivist process of open, axial, and selective coding. The investigation revealed ten selective codes and three temporal orientations of self-representation. All pavilions were found to self-represent at least a few present selective codes, but some pavilions were absent past or future selective codes. The attribution of the selective codes to the pavilions revealed each country's self-representation as one of three categories of tem-

poral orientations: 1) predominantly past and present, 2) past, present, and future, and 3) predominantly present and future. By far, the most prominent selective code throughout the national pavilions was sustainability. This was unsurprising as sustainability has emerged in the last few expos as a prominent symbol for countries to signify modernity. Host country UAE's pavilion highlighted shifting from being a petrostate to global leader for sustainable development. While nature and landscapes have long comprised staple displays of national pavilions, the promotion of sustainability as protection of the environment, tackling climate change, maintaining ecological balance, and fighting pollution were consistent hallmarks. Only 21 countries did not feature an aspect of this most popular selective code in some form at their pavilion. At Dubai 2020, two inherent aspects of countries often correlated with the time orientation categories of their national pavilions: geography and economic development level. Countries with relatively high economic development in northern regions were the most likely to self-represent as predominantly present and future oriented. However, being highly developed economically was not always enough by itself to prompt self-representation without the past as demonstrated by the national pavilions of the Arabian Peninsula countries, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The latter three being settler countries, unlike northern Europe and Asia, serves as motivation to acknowledge history and represent First Peoples at their national pavilions though the US pavilion failed to do so. Middle East and North Africa countries did not self-represent without telling their formative stories of national identity.

Keywords: world expositions, national pavilions, national identity, self-representation, sustainability

From Concept to Practice: Governance, Capacity and Stakeholder Perspectives on Regenerative Tourism

Smiljana Pivčević

University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Croatia
smiljana.pivcevic@efst.hr

Abstract

In recent years, tourism research has increasingly shifted from the paradigm of sustainable tourism towards regenerative approaches that emphasize restoration, renewal, and net-positive contributions to destinations. While sustainability has been widely adopted in policy and practice, it has also been criticized for its limited transformative capacity and focus on impact mitigation rather than systemic improvement. In response, regenerative tourism has emerged as a promising alternative, grounded in systems thinking, socio-ecological resilience, and place-based development. However, despite growing conceptual interest, there remains a significant gap between theoretical discourse and practical implementation, particularly in rural destinations characterized by limited institutional capacity and fragmented governance. This paper aims to explore how regenerative tourism is understood, perceived, and operationalized by local stakeholders in a rural Mediterranean context. Specifically, it seeks to (1) examine stakeholder perceptions of regenerative tourism, (2) identify key barriers and enabling factors influencing its implementation, and (3) determine priority actions required to advance regenerative tourism at the local level. The study is based on a qualitative research design using focus group to capture in-depth stakeholder insights. The focus group included ten participants representing public institutions, tourism organizations, and local stakeholders in rural destination. Data were collected through structured discussion addressing perceptions, barriers, community engagement, and priority-setting. The analysis followed a thematic approach, identifying recurring patterns and relationships across stakeholder responses. The findings indicate that stakeholders perceive regenerative tourism as a step beyond sustainability, emphasizing not only preservation but also active enhancement of community well-being, cultural heritage, and natural resources. Regenerative

tourism is associated with stronger community inclusion, revitalization of local identity, and more equitable distribution of benefits. However, its implementation is constrained by several structural barriers, including weak institutional capacity, complex administrative processes, limited infrastructure, and a lack of skilled human resources. Governance challenges—particularly insufficient coordination between local, regional, and national levels—emerge as critical impediments. Among identified priorities, awareness-building through education and media campaigns is ranked as the most important, followed by strengthening stakeholder cooperation and resource pooling. The results also suggest that regenerative tourism is perceived as a gradual, incremental process rather than a rapid transformation. The study has several implications for both theory and practice. It highlights the central role of governance quality and institutional capacity in enabling regenerative tourism transitions, suggesting that conceptual adoption alone is insufficient without systemic support. For practitioners and policymakers, the findings emphasize the importance of awareness-building and collaborative approaches as foundational steps. However, the study is limited by its qualitative design and single-case focus, which may restrict the generalizability of findings. Future research could expand the analysis through comparative or mixed-method approaches across multiple destinations. This paper contributes to the emerging literature on regenerative tourism by providing a micro-level, stakeholder-driven perspective on its operationalization in a rural context. It moves beyond conceptual discussions by empirically examining how regenerative tourism is interpreted and prioritized by local actors, thereby addressing a critical gap between theory and practice. The findings suggest that the main challenge of regenerative tourism is not its conceptual acceptance but rather governance and capacity constraints that shape its implementation. Advancing regenerative tourism requires a gradual, layered and context-sensitive approach, beginning with awareness-building and progressing through enhanced collaboration, capacity development, and institutional strengthening. As such, regenerative tourism should be understood as a long-term transition process rather than an immediate transformation.

Keywords: regenerative tourism, socio-ecological systems, tourism governance, institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement

Assessing Digital Competitiveness of Tourist Boards: Comparative Evidence from Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia

Ariana Ergović

Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development in Požega, Croatia
aergovic@ftrr.hr

Katarina Štavlić

Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development in Požega, Croatia
kstavlic@ftrr.hr

Katarina Potnik Galić

Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development in Požega, Croatia
kpotnikgalic@ftrr.hr

Abstract

In the context of accelerating digitalization in tourism, official websites of tourist boards represent a critical interface between destinations and potential visitors. The capacity of tourist boards to deliver accessible, structured, and user-oriented online content has emerged as an important determinant of destination competitiveness and an increasingly relevant component of sustainable destination development. While destination competitiveness has been extensively examined within established theoretical frameworks, the comparative digital performance of tourist boards across different national contexts remains underexplored. This study aims to assess the digital competitiveness of tourist boards through a comparative analysis of their official websites, with a primary focus on Croatia and a complementary comparison with Slovenia and Serbia. The research examines the extent to which website content, functionality, and accessibility contribute to destination competitiveness, and identifies cross-country differences under a standardized evaluation framework. The study is based on a quantitative content analysis of official tourist board websites, covering the full population of tourist boards in Croatia and a structured comparative sample from Slovenia and Serbia. A standardized coding framework was developed using objective indicators measured on binary (0–1) and ordinal (0–2) scales. The evaluation was conducted from the perspective of an international tourist using English as the only language, ensuring

cross-country comparability. The analysis includes key dimensions of digital performance, such as website functionality, multilingual accessibility, availability of core tourism information, interactive elements, and overall usability. Data analysis combines descriptive statistics, comparative analysis, and inferential techniques, including correlation and regression analysis. The findings reveal notable cross-country differences in digital competitiveness. Croatian tourist boards demonstrate a relatively high level of basic digital presence, with an average composite score of approximately 14.1, while tourist boards in Slovenia and Serbia achieve lower average scores (approximately 11.2 and 12.0, respectively), indicating more limited content depth and functionality. Across all three countries, destinations with higher tourism intensity consistently exhibit higher levels of digital performance, whereas rural and less developed destinations remain predominantly characterized by basic informational functionality and limited international accessibility. The results suggest that improving website quality, multilingual accessibility, and user-oriented content can significantly enhance digital competitiveness and contribute to more sustainable destination development. The study develops and empirically applies an objective and replicable framework for assessing the digital competitiveness of tourist boards, providing an evidence-based foundation for policy measures and strategic interventions aimed at strengthening destination management and digital communication.

Keywords: destination competitiveness, tourist boards, digital competitiveness, official tourist board websites, comparative analysis

Near or Far, Does It Matter? Destination Familiarity and Cross-Market Differences in Rural Tourism Demand

Ljudevit Pranić

University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Croatia
ljudevit.pranic@efst.hr

Marija Vuković

University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Croatia
marija.vukovic@efst.hr

Abstract

Tourism demand is rarely evenly distributed across destinations, seasons, or tourist markets. As a result, many destinations face challenges related to spatial concentration, seasonality, and dependence on a limited number of source markets. Rural tourism has therefore been widely recognized as a potential pathway for diversifying tourism demand, redistributing visitor flows spatially, and supporting more balanced and sustainable tourism development. Understanding how different tourist markets respond to rural tourism opportunities is therefore critical for destinations seeking to position rural areas as complementary tourism offerings. Recent research has examined how travel motivations shape interest in rural tourism activities and experiences, demonstrating that motivations such as novelty, relaxation, and escape influence tourist engagement with rural destinations. However, tourism research offers limited insight into whether rural tourism demand differs across tourist markets and what factors may explain such differences. Addressing this question, the present study examines cross-market differences in rural tourism demand by introducing destination familiarity as a potential explanatory concept. While destination familiarity has been widely examined in tourism behaviour research, its role in explaining cross-market differences in rural tourism demand remains underexplored. Destination familiarity is conceptualized as a market-level characteristic reflecting the structural relationship between tourist markets and a destination, which may vary according to geographic proximity and travel distance. To examine this issue, the study empirically compares

tourists from eleven EU countries interested in rural tourism experiences in Croatia, which serves as the empirical setting for analysing how destination familiarity may influence tourism demand across markets. The analytical strategy is designed to examine whether rural tourism demand differs across tourist markets and whether destination familiarity helps explain such differences. The study adopts a quantitative research design based on an integrated dataset combining domestic and international survey samples. The domestic dataset consists of Croatian residents interested in rural tourism experiences ($n = 710$), while the international dataset includes respondents from ten other EU countries ($n = 1,000$). The combined dataset therefore includes 1,710 respondents, enabling cross-market comparisons across multiple tourist markets. The research instrument replicates the measurement framework used in previous research, ensuring comparability across markets through identical constructs and measurement scales. The questionnaire measures travel motivations for rural tourism (e.g., novelty, relaxation, escape, prestige, and physical activity), interest in rural tourism activities (e.g., natural heritage activities, performed heritage experiences, and historic or built heritage attractions), and the likelihood of choosing specific rural tourism scenarios. Data analysis will proceed in several stages. First, descriptive statistics will compare motivations, activity preferences, and scenario interest across countries. Second, a baseline structural model will be estimated for the full sample using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships between travel motivations, rural tourism activities, and tourism scenarios. Third, measurement invariance across markets will be assessed using the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure to ensure that constructs are comparable across groups. Fourth, multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) will be conducted to test whether structural relationships differ across tourist markets, including domestic tourists, nearby European markets with higher familiarity, and more distant European markets with lower familiarity. In addition, geographic distance between respondents' countries of residence and Croatia will be incorporated as a continuous explanatory variable, operationalized as the approximate distance between national capitals and Zagreb. This distance-based analysis will allow the study to examine whether spatial

distance predicts rural tourism motivations and behavioural preferences, thereby providing an empirical test of the destination familiarity hypothesis. This study is expected to contribute to the literature on rural tourism and tourism demand in several ways. Conceptually, it will advance tourism demand research by examining destination familiarity as a theoretical lens for explaining cross-market differences in tourism behaviour. Empirically, the research will provide comparative insights into whether and how domestic and European tourists differ in their motivations, activity preferences, and interest in rural tourism experiences. Methodologically, the study will demonstrate how integrated multi-market datasets can be analysed using structural modelling, measurement invariance testing, and multi-group analysis to identify behavioural differences across tourist markets. From a practical perspective, the findings may support tourism policymakers and destination managers in designing rural tourism products and marketing strategies that better align with the expectations of different visitor markets. By identifying which markets are more likely to engage in nature-based, cultural, or heritage-oriented rural experiences, the research may inform targeted tourism development strategies aimed at distributing tourism demand beyond coastal areas and peak seasons. In doing so, the study is expected to contribute to broader efforts to foster more balanced and sustainable tourism systems, where rural regions play a greater role in supporting regional development, preserving cultural landscapes, and co-creating diversified tourism opportunities across destinations and visitor markets.

