

DOI 10.17234/SocEkol.28.3.3
UDK 338.48:502(497.5)
502.14(497.5)
502.131.1(497.562)

Preliminary communication
Received: 4 Oct 2019
Accepted: 19 Dec 2019

(UN)SUSTAINABLE (RURAL) TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF LIKA-SENJ COUNTY

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism is a carefully planned activity with clear, specific and long-term goals that does not cause environmental devastation, and respects the social, ecological, cultural and economic value of the space in which it occurs. This paper presents the (un)sustainable rural tourism practice in Lika-Senj County in Croatia through a case study of the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch and Plitvice Lakes. In order to understand the concepts of sustainable rural tourism, overtourism and undertourism, the case study begins with an analysis of statistical data, secondary literature and examples of overtourism in Lika (Plitvice Lakes National Park). Qualitative insight (preliminary data) is used to reflect on the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch campaign called CIDER (Community, Integrity, Development, Evolution and Responsibility), which can be considered as the point of departure for the enhancement of undertourism development.

Keywords: *neo-endogenous development, overtourism, sustainable tourism, undertourism*

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Tourism is one of the most important social phenomena of the 20th and 21st centuries. This activity accounted for 10% of the global and 3.9% of the European Union's GDP in 2018.² According to available data, there were 1.3 billion tourist arrivals in the world in 2017³ meaning that approximately one sixth of the (privileged!) world's population travelled for leisure in 2017. During that same year 671.7 million tourists travelled to Europe, the continent which still holds first place on the global tourism map in terms of arrivals, while 264.4 million tourists travelled to southern and south-eastern Europe (UNWTO, 2018). In 2017, 15.5 million tourists visited Croatia as a tourist destination

1 The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research including commercial or personal benefit of any kind

2 For more information about tourism facts in the EU, see European Parliament, 2019.

3 In 2018 there were 1.4 billion tourist arrivals in the world. This is an increase of 6% from 2017. For more information about international tourist arrivals in 2018, see UNWTO, 2019.

and this number grew to 18.7 million in 2018 (NSB, 2019). Croatia thus accounts for 2.3% of all tourist arrivals in Europe, and 5.8% in southern and south-eastern Europe. The figures that pertain to Croatia may seem less significant, particularly if one takes into account the better developed western European states such as Germany (37.4 million arrivals), which accounts for 5.6% of all arrivals in Europe, or France (86.9 million arrivals). France is, in fact, ranked first in the world in terms of tourist arrivals, and it accounts for 13% of all arrivals at the European level (UNWTO, 2018).

According to data for Europe in 2017, Croatia is ranked in the middle of the scale and belongs to the same group as Hungary (2.4% of all arrivals to Europe), Poland (2.7% of all arrivals to Europe), and Ukraine (2.1% of all arrivals to Europe) (UNWTO, 2018). Comparing Poland to Croatia in terms of population and total surface area, Poland has nine and a half times more residents who live in a territory five times larger. Ukraine has eleven times more people living in a territory ten times larger than Croatia. This also means that the pressure of tourists on the natural environments in Poland and Ukraine is not as great. Taking into consideration that Croatia's total population is only 4.2 million and, comparing this to the figure of 15.5 million tourists in 2017, one can conclude that Croatia's territory (the natural environment, both the rural and urban zones) was burdened by 3.6 times the amount of people that the country otherwise accommodates. During 2018, Croatia received visitors into its territory in a number 4.6 times higher than its population. It is no surprise then that Croatia has the highest share of tourism in GDP (18%) compared to the remaining EU member states, while the 'travel & tourism' sector directly contributed 3.9% to the EU's GDP.⁴ Nevertheless, tourist visits are not equally distributed throughout the country's territory.

Public policies and associated strategies also contribute to this state of tourism. The Republic of Croatia adopted its Sustainable Development Strategy in 2009 and while the Strategy did not expressly identify sustainable tourism as one of the concepts whose implementation was to be pursued in practice, it is mentioned in the Republic of Croatia Tourism Development Strategy until 2020, adopted in 2013, wherein global qualitative megatrends are highlighted: "Environmental issues and environmental responsibility are the most current issues for the future. As an industry that both heavily relies on and influences the quality of the environment, tourism will more intensively apply the implementation of environmentally sound, 'green' concepts both at the level of individual service providers and of entire destinations." While it claims that tourism needs to be developed throughout the country's territory, the Strategy is not particularly concerned with the potential of continental (inland) Croatia. Although Highland Croatia is not seen as potentially fertile ground for tourism development, other national documents do discuss sustainable rural development, specifically the Rural Development Programme of the Republic of Croatia for 2014–2020 (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019). However, none of these documents addresses sustainable rural tourism as a separate topic.