Keywords: Rural tourism, destination familiarity, tourism demand, cross-market comparison, sustainable tourism development

The Role and Importance of Cultural and Creative Tourism in Sustainable Destination Development with Particular Emphasis on the Opinions and Attitudes of Respondents

Marta Borić Cveniċ

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek/ Department of Culture, Media and Management,
Croatia
marta.boric5@gmail.com

Marija Šain

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek/ Department of Culture, Media and Management,
Croatia
marija.m2401@gmail.com

Karla Źulj

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek/ Department of Culture, Media and Management,
Croatia
zuljkarla@gmail.com

Abstract

This scientific paper originated from the preparation of the master's thesis entitled "Destination Development through the Example of Cultural and Creative Tourism", authored by Karla Źulj under the supervision of Associate Professor Marta Boriċ Cveniċ, within the Destination Management course during the 2024/2025 academic year at the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Department of Culture, Media and Management. The purpose of this paper is to examine and analyse respondents' attitudes and experiences related to cultural and creative tourism. Through the use of a survey questionnaire, the study investigates the level of familiarity with these concepts, the motives underlying visits to particular destinations, and perceptions of the influence of these forms of tourism on destination development. The research problem focuses on the extent to which visitors are acquainted with the concepts of cultural and creative tourism and whether such concepts influence their destination choices. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine whether cultural and creative content is perceived as a significant factor in destination attrac-

tiveness and long-term sustainable development. The paper is based on both primary and secondary research. The primary research consisted of an empirical survey conducted among randomly selected tourists, with the aim of examining their level of awareness, perceptions, and interest in cultural and creative content, that is in cultural and creative tourism. The secondary research comprised desk research, content analysis, and a review of relevant scientific and professional literature in the field of cultural and creative tourism. In addition, the study used the methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, compilation, and comparison. The findings confirm that cultural and creative tourism occupy an important place in respondents' selection of tourist destinations. The majority of respondents are well acquainted with the concept of cultural tourism and demonstrate a marked interest in cultural and historical landmarks, as well as in cultural events. Although awareness of creative tourism is somewhat less pronounced, respondents nevertheless express interest in creative activities and festivals and show a willingness to participate in them. Cultural and creative content has been recognized both as a motive for visiting destinations and as a significant factor in destination development and market differentiation. The findings further suggest that destinations striving for long-term growth and enhanced attractiveness should continue to invest in cultural and creative programmes and strengthen visitors' awareness of these forms of tourism, thereby contributing to sustainable destination development and the creation of a competitive advantage in the tourism market. The principal limitation of the study lies in the relatively small number of respondents and the random nature of the sample. Nevertheless, the research may be regarded as a pilot study that provides a useful basis for more extensive future research. It is recommended that future research include a larger sample and place greater emphasis on respondents who display a strong affinity for cultural and creative tourism. Moreover, similar research could be conducted among providers of cultural and creative products within a destination in order to examine their perceptions of the role of cultural and creative tourism in fostering sustainable destination development. The scientific contribution of this study lies in providing a deeper understanding of the role of cultural and creative tourism in the development of tourist destinations. The results may serve as a basis for further research in the field of tour-



ism and as a source of guidance for decision-makers in the planning and design of tourism offerings. In addition, the study may assist destination management organizations in formulating more effective strategies for the promotion and development of cultural and creative content. The development of cultural and creative tourism offers numerous advantages for tourist destinations, as it enables the creation of innovative and authentic offerings that correspond to the needs of contemporary tourists. The interrelationship between culture, education, and creative expression has become a key element in generating unique experiences that transcend traditional forms of tourism. Creative tourism also provides opportunities for the development of new markets and for targeting specific visitor segments seeking authenticity and comprehensive experiences. The results confirm that most respondents are familiar with cultural tourism and associate it with visits to landmarks, festivals, and events. Although awareness of creative tourism is less developed, the expressed interest in workshops and artistic and gastronomic experiences indicates substantial potential for this segment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that cultural and creative content influences destination choice, attracts tourists, and contributes both to tourism development and to increased visitor numbers.

Keywords: creative tourism, culture tourism, economic impacts of tourism, opinions and attitudes of respondents, sustainable destination development

Beyond Aid: Sustainable Tourism as a Strategic Field in German Development Policy

Anna Paterek

Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University, Faculty of Law, Poland
apaterek@uafm.edu.pl

Abstract

Tourism is one of the most dynamic and contested sectors in the global economy. While it creates jobs and generates income, it can also destroy ecosystems and deepen inequalities. How development actors engage with these complexities has significant implications for sustainable outcomes. In the context of German development policy, sustainable tourism has emerged as a strategic field, reflecting both opportunity and risk. This paper analyses how Germany, as the largest provider of official development assistance (ODA) among OECD members, strategically positions sustainable tourism within its development cooperation architecture. It explores the roles of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and private sector partners in fostering globally sustainable development through tourism. The BMZ is currently engaged in over 100 tourism-related projects worldwide. A central focus is placed on the governance models and institutional arrangements that underpin Germany's bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this area. The BMZ's Sector Dialogue on Tourism for Sustainable Development and the GIZ's sector project Sustainable Development through Tourism illustrate how multi-stakeholder mechanisms, launched since 2003 and further expanded with the 2016 Sector Dialogue, are used to coordinate actors across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Since July 2021, the Sector Dialogue on Sustainable Tourism, as part of the BMZ Corona Relief Package for Tourism, has implemented projects in Colombia, Tunisia, and the Dominican Republic, supporting sustainable business model adoption, reducing resource consumption, and promoting biodiversity conservation in the accommodation sector. Preventing food waste and plastic pollution are also key priorities. Digital innovation is highlighted through the atingi.org platform and its multilingual eAcademy "Tourism & Hospitality," which offers accessible vocational and professional development opportunities in tourism. Methodologically, the paper adopts a compar-

ative case study approach, analysing policy documents, project evaluations, and selected experiences from Armenia, Malawi, and Albania. Case selection is informed by the diversity of governance modalities and development contexts, and the analytical framework is rooted in governance and development architecture analysis. Particular attention is devoted to the operationalization of the community-based tourism (CBT) approach. It examines how CBT is interpreted and implemented within German development cooperation and assesses conditions for local ownership, empowerment, and bottom-up participation. Preliminary results indicate that while community-based tourism projects can foster local ownership, empowerment, and environmental stewardship, they often encounter persistent challenges. These include navigating internal community diversity, power imbalances, donor-driven timelines, and misalignment between private sector incentives and social equity or environmental goals. Additionally, the integration of tourism as a component of broader development initiatives sometimes dilutes its impact, and insufficient market knowledge or capacity remains a recurring obstacle. The implications of these findings highlight that sustainable tourism can contribute meaningfully to local and regional development but is not a panacea. Its effectiveness depends on context-sensitive governance, genuine inclusion of local voices, and realistic alignment between economic, social, and environmental objectives. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are linked to the inherent difficulty in obtaining direct impact metrics, which constrains the ability to quantitatively assess the outcomes of sustainable tourism interventions. The paper's originality lies in its governance-cantered analysis of sustainable tourism within German development cooperation, its explicit focus on the operational dynamics of CBT, and its comparative perspective across diverse contexts. By situating tourism at the intersection of development architecture, the paper advances the policy debate beyond traditional aid modalities, offering insights relevant for both practitioners and policymakers engaged in sustainable development. In conclusion, Germany's strategic engagement with sustainable tourism illustrates both the opportunities and the complexities inherent in leveraging tourism for development. Realizing the full potential of CBT and sustainable tourism requires adaptive governance, long-term commitment, and a nuanced understanding of local realities.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, German development cooperation, CBT, ODA

From Co-Design to Co-Creation in Developing Inclusive Tourism Experiences

Jelena Đurkin Badurina *

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management
jelenad@fthm.hr

Abstract

Accessible and inclusive tourism has increasingly been recognized as both a human rights issue and a pathway toward more equitable and sustainable destination development. Despite growing attention to accessibility in tourism research and practice, tourism experiences for persons with disabilities are still too often designed for them rather than with them. Recent scholarship argues that co-design is essential because it repositions persons with disabilities as experts of their own lived experiences and enables a shift from tokenistic consultation toward meaningful participation in decision-making. In this sense, co-design is not merely a methodological choice, but an emancipatory and ethical approach to the co-creation of tourism experiences. This paper aims to explore co-design as a pathway to co-creation in accessible tourism, with particular attention to how participatory processes can contribute to the development of tourism experiences that are more inclusive, responsive, and grounded in real access needs. The discussion builds on recent work showing that tourism research still contains relatively little evidence of genuine co-design, while many studies continue to treat persons with disabilities primarily as research subjects rather than active partners. At the same time, inaccessible built environments, service systems, and tourism touchpoints continue to limit participation, reinforcing exclusion and ableist assumptions. The paper adopts a conceptual and reflective perspective informed by the research note of McIntosh and Flemmer from 2026 on sharing experiences of co-design for accessible tourism which was published in *Annals of tourism research* and critically reflected on an interdisciplinary co-design process in New Zealand. The empirical context for advancing these theoretical

points and understanding practical challenges of co-design in accessible tourism will be Croatia. As a tourist destination of strong international visibility and reputation, widely recognized for its natural attractions, cultural heritage, and coastal tourism appeal, it is still rather under-developed in terms of accessible and inclusive tourism, which makes it a particularly relevant setting for this paper. Study focuses on examining how co-design approaches can contribute to the co-creation of tourism experiences that better respond to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. Exploring practical implementation of those processes in the national context can provide valuable insights into the gaps between destination attractiveness and destination accessibility, while also highlighting the potential of participatory approaches to support more inclusive tourism development in destinations that are successful in the mainstream market but still insufficiently adapted to the principles of accessibility and inclusion. In terms of methodology, the paper employs a qualitative desk-based research approach grounded in the analysis of secondary data from Croatian context. The research particularly focuses on grey literature, policy and project documents, media reports, and on-line sources in order to identify examples of co-design in accessible and inclusive tourism in Croatia. These examples are subsequently analysed through an interpretive qualitative lens, with the aim of assessing how co-design practices support the co-creation of tourism experiences for persons with disabilities. The analysis focuses on the nature of stakeholder collaboration, the inclusion of persons with disabilities as active contributors, and the potential of identified initiatives to generate more inclusive and responsive tourism experiences. Preliminary results show that there is a rather small number of examples that can serve as examples of co-design of tourism experiences and in very few cases those co-design efforts resulted in long-term cooperation for the purpose of true co-creation of tourism experiences. The paper argues that co-design contributes to co-created tourism experiences in three important ways. First, it centres lived experience as a form of expertise. Persons with disabilities bring situated knowledge of barriers, enablers, emotions, and practical needs that conventional top-down planning often overlooks. Second, co-design broadens the understanding of accessibility beyond technical compliance, highlighting experiential, social, and

relational dimensions of tourism participation. Third, it creates opportunities for more relevant and transformative outputs, including service redesign, accessible information, advocacy materials, and policy recommendations. In this way, co-design strengthens both the quality and legitimacy of tourism development processes. Limitations are present in the narrow research area and scarce successful examples analysed. The implications of this work is particularly visible in terms of importance for destination managers and tourism providers who want to co-create meaningful experiences for persons with disabilities. In terms of contributions for researchers, it adds to the literature on understanding co-design and co-creation in the field of accessible tourism and opens new research avenues aiming at operationalisation of such research for further exploration.

Keywords: co-design, co-creation, accessible tourism, inclusive tourism, persons with disabilities, participatory approach

*** Acknowledgement**

Funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU – PRISTUR – uniri-iz-25-36
The views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official stance of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held accountable for them.

Construction of Perceived Authenticity Through Experiential Evaluation in Travel Vlogs: The Case of Zadar as a Non-Iconic but Mature Destination

Ivona Mikulandra Volić

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
imvolic@unizd.hr

Marija Opačak Eror

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
mopacak@unizd.hr

Abstract

This paper explores how Zadar, a destination with a long tourist tradition but without a global iconic status, is constructed and evaluated through travel vlogs. The focus is on how vloggers use previous travel experiences to compare and interpret the destination and how such evaluations shape perceptions of authenticity. The theoretical framework includes destination image theory, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and authenticity in tourism, viewed as a relational and experiential construct. Qualitative analysis supported by MAXQDA includes narrative, visual, and sentiment analysis, with an emphasis on comparisons, evaluative sentiment, and perceived authenticity, especially the distinction between familiar and unique elements. The results show that the image of a destination is formed through comparative and affective evaluations, with perceived authenticity emerging through the interrelationship of the familiar and the new. Vloggers distinguish elements that are perceived as similar to other destinations from those that are perceived as unique or new. Elements experienced as unique are associated with positive evaluations, while those perceived as similar are more often relativized through previous experiences. The paper contributes to understanding authenticity in the context of user-generated content. More specifically, the study demonstrates that authenticity is not presented as an inherent feature of the destination itself, but as something negotiated through the vlogger's personal expectations, embodied encounters, and media performance. In this process, Zadar emerges as a destination

whose value is articulated through comparisons with previously visited places and experiences. Such comparisons position the destination within a broader hierarchy of tourist experiences and influence the way its attributes are interpreted and valued. The paper shows how content generated by users, especially travel roles, shapes the meaning of a destination through experiential comparison and evaluation. This contributes to the understanding of authenticity as a dynamic and contextual construct and emphasizes the importance of analysing digital narratives in interpreting the image of mature, but non-iconic destinations.

Keywords: destination image, authenticity, user-generated content, sentiment analysis, comparative evaluation

Stakeholder Inclusion and Co-Creation in Sustainable Destinations: Cases from Slovenia

Jasna Potočnik Topler

University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism, Slovenia
jasna.potocnik1@um.si

Abstract

This article explores how narrativebased and participatory approaches can support sustainable tourism development, focusing on two Slovenian municipalities, namely Ilirska Bistrica and Ravne na Koroškem. Both destinations possess rich literary heritage, the first connected to Dragotin Kette and the latter to Lovro Kuhar - Prežihov Voranc. The study is situated within the national framework of the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, which promotes holistic sustainability, community engagement, and responsible heritage interpretation. Against this backdrop, the article examines how literary tourism and content tourism, especially when embedded in walkingbased experiences, can enhance community wellbeing, strengthen place identity, and contribute to sustainable destination development. The purpose of the article is to analyse how narrative methods, including storytelling, travel writing, and dialogic engagement, can be employed as tools for cocreative tourism planning. It aims to demonstrate how local literary narratives, when integrated into participatory governance structures, can generate tourism products that align with national sustainability goals while fostering community ownership. Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative, comparative casestudy design. Data were collected through document analysis, field observations of literary routes, and semistructured interviews with local stakeholders, including municipal representatives, cultural institutions, educators, and tourism providers. This multilayered approach enables an indepth understanding of how literary heritage is interpreted, activated, and embedded into local development strategies. The findings reveal two distinct yet complementary models of stakeholder inclusion. In Ilirska Bistrica, a bottomup process of heritage reactivation led to the revitaliza-

tion of the Kette Literary Route, transforming passive literary sites into interactive, walkingbased experiences supported by physical guides and digital content. In Ravne na Koroškem, a systemic, institutionally coordinated model integrates Prežih's literary legacy with educational innovation, environmental sustainability, and cultural programming, resulting in a cohesive ecosystem of literary routes and interpretive environments. Across both cases, literary and content tourism emerge as effective vehicles for strengthening local identity, enhancing wellbeing through walking and outdoor engagement, and supporting the sustainability objectives of the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism. The article acknowledges limitations, including the contextspecific nature of the findings and the reliance on qualitative data, which may limit generalizability. However, the insights offer valuable implications for municipalities seeking to integrate cultural narratives into sustainable tourism planning. The analysis suggests that literary heritage, when activated through participatory processes, can serve as a catalyst for crosssector collaboration, community empowerment, and the development of distinctive tourism products. The originality of the article lies in its integration of literary and content tourism with participatory planning and national sustainability frameworks. It contributes to the literature by demonstrating how narrativedriven approaches can bridge cultural heritage, wellbeing, and sustainable destination management, offering a replicable model for other regions with underutilized literary assets. In conclusion, the article argues that destinations succeed not despite their communities but because their diverse voices, histories, and creative expressions are actively included in tourism development. The cases of Ravne na Koroškem and Ilirska Bistrica illustrate the transformative potential of narrativedriven, stakeholdercentered approaches for creating tourism futures that are sustainable, inclusive, and grounded in wellbeing. Walkingbased literary routes, in particular, exemplify how cultural engagement, physical activity, and environmental awareness can be meaningfully combined within the holistic sustainability framework of the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism.

Keywords: stakeholder participation, narrative methods, literary tourism, literary routes, well-being

Choose to Reuse: Transforming Waste into a Tourist Experience on the Zadar Islands

Klara Klapan *

University of Zadar (student), Croatia
kklapan23@unizd.hr

Laura Duić *

University of Zadar (student), Croatia
lduic23@unizd.hr

Gabrijela Vidić *

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
gvidic@unizd.hr

Abstract

Mass tourism and pronounced seasonality place considerable pressure on the infrastructure of island destinations, particularly those in the Zadar archipelago, where limited spatial capacity, fragile ecosystems, and underdeveloped waste management systems amplify the environmental impact of short-term visitor flows. Among the most visible consequences is the accumulation of paper-based tourist waste, such as brochures, maps, receipts, and tickets, which often remain improperly disposed of, contributing to the degradation of the destination's visual identity and natural environment. This paper proposes the Choose to Reuse concept, an innovative tourism product that integrates environmental awareness, interactive participation and the authentic experience of island destinations. The concept is based on the collection of paper tourist waste at local tourist boards, where, at the end of their stay, visitors hand over their accumulated materials in exchange for a personalised postcard produced from recycled paper. In this way, tourists are transformed from passive consumers into active participants in a sustainable, co-created process of destination management. The aim of the paper is to examine the potential of the proposed model as a tool to reduce seasonal waste pressures on Zadar's Island destinations while simultaneously enriching the tourist offer through educational and experiential content. The conceptual framework draws on the principles of sustainable tourism, the circular economy, and experience-based tour-

ism, with particular emphasis on the specific challenges faced by small island communities. The expected contributions of the project are two-fold: ecological, through a measurable reduction in paper waste during the peak season, and socio-economic, through a strengthened destination image, greater local community involvement, and the creation of a distinctive, memorable visitor experience. The paper concludes that island destinations, such as those in the Zadar archipelago, can use waste not as an endpoint but as a starting point for new value, turning environmental responsibility into a recognisable element of destination identity.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, island destinations, Zadar archipelago, circular economy, tourist experience

* Acknowledgement

This paper was prepared within the framework of the project Sustainable Island Tourism (OTOK) (IP-UNIZD 2025-MT 28005), funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

Managing Community-Based Tourism Development – Insights into Challenges and Opportunities

Gabriela Šepac

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business (alumna), Croatia
sepacg@gmail.com

Vanja Krajinović

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business, Croatia
vkrajinovic@net.efzg.hr