⁴ For more information on this topic, see European Parliament, 2019.

In Europe, the best examples of overburdened locations, i.e. destinations with too many tourists, are Venice and Barcelona. In Croatia, the same can be said of Dubrovnik. More recently, similar observations have been made about the excessive burden placed on the environment of the Plitvice Lakes National Park, which receives an average of 1.4 million tourists annually. The park is located in Lika-Senj County, which is situated in the mountainous part of Croatia. The phenomenon of overtourism in Plitvice Lakes National Park has not been in the focus of the Croatian scientific community. There are, however, some scientific texts that problematize sustainability in Plitvice Lakes (Ivandić et al., 1996; Graan et al., 2011), but the contemporary phenomenon of overtourism was not mentioned. This then gives rise to a fundamental research question in this case study: Can overtourism of certain (rural) areas, as an existing phenomenon of mass tourism, be used as a background for the development of sustainable and alternative tourism in other (rural) destinations?

2. METHODOLOGY, GOALS AND HYPOTHESIS

The paper has been designed as a descriptive case study which consists of a discussion of secondary sources and, in particular, a quantitative and qualitative review.⁵ As is commonly known, a case study allows for an in-depth analysis of a specific phenomenon or process (Tkalac Verčić et al., 2010). The case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context may not be evident (Yin, 2014). “[It] copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result [it] relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of the theoretical preposition to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2014:17).

This paper looks at the theoretical concepts of integral sustainability and sustainable development. In a general manner, as part of the modernization and in particular ecological modernization theory discourse (Giddens, 1999; Burns, 2012), the paper contributes to the critical discussion of tourism overconsumption (Carolan, 2004). In the first section, the desk method is used in order to analyze existing sources and documents relevant to understanding the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, overtourism, undertourism and the neo-endogenous developmental model. This is followed by an analysis of published and publicly available statistical data related primarily to the structure of tourist arrivals in Croatia by county during 2017 and 2018, with a special focus on Lika-Senj County and Plitvice Lakes National Park. The final section presents preliminary data from the field. Qualitative data was collected by observing and using the method of the semi-structured interview conducted longitudinally at the

⁵ The case study's qualitative and quantitative data are presented as preliminary processed material.

Linden Tree Retreat and Ranch during 2012, 2013, and 2018.⁶ There were three semi-structured interviews conducted in periods when the owner of the rural estate made changes to his business model and in his relations to society and the local community. Thus, the main topic of the interviewing was on the processes of the business model change and local community relations. The first interview was conducted in 2012 when the estate was collaborating with national and international universities and was part of the international student's exchange network. The second interview was conducted in 2013 when the estate was part of the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) network. The last interview was conducted in 2018 when the estate became a significant actor of the alternative tourism scene in Lika-Senj County. The entire research process is still in its initial stages and will be completed by conducting semi-structural interviews with other actors – ranch workers, volunteers, visitors, local community representatives – and the results presented in this paper are preliminary. The goal of this paper is to present the (un)sustainable rural tourism practice in Lika-Senj County through the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch and Plitvice Lakes case study.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sociology and other scholarly disciplines that engage in research into physical space and local communities through the prism of potential implementation of sustainable development strategies are rooted in the very concept of sustainable development in the sense of theory and practice (Steer and Wade-Gery, 1993; van den Bergh, 1996; Baker, 2006; Merlan and Raftery, 2009; Zhelezov, 2011; Fröhlich et al., 2013; Holden et al., 2014). Although this concept, which the global scholarly community has been debating since the 1970s, and since the 1990s in Croatia, has been subjected to criticism in recent years, sustainable development and integral sustainability remain fundamental developmental criteria, springing forth from the holistic principle of wholeness (Lay, 2007) as attested by contemporary literature (Constanza et al., 2013; van Wijk, 2013; Komiyama, 2014; Waage and Yap, 2015; Göpel, 2016).