Abstract

Community-based tourism is a model that involves local community stakeholders in all phases of tourism development, from adopting development plans to actively participating in creating the tourism offer. The aim of such development is to achieve economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits of tourism for the local community, with sustainable tourism development serving as the platform for attaining these benefits. In many destinations that implement this model, the offer is often based on ecotourism as a product that fundamentally valorises, while simultaneously conserving, the natural resources of the destination. This paper therefore conducts qualitative research using the case study method to analyse the role of different stakeholder groups in managing such development model. The main objective of the paper is to identify key challenges faced by tourism stakeholders in the process of implementing the model of community-based tourism. Focus is also put on the challenges faced by the stakeholders in terms of financing such development models, as well as determining the issue of both power and interest, as that is one of the key barriers in achieving the objectives set by the model. The research in the paper is based on a qualitative method, specifically the case study method. The destinations included in this research were selected based on successful practices and outcomes in implementing community-based tourism. Given the complexity of the model, the Galapagos Islands represent a symbol of sustainable tourism development, balancing ecosystem preservation with the needs of the local community. In contrast, Thailand is known for its developed and preserved cultural heritage, active local community participation in tour-

ism, and a tourism identity built on a combination of adventure activities, indigenous cuisine, and natural beauty. Additionally, these two destinations were chosen because of their different images on the tourism market. The Galapagos Islands are predominantly perceived as a unique, preserved, pristine, and sustainable destination, while Thailand is seen as a more diverse, affordable destination, currently in the process of re-branding its tourism product, moving away from the notion of a potentially mass tourism destination towards a unique, authentic destination. While the Galapagos Islands predominantly develop their tourism products based on natural resources, in Thailand the focus is now placed on cultural and intangible heritage. Thus, these two destinations provide a sound basis for determining the key challenges and opportunities of implementing community-based tourism development models. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the success of community-based tourism development largely depends on the partnership between the local community and other tourism stakeholders. Key elements also include educating community members, involving individual stakeholders, and the quality of the resources on which tourism development is based. The main purpose of community-based tourism is to empower the local community through active participation, control, and the benefits gained from tourism development. While this is achievable in theory, it does not necessarily function harmoniously in all communities. In the cases of the Galapagos Islands and Thailand, it is evident that control often rests with the government and external agencies rather than the local community. Thailand is an example of successful community-based tourism development, but the local community does not have full control. Although the government grants the community freedom in managing tourism, it restricts them in strategic decision-making processes. In the Galapagos Islands, the situation is similar, but with greater environmental challenges. The Galapagos Islands are renowned for their unspoilt nature, offering peace, clean air, and the hospitality of the local community, without mass tourism development. The local community must invest significant effort and commitment to maintain the area and develop tourism. Although the community has contributed greatly to tourism development, they are still not considered sufficiently involved. Their access to the market is largely restricted, and national tourism policy is responsible for this.



The government makes final decisions on licenses, tourism implementation, and infrastructure. A major issue is that income from tourism development does not usually remain within the local community, and strict environmental regulations limit the community's ability to plan tourism according to their expectations. While this study provides an overview of recent progress in implementing and monitoring community-based tourism development in two renowned destinations, particularly from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups and the financial aspects of such development, it is important to note that the case study method has its limitations. Although this analysis offers a deeper understanding of managing community-based tourism development, the results cannot be generalized, nor is it possible to definitively establish the connection between causes and effects of such development. In the next phases of research, it will be necessary to expand the qualitative research by including in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the destinations to draw more reliable conclusions and increase the potential for generalizing the research results.

Keywords: community-based tourism, development models, stakeholder collaboration, funding tourism development, community empowerment

Human-Centred Tourism: Integrating Design Thinking Across Digital, Sustainable, and Experiential Domains

Nikola Kadoić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, Croatia
nkadoic@foi.unizg.hr

Abstract

The increasing complexity of tourism systems—driven by digital transformation, evolving tourist expectations, and sustainability imperatives—has intensified the search for innovative, human-centred approaches to problem-solving. Within this context, design thinking has emerged as a promising methodology, offering iterative, user-centred, and collaborative processes for addressing multifaceted challenges in tourism and hospitality. Over the past decade, a growing body of research has explored the intersection of design thinking and tourism; however, this literature remains fragmented across disciplines, application domains, and methodological approaches. This paper aims to synthesize and re-conceptualize existing knowledge by integrating insights from recent literature reviews and empirical studies, proposing a coherent framework for understanding how design thinking is applied within tourism research and practice. Drawing on a comparative analysis of over 50–75 scholarly contributions published between 2016 and 2026, the findings reveal that design thinking has been adopted across a diverse set of application domains, most notably in smart tourism and digital innovation, sustainable tourism development, destination design and management, tourism education, and community-based tourism. Among these, digital platforms and user experience (UX) design emerge as the most dominant research stream, reflecting the sector's increasing reliance on mobile applications, online platforms, and AI-driven systems to enhance tourist experiences. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that design thinking contributes to improved usability, higher user satisfaction, and more personalized services, particularly when applied through iterative prototyping and user-centred design processes. At the same time, design thinking has proven valuable in advancing sustainability-oriented innovation. Research highlights its role in addressing complex environmental and social challenges, such as overtourism, resource man-

agement, and community empowerment. By facilitating stakeholder engagement and co-creation processes, design thinking enables the development of context-sensitive solutions that balance economic, environmental, and social objectives. Similarly, at the destination level, design thinking supports participatory planning and governance, allowing multiple stakeholders, including local communities, policymakers, and tourism providers, to collaboratively shape tourism development strategies. In parallel, the literature identifies a growing application of design thinking in tourism education and capacity building, where it is used to develop critical competencies such as problem-solving, empathy, and collaboration among future tourism professionals. Furthermore, community-based tourism initiatives increasingly employ design thinking to foster social innovation, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance local economic resilience. Despite these diverse applications, existing research predominantly adopts an application-oriented perspective, categorizing design thinking according to domains of use (e.g., digital, sustainability, education). While this approach provides valuable empirical insights, it tends to obscure the underlying mechanisms through which design thinking contributes to tourism innovation. To address this limitation, this paper proposes a complementary conceptual perspective that categorizes the relationship between design thinking and tourism according to its functional roles. Specifically, the analysis identifies four primary roles of design thinking within tourism contexts. First, design thinking functions as an innovation tool, enabling the development of new tourism products, services, and experiences through user-centred ideation and prototyping. Second, it operates as an experience design framework, focusing on the orchestration of tourist journeys, emotional engagement, and service touchpoints. Third, design thinking serves as a managerial and organizational approach, supporting decision-making, fostering innovation capabilities, and addressing complex, “wicked” problems within tourism organizations and ecosystems. Finally, it acts as a participatory research and development methodology, facilitating co-creation, stakeholder engagement, and iterative experimentation. Importantly, these roles operate across multiple levels of the tourism system. At the micro level, design thinking enhances individual tourist experiences and interactions. At the meso level, it contributes to organizational innovation and service design within tourism enterprises. At the macro level, it informs destination development, governance, and policy-making processes. This multi-level perspective highlights design thinking’s capacity to bridge individual experiences with systemic trans-

formation. The study also acknowledges key limitations within the current body of research. Existing evidence is largely based on small-scale case studies and prototype implementations, with limited longitudinal or large-scale evaluation. Moreover, the dominance of qualitative and exploratory methodologies constrains the generalizability of findings, while standardized metrics for assessing the impact of design thinking remain underdeveloped. These gaps indicate a need for more rigorous, comparative, and longitudinal research to better understand the long-term value of design thinking in tourism. In conclusion, this paper contributes to the literature by integrating fragmented research streams into a unified conceptual framework that captures both the diversity of applications and the underlying functional roles of design thinking in tourism. By bridging application-based and function-based perspectives, the proposed framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of how design thinking operates across different contexts and levels of tourism systems. This integrative approach not only advances theoretical clarity but also provides practical insights for tourism stakeholders seeking to leverage design thinking as a strategic tool for innovation, sustainability, and experience design in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment.

Keywords: design thinking, tourism innovation, user experience (UX), sustainable tourism, smart tourism

Understanding the Identity–Image Relationship in Emerging Gastrotourism Destinations

Rikard Bakan

Virovitica University of Applied Sciences, Croatia
rikard.bakan@vuv.hr

Mirna Leko Šimić

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Economics and Business, Croatia
mirna.leko@efos.hr

Dejan Tubić

Virovitica University of Applied Sciences, Croatia
dejan.tubic@vuv.hr

Abstract

In recent years, gastronomy has increasingly been seen as one of the strategic resources for the development of modern tourism, significantly contributing to differentiation, branding and the creation of a unique experience. Emerging gastrotourism destinations, especially those still insufficiently recognizable on the market, face the challenge of developing their own market identity on the one hand, and the perception of potential tourists on the other. Marketing and development theory, as well as the practice of tourism destination management, emphasize the need for experiential enrichment of the basic gastrotourism product and the growing importance of co-creation in tourism, which contributes to greater satisfaction, stronger emotional bonds and increased tourist loyalty, and thus improved destination competitiveness. Given the above, gastrotourism products represent a part of the destination offer that is particularly suitable for creating an environment that enables and encourages tourists to co-create their own experience through activities such as food preparation, participation in local production and interaction with local stakeholders. The effectiveness of digital communication platforms today plays a key role in shaping the image of a destination, and therefore it is necessary to conduct empirical research with the aim of assessing the compatibility of communication identity and perceived

image in gastrotourism destinations. The primary goal of this research is to advance the understanding of the relationship between destination identity and destination image in emerging gastrotourism destinations using the Slavonia region in eastern Croatia as an example. Specifically, the paper explores the differences between: identity as communicated by destination management organizations (supply side) and image as perceived by potential tourists (demand side). A mixed-method research approach was employed. The qualitative component includes an analysis of the content of the official websites of the Croatian National Tourist Board, five regional tourist boards and 24 selected gastro-service providers from the Slavonia region. The analysis included an evaluation of content and interactivity according to predefined criteria such as the availability of information on gastronomy and gastronomic heritage, opportunities for co-creation of a gastrotourism experience and digital functionality. The quantitative research consisted of a survey that included a sample of 397 respondents from Croatia, with the aim of examining the perception of Slavonia as a gastrotourism destination in the context of the availability of individual gastrotourism experiences, the possibility of active participation and co-creation and the availability of information sources. The research results indicate a significant gap between the communicated identity and the perceived image. While the communication of the identity of the gastrotourism destination through the analysed websites was rated as moderately developed (around 2.5 out of 5), the overall perceived image among potential tourists is more positive (scores between 3.17 and 3.73 out of 5). The content analysis shows that institutional stakeholders provide relatively high-quality information about the gastronomic offer and heritage, but shortcomings in interactivity and the ability to independently design a rounded, experientially rich tourist experience were observed. On the other hand, gastro-service providers on their websites enable greater interactivity, but also a lack of content in terms of a coherent narrative destination story. From a demand perspective, tourists recognize the gastronomic potential of the region, especially through events and thematic routes, but at the same time perceive it as a destination with fewer opportunities for active participation and co-creation of experiences. Respondents also highlighted the lack of availability of more detailed information



about the gastrotourism offer, which is why they mainly rely on informal sources such as word of mouth and social networks. The research results highlight the need for a unified communication of destination identity by all stakeholders on the supply side, especially through improved digital communication in the context of a broader, experientially rich gastrotourism offer that fits the expectations of modern gastro tourists. Integration and communication of content and activities that encourage tourists to co-create and actively engage in the gastrotourism experience prove to be a key factor in increasing the competitiveness of a destination. Of course, it is necessary to mention certain limitations of this research. They are primarily seen through the fact that the research is geographically limited to eastern Croatia, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Likewise, the selection of service providers that are highlighted as leading in gastronomy on the websites of tourist boards may not fully reflect the overall quality of the destination offer. In conclusion, emerging gastrotourism destinations may have a relatively good and positive image among potential tourists, although the identity building strategy is not at the level required by the modern gastro tourist. By aligning the communication of identity with the expectations of gastro tourists, especially in terms of active participation and authentic experiences, destinations can increase their competitiveness and attractiveness in the market.

Keywords: gastrotourism, destination identity, destination image, emerging gastrotourism destinations

Tourism Market Dynamics and SME Performance: The Role of Strategic Response in Coastal Areas

Eli Marušić

University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, Croatia
emarusic@pfst.hr

Katija Kovačić

University of Split, Faculty of Kinesiology, Croatia
katija.kovacic@kfst.eu

Maja Račić

University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, Croatia
mracic@pfst.hr

Abstract

Tourism has become a dominant economic activity in coastal areas worldwide, shaping local business environments through increasing demand, expanding market opportunities, and growing dependence on tourism-related activities. Tourism-oriented and tourism-supporting businesses operate under conditions of both market expansion and structural constraints, including seasonality, regulatory requirements, and economic dependence on tourism flows. While the economic contribution of tourism is widely discussed, research has only partially examined how local businesses perceive these changes and how these perceptions are reflected in their strategic responses and business performance. This paper aims to examine the relationship between perceived tourism market dynamics, entrepreneurial environment conditions, strategic response, and business performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in coastal tourism areas. The study focuses on whether SMEs that perceive stronger tourism growth also report higher levels of strategic adaptation and business performance. Empirical research was conducted using a structured questionnaire among managers of SMEs operating in tourism-related and supporting business activities in the Mid-Dalmatian coastal area. The study investigated four groups of variables: tourism market dynamics, constraints and support within the entrepreneurial environment, strategic response, and business performance. All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in SPSS. The findings indicate that the surveyed firms perceive a strong increase in tourism market dynamics, including growth in tourist numbers, business activity, and market opportunities. At the

same time, respondents report significant constraints related to seasonality, dependence on tourism, and regulatory requirements, as well as moderate levels of institutional and sustainability-related support. The results show that SMEs respond to these conditions by introducing new products and services, entering new markets, and adopting innovative and sustainable business practices. Correlation analysis reveals positive relationships between tourism market dynamics, strategic response, and business performance. The results show strong correlations between tourism dynamics and SME performance indicators, as well as between strategic response and performance. These findings suggest that businesses that perceive stronger tourism growth also report higher levels of adaptation and performance outcomes. This study indicates that tourism-driven environments in coastal areas are closely linked to SME-level strategic behavior and business performance. At the same time, the coexistence of strong market dynamics and constraints in the entrepreneurial environment highlights the complexity of tourism-dependent local economies. The study is limited to perception-based data and a specific regional context, however, it provides insights into how businesses in coastal tourism areas respond to changing market conditions. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the growth of the tourism sector and SMEs' performance, emphasizing the role of strategic response in shaping firm-level outcomes in tourism-intensive regions.

Keywords: coastal tourism, SMEs, strategic response, business performance, tourism dynamics

Reconnecting Event Tourism with Community Values: A Regenerative and Narrative-Based Approach to Authenticity

Otto Regalado-pezuá

Universidad ESAN, Peru
oregalado@esan.edu.pe

Sylvie Christofle

Université Côte d'Azur-ESPACE-IAE Nice, France
Sylvie.Christofle@univ-cotedazur.fr

Abstract

Contemporary tourism, and particularly event tourism, is increasingly challenged by issues of over-commercialization, loss of authenticity, and weak integration of local communities. In response, recent academic and institutional discourses emphasize the need to re-anchor tourism development in place-based values, local identities, and participatory governance. This shift aligns with emerging paradigms such as regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism moves beyond traditional sustainability approaches by actively restoring ecological, cultural, and social systems affected by tourism development. Rather than focusing solely on mitigating negative impacts, regenerative perspectives emphasize the capacity of tourism initiatives to regenerate positive contributions to local ecosystems, cultural continuity, and community well-being. It also resonates with growing attention to storytelling and digital mediation in shaping destination image and perceived authenticity. At the intersection of tourism studies, territorial marketing, and communication studies, this paper situates event tourism as a strategic lever for reconnecting global flows with local meanings. The paper aims to analyse how event tourism can contribute to anchoring tourism development in authentic community values through co-creation processes, narrative construction, stakeholder networks, and regenerative principles. It specifically seeks to conceptualize authenticity as a co-constructed and communicated resource, examine the role of storytelling and digital platforms in mediating authenticity, and identify good practices through

documented case studies illustrating successful integration of local communities in event-based tourism strategies. The research adopts a qualitative and exploratory design based on secondary data. It combines a structured literature review (academic articles, books, and conference proceedings) with an analysis of grey literature, including institutional reports (e.g., UNWTO, OECD), professional blogs, and official destination websites. This multi-source approach allows the study to integrate academic insights with practical experiences from tourism destinations and cultural initiatives. Several emblematic case studies are selected based on their documentation quality and relevance to the themes of authenticity, community engagement, and communication strategies (e.g., cultural festivals, creative tourism initiatives, and craft-based tourism projects). These cases represent diverse territorial contexts where cultural heritage, creative industries, and tourism events intersect. The analysis follows a comparative and interpretative approach, mobilizing theoretical frameworks from regenerative tourism, territorial anchoring, and narrative marketing. The comparative analysis allows the identification of transferable practices and governance mechanisms across different contexts. Preliminary findings highlight three main dynamics. First, authenticity emerges not as an intrinsic property but as a relational and negotiated construct, shaped by interactions between tourists, local communities, and intermediaries, reflecting the interdependent relationships between visitors and the socio-ecological systems that shape the destination. Second, storytelling (especially through digital platforms) plays a central role in framing and amplifying this authenticity, often translating local practices into globally consumable narratives. Third, successful cases demonstrate that strong stakeholder networks and participatory governance mechanisms are critical in ensuring that event tourism initiatives genuinely reflect community values rather than merely staging them. These dynamics are illustrated through cases where local crafts, creative practices, heritage, and cultural expressions are integrated into event programming and communication strategies. The paper provides practical insights for destination managers and policymakers seeking to design more inclusive and authentic event tourism strategies. It highlights the importance of integrating communication practices with governance and territorial development. However,

the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and documented cases, which may introduce a bias toward successful or well-publicized initiatives. Further empirical research could complement these findings through fieldwork and stakeholder interviews. The originality of this paper lies in its integrative approach, combining regenerative tourism theory, territorial anchoring, and narrative analysis to examine event tourism. It contributes to bridging gaps between conceptual frameworks and operational practices by emphasizing the role of communication and storytelling in constructing authenticity. Additionally, it provides a cross-disciplinary perspective that aligns with current calls for more holistic approaches to sustainable tourism development. Event tourism can act as a catalyst for regenerative destination development by fostering community participation, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness when it is grounded in authentic values, supported by participatory networks, and effectively communicated. By articulating regenerative principles with narrative strategies, destinations can move toward more meaningful and sustainable forms of tourism development. This paper underscores the need for integrated approaches that consider not only what is produced but also how it is represented and shared. Such approaches can contribute to tourism models that are not only economically viable but also culturally meaningful and socially inclusive.

Keywords: event tourism, regenerative tourism, community engagement, storytelling, authenticity

Developing an Integrated Territorial Storytelling Framework for Sustainable Tourism: Evidence from the Plovdiv Region, Bulgaria

Velizar Petrov

University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Faculty of
Economics and Management, Bulgaria
velizarpetrov@uad.bg

Abstract

This extended abstract presents a scientific study that develops and applies an integrated conceptual and methodological approach for transforming natural and intangible cultural heritage into storytelling-based tourism experiences in rural and less-visited regions. The background of the study lies in the growing need for sustainable tourism models that move beyond traditional attraction-based development and instead emphasize community participation, cultural identity, and spatially grounded narratives. The Plovdiv Region in Bulgaria, characterized by diverse landscapes, rich intangible heritage, and uneven tourism distribution, provides an ideal context for testing such an approach. The purpose of the paper is to introduce and operationalize two innovations: the Integrated Territorial Storytelling Framework (ITSF), which synthesizes heritage, placemaking, and sustainable development theories, and the Enhanced Territorial Analysis Model (ETAM), which integrates GIS-based spatial assessment, stakeholder co-creation, and multi-layered heritage mapping. The research design combines qualitative, quantitative, and spatial methods, including field observations, stakeholder workshops, heritage inventorying, and GIS analysis of natural, cultural, and infrastructural layers. The methodology emphasizes the integration of community narratives, symbolic landscapes, and thematic cores into a coherent territorial storytelling structure. Key results indicate that the Plovdiv Region possesses a rich but underutilized heritage landscape, with significant potential for developing storytelling routes that connect natural assets, local traditions, and community identities. The spatial analysis reveals clusters of intangible heritage practices, symbolic sites,

and natural features that can serve as anchors for thematic routes, while stakeholder engagement highlights strong local interest but fragmented coordination. The implications of the study suggest that storytelling-based tourism can support sustainable regional development by enhancing interpretation, strengthening local identity, and diversifying tourism offerings. Limitations include uneven stakeholder participation, incomplete mapping of intangible heritage, and limited historical tourism data. The originality and value of the paper lie in its integrated conceptual and methodological contribution, offering a replicable model for regions seeking to valorise heritage through narrative-based tourism development. The study demonstrates how spatial heritage layering, community co-creation, and narrative integration can be combined into a practical planning tool that supports policymakers, destination managers, and local communities. The conclusions emphasize that the ITSF and ETAM provide a robust foundation for developing innovative storytelling routes that align with sustainability principles and contribute to balanced regional development.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, storytelling, intangible cultural heritage, GIS, regional development

Co-Creating AI-Enabled Tourism Experiences: Cultural Perspectives from Visitors in Morocco

Bendjedid Rachad Sanoussi

Euromed University of Fez (UEMF), Euromed Business School (EBS),
Morocco
rachadsanoussi@gmail.com