One should not overlook that theoretical debates on sustainability also contain, among other things, a clear distinction between the concepts of sustainability and survivability. While the first denotes “a path of development that would not lead to declines in average needs of well-being in the future,” the second concept denotes “a path of development that would not lead to declines in well-being below a certain minimum necessary for human life” (Dresner, 2002 as cited in Lay, 2007:22). Contemporary society lives too fast, so that certain changes (in the climate, biosphere and immediate environment) are only noticed when it is too late. This is also the reason why it often happens that conversation almost imperceptibly turns to survivability and even bare survival, and less

⁶ The rural estate owner, Bruce Yerkovich, gave his consent to publish the collected data which are, in this case, not anonymous. He was the interviewee during all three interviewing processes.

to sustainability (Lay, 2007). This even happens when discussing the quality of life in local communities in a territory with well-developed tourism.

The anthropocentric definition of sustainable development which focuses on the survival of (primarily human) future generations is generally known (Baker et al., 1997). This anthropocentricity is the reason for some of the criticism levelled at this concept. The definition of sustainable tourism as that which “takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities,” as set out by the UNWTO in 2005 is also anthropocentric. Moreover, it primarily concentrates on the impact of tourism on the economy, then on society and then, finally, on the environment. This definition then stresses the need to address the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and finally the local communities in whose areas this activity takes place. Thus, those who are directly exposed to the impact of tourism are ranked last. In contrast to this definition, and whose components should be thoroughly reordered at the outset, sustainable rural tourism is defined somewhat differently in scholarly literature. It constitutes an activity that is “economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment, and the social fabric of the host community” (Swarbrooke 1999, as cited in McAreavey and McDonagh, 2011:176). This definition is the guiding principle of the text that follows and is closely connected to the neo-endogenous development concept.

The concept of neo-endogenous development is rooted in the basic idea that local developmental factors should be acknowledged and validated as the initial platform in the creation of a sustainable future. The basic premise of this concept is to validate a specific rural area and local communities as the main actors for the formation and improvement of overall socio-economic conditions. The human and social capital of a specific community is in fact deemed a key segment of development. The striking of a balance between *bottom-up* and *top-down* approaches is a significant feature of the concept. Within neo-endogenous development, local initiatives constitute a segment which may formulate an ad hoc concept for a specific developmental project based primarily on one's own experiences, as well as the vision and aspirations that are to be achieved. The ultimately formulated developmental plan emerges at the place where the *bottom-up* and *top-down* approaches meet. This concept was introduced to theoretical discussions by C. Ray in 2001 (Bušljeta Tonković, 2017).

Contrary to the previously defined concepts, there is also the concept of overtourism, which is part of the popular and scholarly lexicon; it is emblematic of tourism in the Anthropocene where the capacity of destinations to cope has reached the tipping point (Milano, 2017; Sheivachman, 2017 as cited in Cheer et al., 2019:556). Stated in its simplest terms, “overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and / or political capacity thresholds” (Peeters et al., 2018:22). According to these authors, currently an increasing number of cities, such as Berlin, Prague, Santa Monica, Hong Kong, Belfast, Venice, Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, Shanghai, Amsterdam, Palma de Mallorca, Li-

sbon, Reykjavik and Dubrovnik have been reported to be suffering from the phenomenon of overtourism. However, it can be said that overtourism, although a relatively new term, in fact deals with old problems. The problem of tourist-generated impacts on the environment, communities and cultures that they visit has been articulated since the 1970s (Turner and Ash, 1975 as cited in Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). Briefly, the issue that overtourism as a concept describes is the excessive negative impact of tourism on host communities and / or the natural environment (Koens et al., 2018).

In their theoretical work, authors Perkumiene and Pranskuniene (2019) polemically examine the concepts of overtourism and sustainable tourism. They conclude that the overtourism context places greater emphasis on hearing the voices of residents, while on the other hand the sustainable tourism context entails discussions of the right to travel, according greater importance to tourist voices. The results of their integrative review also show the importance of rethinking the concept of sustainability in tourism as a holistic principle of democracy and as a *degrowth movement*,⁷ and opens a broader discussion for the future development of tourism research.