Omar Benjelloun Andaloussi

Euromed University of Fez (UEMF), Euromed Business School (EBS),
Morocco
obenjelloun@ueuromed.org

Mohamed Amine Marhraoui

Euromed University of Fez (UEMF), Euromed Business School (EBS),
Morocco
amarhraoui@ueuromed.org

Abstract

This study examines how cultural values shape tourists' adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) services in the context of sustainable tourism. It aims to understand how AI-based tools can support more inclusive, efficient, and context-sensitive tourism experiences in heritage destinations. The study combines the UTAUT2 model with Hofstede-inspired cultural dimensions and is based on a field survey of 183 international visitors in Fes, Morocco. The analysis was conducted using a structural equation modelling approach (PLS-SEM). The results show that performance expectancy, enjoyment, price value, and habit are the main drivers of behavioural intention to use AI-based tourism services. Facilitating conditions and habit significantly influence actual use. Cultural orientations play a moderating role. Collectivism weakens the relationship between intention and use, while uncertainty avoidance strengthens it. Other dimensions, including long-term orientation, masculinity-femininity, and power distance, do not show consistent effects. The findings indicate that AI adoption in tourism depends not only on technological features but also on how services align with users' cultural expectations. AI tools can contribute to sustainable tourism by improving resource efficiency, supporting better decision-making, and facilitating

access to information. AI-based recommendation systems can guide tourists toward less crowded sites, optimize travel routes, and promote more responsible consumption patterns. At the same time, culturally adaptive design can support more inclusive access to digital services and improve user engagement across diverse visitor groups. This study contributes to research on tourism digitalisation by linking technology adoption, cultural context, and sustainability outcomes. It shows that AI can support more balanced tourism systems when combined with user-oriented design and cultural awareness. The results suggest that tourism stakeholders should focus on usability, accessibility, and trust to ensure that AI-based services support both visitor experience and sustainable destination management.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, tourism technology, cultural values, sustainable tourism, UTAUT2

The Role of Local Community in Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism – Experiences from Istria County (Croatia)

Matteo Legović

Faculty of Tourism Studies - Turistica, Slovenia
legovic.matteo7@gmail.com

Nataša Urošević

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia
natasa.urosevic@unipu.hr

Kristina Afrić Rakitovac

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia
kafric@unipu.hr

Abstract

The paper reflects upon current challenges of sustainable tourism development in World Heritage cities on the Croatian Adriatic, struggling with overtourism challenges and complex sustainability issues. The Istria County, the most tourism-intensive part of Adriatic Croatia, is characterized by great abundance of cultural landscapes and unique heritage sites, shaped through multi-layered historical continuity, often struggling with heritage commodification, urbanisation, and gentrification of historical districts. In the last decade, Istria has accounted for around one-third of Croatia's total arrivals and overnight stays, highlighting the density and intensity of tourism activities, but still relying on the 3S tourism model, high seasonality and rising level of receptive capacities. The paper comparatively elaborates the local community attitudes toward tourism development in two important heritage places: the only existing UNESCO World Heritage Site in Istria County and another one in process of nomination. The historic city of Poreč, with the Euphrasian Basilica, an Early Christian monument inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997, is endangered by the pressures of overtourism and inadequate management strategies. On the other hand, the undervalued ancient and modern heritage of Pula, with Roman Amphitheater as the iconic symbol of the city, is still waiting for its proper valorisation, and currently in the process of evaluating nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage list. By identifying the perspectives of residents, the paper provides an opportunity to critically reassess existing management models and explore new approaches to the co-creation of sustainable

tourism practices, where local communities are centered as a core development priority. The analyses of local community perspectives and active participation in tourism and heritage management processes is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and success of tourism initiatives. To elaborate the current situation and development perspectives, the authors combined quantitative and qualitative methodology and conducted a survey within local communities of Poreč and Pula, as well as semi-structured interviews with representatives of key stakeholders. The research results were tested through Doxey's Irritation Index. The Irridex model, introduced by Doxey in 1975, is a four-stage theoretical framework that attempts to explain the reactions of the local community towards tourism development. The model recognizes that the adverse effects of tourism development can lead to irritation within the community. Such irritation is determined by the degree of incompatibility between residents and tourists. The model connects the rise of tourist numbers and destination development with the change of residents' perceptions: from euphoria to apathy, then to irritation, and finally to antagonism. The preliminary comparative research results indicate how in the local communities, while recognizing economic benefits, the frustrations arise from overcrowding, rising prices, and disruptions to daily life, indicating growing dissatisfaction with current tourism practices. By applying the Irridex model, the conducted research reveals that the local communities of Poreč and Pula are in transitioning phase from apathy to irritation, with growing antagonism toward the current tourism models. The conducted research emphasizes the importance of integrating local community perspectives into sustainable tourism planning and implementing participatory governance strategies to balance economic growth with social and environmental well-being. Innovative management models, which involve all key stakeholders through participatory approach, could enhance liveability, quality of life of local residents and satisfaction of visitors, and address the sustainability challenges. This research contributes to the growing discourse on co-creating sustainable tourism by providing empirical evidence and offering practical insights for participatory tourism governance.

Keywords: overtourism, local community, participatory governance, historic cities, World Heritage Site

Valorisation of Authentic Local Resources for Sustainable Tourism Development: Evidence from Smiljan

Ivana Tonković Pražić

University of Applied Sciences Nikola Tesla in Gospić, Business Department, Croatia
itonkovic-prazic@velegs-nikolatesla.hr

Marija Baburić Vranešićras

University of Applied Sciences Nikola Tesla in Gospić, Business Department, Croatia
mbaburic@velegs-nikolatesla.hr

Abstract

Smiljan and the wider Gospić area in Lika represent a rural peripheral region facing demographic decline, ageing population, limited infrastructure, and underutilized natural and cultural resources. At the same time, the area is characterized by a strong and distinctive local identity formed and influenced by its geographical features, traditions, and cultural heritage, including the symbolic importance of Nikola Tesla's birthplace. The purpose of this paper is to examine how sustainable tourism can be developed through the valorisation of authentic local resources and through participatory approaches that actively involve local stakeholders. Research is based on the premise that tourism is not an isolated economic activity but a broader development tool that can support community resilience, preserve cultural identity, and contribute to balanced territorial development. The research design is based on a methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data and integrates demographic, geographic, socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural datasets with field research methods such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder engagement activities. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are used to analyse spatial relationships, identify development patterns, and map the distribution of resources and infrastructure. These analytical tools are complemented by participatory methods, including workshops, public consultations, and participatory mapping, which allow the integration of local knowledge into the planning process. The main findings indicate that the Smiljan area has

considerable but insufficiently activated tourism potential. This potential is particularly visible in cultural heritage, landscape-based experiences, gastronomy, traditional practices, and educational and interpretative content related to Tesla's legacy. On the other hand, the research also identifies several structural constraints. These include fragmented governance, limited coordination among stakeholders, infrastructural deficiencies, seasonal tourism patterns, and limited local capacities for tourism development. Despite these challenges, the results suggest that tourism products can be developed through small-scale, experience-based initiatives that are rooted in local identity and adapted to the spatial and social characteristics of the area. Such initiatives may include thematic routes, interpretive programs, educational activities, and integrated cultural and natural experiences. The implications of the study highlight the importance of combining spatial analysis with participatory planning in order to support evidence-based decision-making and to strengthen collaboration among local stakeholders. The findings also suggest that sustainable tourism development requires alignment with broader regional strategies and long-term planning frameworks. The main limitations of the research relate to data availability and the challenges of maintaining long-term stakeholder engagement in participatory processes. Nevertheless, the proposed approach demonstrates a high level of transferability and can be applied to other rural and peripheral regions facing similar demographic and socio-economic conditions. The originality of the paper lies in its integrative framework, which combines GIS-based spatial analysis with participatory co-creation processes and applies them to the development of sustainable tourism in a specific rural context. By linking tourism development with territorial characteristics, cultural identity, and community participation, the paper contributes to discussions on community-based tourism, authenticity, and place-based development. In conclusion, the paper argues that sustainable tourism in Smiljan should be developed as a locally grounded and co-created process. Such an approach enables tourism to act as a catalyst for rural renewal while preserving the identity and integrity of the local environment.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, co-creation, community-based tourism, spatial analysis (GIS), rural development

TOURAL Project: Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism Through Culture, Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement

Marija Dušević

Zadar County Development Agency ZADRA NOVA, Croatia
marija.dusevic@zadra.hr

Abstract

The paper aims to present the TOURAL project and the tourism concept it develops and implements, an innovative model for the sustainable development of tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian and Black Sea regions. The TOURAL project is an initiative funded by the Horizon Europe programme, with the goal of fostering sustainable tourism development in rural and remote areas of Europe. The project focuses on leveraging cultural and creative tourism as a driver of economic growth, while simultaneously strengthening local communities and preserving natural and cultural resources. TOURAL develops an innovative, multidimensional tourism model that integrates various niche forms of tourism (e.g., cultural, creative, scientific, and “silver” tourism) and is based on a participatory approach that involves local stakeholders in the co-creation of tourism products and policies. The project also emphasizes the importance of cross-border cooperation and integrated value chains at the macro-regional level (particularly in the Adriatic-Ionian and Black Sea regions), with the aim of balancing development between urban and rural areas. Ultimately, TOURAL seeks to create a transferable and scalable model that can contribute to long-term sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism development across different European regions. The project brings together 20 partners from 8 countries—Greece, France, Italy, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Turkey. The developed innovative concepts are being tested across six pilot locations in two macro-regions - Adriatic-Ionian Region: Northern Sporades (Greece), Province of Teramo (Italy), and Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia) and Black Sea Region: Nessebar (Bulgaria), Danube Delta – Tulcea (Romania), and Kutsurub (Ukraine). In summary, the project operates in six selected pilot destinations representing different types of rural and coastal areas,

with the aim of developing and testing sustainable tourism models in diverse European contexts. The goal is to develop a transferable and scalable model for co-creating sustainable tourism. By linking culture, creativity, and community participation, the TOURAL model provides a practical framework for developing authentic tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and local populations.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, co-creation, cultural and creative tourism, rural and remote areas, Adriatic-Ionian and Black Sea regions

Tourism 4.0 and Authenticity-Led Light Architecture: Community Co-Creation of Nocturnal Urbanity in Place Gueydon and the Historic Core of Bejaia, Algeria

Nedjima Mouhoubi

University of Abderrahmane Mira - Bejaia, Faculty of Technology / Department of Architecture, Algeria
nedjima.mouhoubi@univ-bejaia.dz

Zeyneb Aya Khoualed

University of Abderrahmane Mira - Bejaia, Faculty of Technology / Department of Architecture, Algeria
zeynebaya.khoualed@univ-bejaia.dz

Manel Ouaret Ladjouze

University of Abderrahmane Mira - Bejaia, Faculty of Technology / Department of Architecture, Algeria
manel.ouaret@univ-bejaia.dz

Abstract

In recent decades, historic urban centres worldwide have increasingly been recognized as key assets in sustainable tourism development, particularly within the emerging paradigm of Tourism 4.0, which emphasizes immersive, experience-based, and culturally meaningful interactions between visitors and urban environments. As cities seek to diversify their tourism offer, growing attention is given to the enhancement of night-time urban environments and the development of nocturnal urbanity through design-driven interventions. Within this context, light architecture has emerged as a powerful tool for reinterpreting and activating heritage spaces while preserving their cultural authenticity, especially when combined with community co-creation processes and local craft traditions. In North Africa, such interdisciplinary and participatory approaches remain relatively underexplored, despite the richness of historic urban fabrics. The case of Bejaia, Algeria illustrates this potential. More specifically, Place Gueydon functions as a socially active evening space, however, its use remains largely passive, cantered on sitting and observing the seafront, offering limited opportunities for immersive cultural engagement and experiential interaction. This leads to the following

research question: How can light architecture, informed by community co-creation and local craft traditions, contribute to enhancing nocturnal urbanity and experiential tourism in Place Gueydon and its surrounding historic core within the framework of Tourism 4.0? This paper aims to develop an interdisciplinary framework integrating authenticity-led light architecture into Tourism 4.0 strategies for heritage valorisation and experiential tourism development. It demonstrates how community co-creation, involving local craft practices such as embroidery, jewellery-making, and ornamental design, can inform a multi-layered lighting system, transforming the space into an immersive and culturally expressive nocturnal environment. The study adopts a design-based and interdisciplinary methodology combining spatial mapping, morphological analysis, field observation, and scenario-based design. A spatial analysis of Place Gueydon and its surrounding urban fabric identifies key structures, pedestrian flows, and access routes leading to the historic core, considered as part of a continuous spatial sequence. Field observations and photographic surveys assess night-time use patterns and identify limitations in spatial legibility, guidance, and atmosphere. These analyses are complemented by a co-creation process involving local artisans across multiple craft traditions, including embroidery, jewellery, and decorative arts. Artisans actively contribute to defining symbolic motifs, patterns, and colour palettes derived from traditional practices. Based on these inputs, a multi-layered lighting strategy is developed through scenario modelling and visual simulations, including façade projection mapping, ambient lighting, and guided pathways connecting the square to its wider urban context. The system is conceived as a continuous narrative structure supporting an immersive spatial experience, in line with Tourism 4.0 principles emphasizing user engagement, interactive environments, and culturally embedded urban experiences. The results demonstrate that light architecture can transform Place Gueydon from a passive social setting into an experiential environment. Illuminated façades become dynamic surfaces of cultural narration, while ground lighting enhances spatial orientation and movement. The extension of lighting into surrounding pathways reinforces a progressive transition, connecting the square to the wider historic fabric and enhancing spatial continuity. Artisan involvement results in a culturally embedded lighting



system where visual elements reflect local meanings. This transformation aligns with Tourism 4.0 by creating interactive, experience-driven environments integrating cultural identity and user engagement. The study highlights how integrating design methodologies, spatial analysis, and local craftsmanship can support sustainable tourism development. It demonstrates that light architecture can act as a low-impact intervention enhancing spatial experience and cultural identity. However, the research remains conceptual and exploratory, and therefore requires validation through real-world implementation addressing challenges related to energy management, maintenance strategies, and governance frameworks. This paper contributes to Tourism 4.0 by proposing authenticity-led light architecture as a co-created and culturally grounded strategy for developing nocturnal urbanity. It advances the role of artisans as active contributors, integrating multiple craft traditions into a unified visual language of light. Moreover, the transformation of Place Gueydon and its surrounding pathways demonstrates that contemporary urban tourism design must move beyond simple spatial activation toward meaningful nocturnal urban experiences. Through a multi-layered lighting system shaped by community input and craft knowledge, light becomes a medium of urban narration, cultural expression, and immersive spatial experience, offering new pathways toward inclusive and sustainable tourism environments.

Keywords: tourism 4.0, light architecture, nocturnal urbanity, community co-creation, heritage valorisation

Creativity and Creative Atmosphere of a Tourist Destination: The Case of the City of Zadar

Božena Krce Miočić *

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
bkrce@unizd.hr

Abstract

The Contemporary tourism research recognizes creativity as an important factor in the development, differentiation, and competitiveness of tourist destinations. Tourism development is increasingly moving away from the passive observation of cultural and natural resources. It is shifting toward experiences that include participation, learning, interaction, co-creation, and a more active connection between visitors and the local community. In this context, a creative destination is not defined only by the existence of cultural attractions, events, or artistic content, but by its ability to use existing resources in a new, interpretively engaging, and experientially valuable way. Creativity in tourism encompasses several connected elements, including creative individuals, processes, products, and environments. This perspective indicates that destination creativity doesn't arise solely from individual attractions, but from the dynamic relationships among spatial characteristics, local stakeholders, tourism products, cultural practices, and visitor experiences. Contemporary destinations aim to develop authentic, adaptable, and distinctive tourism experiences. Creative resources help establish a recognizable identity and symbolic value, which is increasingly important amid growing competition among cities and regions. A central component of a creative destination is its creative atmosphere, defined as the subjective experience of creativity that arises from individuals' interactions with the destination's space, content, people, symbols, and activities. Unlike a destination's general image, creative atmosphere refers to a specific perception of creative elements. Its significance lies in its influence on tourist experiences and visitor behaviour. Research demonstrates that a creative atmosphere can stimulate internal states such as inspiration and emotional connection to place, and could indirectly influence post-visit behaviours,

including sharing experiences, recommending the destination, or seeking further engagement. Creative atmosphere also plays a major role in destination competitiveness. In models of creative tourist destinations, it is considered an enabling factor for development, alongside community involvement and stakeholder competencies. An effective destination atmosphere connects the location, tourists, and entrepreneurs, creating an appealing environment in which atmosphere and sense of place are key factors for attracting creative travellers. Within this framework, the City of Zadar serves as a suitable case for examining creativity and creative atmosphere in a tourist destination. Zadar has a strong cultural, historical, and symbolic identity, with ancient and medieval urban structures integrated with contemporary attractions to create a distinctive tourist experience. The city's creative atmosphere is especially evident in how it integrates the sea, sun, sound, and light into public spaces, exemplified by the Sea Organ and the Greeting to the Sun as contemporary interpretations of the coastal environment. Research results show that, in open-ended responses, Zadar's aesthetic and creative value is most frequently associated with the Sea Organ, the Greeting to the Sun, the Forum, the Church of St Donatus, the city walls, and selected cultural events. This study considers perceptions of creativity and creative atmosphere in the City of Zadar as a tourist destination, with particular focus on the perspectives of residents and tourism-sector representatives. The empirical research adopted a structured questionnaire and an adapted creative atmosphere scale developed by Cheng and Chen. The sample comprised 142 respondents, of whom 65 were involved in tourism in Zadar and 77 were not. The research's originality lies in applying the concept of creative atmosphere to the City of Zadar, analysing residents' and tourism-sector representatives' perceptions of the destination's creative characteristics. In this way, the study contributes to understanding creative atmosphere as a potential development resource of an urban tourist destination. The results show that respondents predominantly perceive Zadar as a destination characterized by a pleasant, relaxed, and emotionally positive atmosphere. Respondents gave the highest ratings to aspects such as comfort, positive impressions, relaxation, and satisfaction with the city experience. Conversely, respondents gave lower ratings to statements about novelty, innovativeness, and the distinctiveness of

the tourism offering. These results suggest that Zadar is perceived primarily in terms of ambience, emotion, and aesthetic value, rather than through innovative or novel tourism content. A descriptive comparison between respondents involved in tourism and those not involved shows that their overall assessments of the creative atmosphere are very similar. The results indicate that Zadar has significant potential to develop its identity as a creative tourist destination, but also point to the need to strengthen innovative, participatory, and recognizable tourism content. The limitations of this research include a relatively small sample size, the exclusion of certain relevant destination stakeholders, a focus on a single tourist destination, and reliance on a cross-sectional survey design. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, examining multiple destinations, and employing additional qualitative and longitudinal methodologies.

Keywords: creativity, creative atmosphere, destination creativity, City of Zadar

*** Acknowledgement**

This paper was prepared within the framework of the project Sustainable Island Tourism (OTOK) (IP-UNIZD 2025-MT 28005), funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

Human Capital Development for Sustainable Tourism: A Competence-Based Perspective on Value Co-Creation

Ljiljana Najev Čačija

University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Croatia
ljnajev@efst.hr

Abstract

The transition towards sustainability relies on the ability of organisations and individuals to co-create value through meaningful, responsible, and experience-oriented interactions. From a marketing perspective, this shift marks a move from product-centric approaches to service-dominant logic, where value is co-created through interactions and human capital becomes central to delivering customer value. In this context, competences such as social interaction, sustainability awareness, and digital literacy emerge as critical marketing assets, shaping the design, communication, and delivery of customer experiences. While previous research acknowledges the role of competences in enabling transformation, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how different competence domains interact with reflective practice and motivation to generate development-oriented behaviour. This gap is particularly relevant in creative sectors such as tourism, where transformation depends not only on stakeholders possessing knowledge, but also on their ability to engage effectively and facilitate collaboration, creativity, and responsible behaviour. Moreover, existing literature predominantly conceptualises competences as static resources, overlooking the mechanisms through which they are translated into behaviours that support value creation and customer-oriented outcomes. The primary aim of this research is to develop and empirically test a competence-based model of human capital development for sustainable industries, framed within a marketing-oriented perspective. The proposed model examines the relationships between reflective practice, social and professional competences, motivation, and development-oriented competences, while also assessing the role of digital and green competences as contextual enablers. The constructs used in this research were adapted from previ-

ous studies on reflective practice, social and professional competences, digital and green competences, and motivation. Reflective practice was treated as an antecedent of social and professional competences, which in turn influence both motivation and development-oriented competences. Digital and green competences were included in the model as moderators of two proposed relationships: between motivation and development-oriented competences, and between social and professional competences and development-oriented competences. Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered to participants engaged in competence development and training activities within tourism and other creative industries, resulting in a convenience sample of 171 respondents. Given the non-normal distribution of the data, the model was estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that reflective practice has a significant positive effect on social and professional competences, confirming its role as a key learning mechanism. In turn, social and professional competences significantly influence both motivation and development-oriented competences. However, motivation does not have a significant effect on development-oriented competences, suggesting that willingness alone is insufficient to translate into behavioural outcomes. These results highlight the central role of competences as the primary mechanism linking learning processes to actionable outcomes in sustainable tourism contexts. The absence of a significant relationship between motivation and development-oriented competences challenges dominant assumptions in marketing literature that emphasise attitudes and intentions as key behavioural drivers. Instead, the findings support a capability-based perspective, whereby competences – particularly those related to social interaction and collaboration – serve as critical enablers of value co-creation. Consequently, development-oriented competences can be understood as foundational to service quality and customer experience in sustainable tourism. Finally, the results do not confirm the hypothesised moderating effects of digital and green competences, but instead reveal their significant direct influence on development-oriented competences. This suggests that these competences operate as independent capability domains rather than contingent enhancers of existing relationships. From a marketing perspective, this underscores



the importance of integrating digital and sustainability-related competences into customer-facing processes, as they directly contribute to the co-creation of value. The main limitations of this research are the relatively small sample size, self-reported measures, and a cross-sectional research design, which constrain causal interpretation. Future research should use longitudinal approaches and include objective performance indicators to further validate the proposed relationships. Overall, the results support a competence-driven model of transformation, in which reflective practice enhances social and professional competences that directly translate into development-oriented competences as the key driver of behaviour. Digital and green competences further reinforce this process as independent enablers. These insights contribute to both human capital and marketing literature by emphasising the role of competences as micro-foundations of value co-creation. Accordingly, tourism organisations and policymakers should prioritise competence development within their marketing orientation, ensuring that frontline actors are equipped not only to deliver services but also to actively facilitate meaningful, sustainable, and engaging tourism experiences.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, human capital development, competence-based approach, value co-creation, structural equation modelling

From Growth to Sustainability: Rethinking Tourism Development on Croatian Islands

Tomislav Klarin *

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
tklarin@unizd.hr

Abstract

Tourism development on islands represents one of the most important drivers of economic growth, but it also creates significant pressures on the environment, local communities, infrastructure, and traditional economic activities. Due to their geographical isolation, limited resources, fragile ecosystems, and restricted spatial capacity, island destinations are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of uncontrolled tourism development. The Croatian islands, which form the second-largest archipelago in the Mediterranean, have undergone substantial social and economic changes over the past several decades. These changes include depopulation, population ageing, the abandonment of traditional activities such as agriculture and fisheries, and an increasing dependence on tourism as the primary source of income and employment. The aim of this paper is to analyse the specific characteristics of sustainable tourism development on Croatian islands through a review of relevant national and international scientific literature. Particular attention is given to the main challenges, opportunities, and management approaches associated with the long-term sustainability of island destinations. The paper also examines the role of key stakeholders, including public authorities, private businesses, local residents, civil society organisations, and tourists, in shaping and implementing sustainable tourism policies. The literature review indicates that tourism has a dual role in island communities. On the one hand, it contributes to economic growth, employment creation, increased household income, infrastructure development, and the promotion of local products, cultural heritage, and traditional practices. Tourism can also support the revitalisation of rural and coastal settlements, encourage investment, and improve the visibility of Croatian islands in domestic and international markets. In some cases, tourism provides opportunities for young people and may contribute to reducing migration from island communities. On the other hand, tourism generates considerable environmental, social, and economic pressures. The

most significant challenges include seasonality, excessive concentration of visitors during the summer months, overbuilding, traffic congestion, increased waste production, water shortages, and high energy consumption. Tourism development may also contribute to the degradation of coastal landscapes, the loss of biodiversity, and the deterioration of marine ecosystems. In addition, rising property prices and living costs can make housing less accessible to local residents. The growing dominance of tourism may weaken traditional activities, increase economic dependence on external markets, and make island economies more vulnerable to crises, climate change, and fluctuations in tourist demand. The analysis further shows that sustainable tourism management requires the active participation of all relevant stakeholders. Local communities should be involved in decision-making processes, while public authorities must ensure transparent spatial planning, effective infrastructure management, and the protection of natural and cultural resources. Private businesses should adopt responsible practices, reduce their environmental impact, and strengthen cooperation with local producers. Tourists also have an important role through responsible consumption and respect for local communities and ecosystems. Previous studies of Croatian islands have mainly focused on individual destinations or specific aspects of tourism development. There is still a lack of systematic and integrated research addressing sustainability at the level of island groups and the entire archipelago. Therefore, future research should focus on developing measurable sustainability indicators, assessing the carrying capacity of destinations, and examining the long-term effects of tourism on island communities. In conclusion, sustainable tourism development on Croatian islands requires integrated, participatory, and place-based governance. Such an approach must balance economic development with environmental protection, social well-being, cultural preservation, and climate resilience. Only through coordinated action among stakeholders can island resources be protected and the long-term competitiveness and quality of life of Croatian island destinations be ensured.

Keywords: sustainable tourism island, destination management, Croatian islands

* Acknowledgement

This paper was prepared within the framework of the project Sustainable Island Tourism (OTOK) (IP-UNIZD 2025-MT 28005), funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

Development Opportunities for Special Interest Tourism in Diversifying the Tourism Offer of the Zadar Islands

Ana Grgica Knežević *

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
agrgicaknezevic@unizd.hr

Nikolina Jukić *

University of Zadar, Department of Economics, Croatia
njukic@unizd.hr

Abstract

Island destinations of the Zadar Archipelago are marked by strong tourism seasonality and a sun-and-sea model that concentrates most visitor demand within a narrow summer window. This dependence on peak-season tourism limits economic resilience, strains local resources and infrastructure, and leaves much of the destination's potential unrealised throughout the rest of the year. Despite growing awareness of the need for change, many island destinations still find it difficult to transition toward a more diversified and year-round tourism offer, making the search for viable alternative development pathways a question of both academic interest and practical importance. This paper explores certain forms of special interest tourism as strategic tools for broadening the tourism offer and extending the active season beyond the summer months. For small island destinations with limited carrying capacity, this approach is particularly valuable, as it enables the development of focused, high-quality products that are well suited to the specific resources and identity of the destination, without relying on further mass-market expansion. The paper is based on a review of relevant academic literature, tourism statistics, and strategic planning documents at national, regional, and local levels. The analysis is grounded in an inventory of existing resources, facilities, and tourism events within the studied area, allowing for a comparative assessment of development opportunities within an integrated destination management framework. This approach makes it possible to identify both the strengths that can be built upon and the

constraints including small-scale production, limited infrastructure, and the logistical challenges typical of island settings that need to be carefully considered in any development strategy. The findings show that the examined area has a rich and largely untapped resource base, spanning natural landscapes, cultural and sacred heritage, gastronomic traditions, and an existing events scene, which together provide a strong foundation for developing several complementary tourism forms. Among those examined, MICE tourism emerges as a driver of higher visitor spending outside peak months, sports and recreational tourism builds on existing outdoor events and natural assets to attract active travellers in spring and autumn, gastronomic tourism turns distinctive local food and drink traditions into authentic, experience-driven products, religious and contemplative tourism draws on a rich sacred and monastic heritage with clear potential for pilgrimage, retreat, and cultural itineraries, and event tourism, when strategically coordinated through a shared destination calendar, can help distribute visitor demand more evenly across the year. When developed selectively and in a complementary rather than mass-market manner, these forms of special interest tourism can collectively contribute to season extension, more balanced distribution of visitor demand, strengthening of local identity, and long-term sustainable tourism development of island destinations in the Zadar Archipelago. The paper concludes that realising this potential call not only for the development of individual tourism products, but also for coordinated destination governance, close inter-municipal cooperation, and a firm strategic commitment to quality-oriented and sustainable growth.

Keywords: special interest tourism, seasonality, island tourism, Zadar archipelago, tourism diversification

*** Acknowledgement**

This paper was prepared within the framework of the project Sustainable Island Tourism (OTOK) (IP-UNIZD 2025-MT 28005), funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

About the SOCRAT Project

SOCRAT (Socializing Craft & Contemporary Art for Sustainable Tourism) is a cross-border project supported by the Interreg VI-A Italy–Croatia Programme 2021–2027, under Priority 4 – Culture and Tourism for Sustainable Development and Specific Objective 4.1 – Culture and Sustainable Tourism. The project covers the period from 1 March 2024 to 31 August 2026, with a total budget of €2,344,660.20.

The project partnership brings together institutions from Italy and Croatia: the Pino Pascali Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art (Lead Partner), the National Confederation of the Craft Sector and Small and Medium Enterprises Bari, Veneto Region, Veneto Institute for Labour, Region of Istria, Kvarner Region Tourist Board, Institution for Development of Competences, Innovation and Specialisation of Zadar County, and the University of Zadar.

The SOCRAT project aims to foster sustainable tourism and community empowerment along the Italian and Croatian Adriatic coasts by leveraging contemporary arts, crafts, creative industries, and civil society. Addressing issues such as dependence on seasonal tourism, lack of cooperation between artists and local authorities, and the need for authentic tourist offerings, the project seeks to diversify tourist flows and boost local development.

The core objective is to create more authentic tourist experiences rooted in local creativity through a socially-based model. Central to this approach are Creative Living Labs, which bring together local industries, artists, and civil society to co-create new tourism products and services that highlight cultural heritage and creativity while providing economic opportunities for local communities. The cross-border approach promotes stakeholder cooperation and sustainable tourism development in a holistic, community-led manner that integrates social, cultural, and environmental sustainability dimensions. The SOCRAT project advances beyond existing practices by prioritising arts and social innovation, emphasising the substance and spirit of creative efforts.

Project-specific objectives:

- Promote sustainable tourism along the Italian and Croatian Adriatic coasts;
- Empower local communities through active participation in cultural tourism;
- Address territorial challenges such as over-reliance on seasonal tourism, limited cooperation between artists and local authorities and lack of authenticity in tourist offers;
- Diversify tourist flows by creating locally rooted and creative experiences;
- Develop a socially driven model based on Creative Living Labs;
- Foster collaboration between artists, creative industries, and civil society;
- Co-create new cultural and tourism products that reflect local heritage and identity;
- Support local economic development through culture and creativity.

More information about the SOCRAT project is available on the official project website: <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/en/web/socrat>

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

Italy – Croatia



KVARNER REGION TOURIST BOARD
KVARNER
Diversity is beautiful



University of Zadar
Universitas Studiorum
Jadertina | 1396 | 2002 |