The concept of undertourism actually emerged as a result of the excessive burden on individual tourism destinations, thus precisely due to the overtourism phenomenon. This concept implies the total natural and cultural heritage and other qualities of a given destination which is attempting to place itself in the function of tourism, for which it has potential based on its scenic beauty, natural and cultural heritage and developed infrastructure. This concept therefore denotes a certain *idle capital* of individual destinations which are attempting to activate themselves with the help of carefully conceived developmental plans, creative economies and creative industries. Multiple destinations have activated undertourism messaging in recent years. "Oslo, for example, launched a campaign in 2017 that focused on 'rescuing' tourists from popular cities like Paris and bringing them to Norway's capital, where museums generally lack crowds, restaurant reservations are easy to secure, and public parks have plenty of free space" (Peltier, 2019). This concept thus often exploits overtourism in other destinations as a reason for giving up on them. The emphasis is placed on those destinations which offer a high-quality and pleasant stay with equal opportunities for relaxation and entertainment. In the interest of promoting such "unfairly neglected destinations," marketing experts often toy with slogans such as "Sumatra is the new Borneo". Simply put, undertourism pertains to a tourism product outside of the tourist hotspots, simultaneously highlighting "alternatives that tourists didn't know they loved" (Peltier, 2019). The concept could be connected to sustainable tourism and neo-endogeneous development models. It is also related to the creative economy model.

In the promotion of attractions and sites that may be considered undertourism destinations, the concept of *orange economy* is used. This concept is also called the creative economy, and it was first discussed by John Howkins in 2002. The creative economy

⁷ For more on the *degrowth movement*, see Kallis et al., 2016.

includes all of the creative industries such as arts and culture (Peltier, 2019). This type of economy tied to tourism can be called fluid, for the product is formed in such a way that emphasis is placed precisely on undertourism destinations, not only in order to disburden the sites of overtourism, but also to ensure that an entire city or, for example, province develops equally. The creative industries are the core of the creative economy and are defined as cycles of production of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as their main input. They are classified by their role as heritage, art, media and functional creations (UNCTAD as cited in Restrepo and Márquez, 2013:37; UNCTAD, 2010). The creative economy as a concept that uses creativity and intellectual capital (especially if it takes the local community's intellectual capital) can be connected to the neo-endogenous concept.

The paper discusses the concept of creative economy in a simplified sense. The potential impact of this concept on rural development is also presented in its basic meaning. It should be noted that the concept of creative economy has been criticized as being a part of the neoliberal agenda. However, creative economy as an *umbrella concept* has evolved in the past years from being limited to specific sectors to becoming seen as a creative agent that can generate change and innovation, and which has achieved high levels of acceptance and significance in many different countries (Cunningham, 2011).⁸

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *Lika-Senj County and (Un)sustainable Tourism: From overtourism in Plitvice Lakes National Park to undertourism in the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch*

Lika-Senj County, together with the Lika Region is a highland / mountainous part of Croatia which serves as the link between the country's north and south. In the European context, together with Gorski Kotar it further forms a link between central and south-eastern Europe. Lika is considered a traditional region, meaning that in the administrative sense it no longer exists; however, due to its historical heritage it certainly lives on precisely through the identity and rich cultural heritage of local communities. Lika-Senj County is the largest county in Croatia with the lowest population density (9 inhabitants per square kilometer; the Croatian average is 75). According to the last census (2011), the county's population is 51,927, which is also the lowest in Croatia. It is also a county with the largest state protected areas; 58% of all of Croatia's protected areas are situated in Lika's three national parks (Plitvice Lakes, Northern Velebit and

⁸ As modernization processes mostly bypassed the Lika Region and Lika-Senj County, while free market transition was connected to the negative processes of depopulation and economy stagnation, positive outcomes of the creative economy and creative industries should be considered as one of the options. The same recommendation can be applied with regards to modernization processes – the Region should choose only positive and environment friendly contemporary technologies; just as it should only use positive practices from the creative economy concept.

Paklenica) and one nature park (Velebit). The county encompasses four towns and eight municipalities. The town of Gospić (population: 12,745, 2011 Census) is the county seat and its largest town. As modernization processes mostly bypassed this region (except for some of the planned socialist industries that failed after the free market transformation in the 1990s), the region has almost ideal conditions for the development of sustainable tourism. Although it is still impossible to speak of the current development of sustainable tourism, some indications do exist with the first being the predisposition for the development of such tourism precisely in a preserved and protected natural environment.

Any further consideration must first be preceded by an illustration and analysis of data on tourist arrivals to Croatia, and then Lika-Senj County.

Table 1. *Tourist arrivals to Croatia by county in 2017 and 2018 in thousands (DZS, 2019; Ministry of Tourism, 2018, 2019)*

County	Tourist arrivals in 2017	Tourist arrivals in 2018
Continental Croatia Total	2295	2516
City of Zagreb	1286	1400
Karlovac County	333	353
Krapina-Zagorje County	142	161
Zagreb County	87	123
Međimurje County	70	76
Varaždin County	61	71
Sisak-Moslavina County	37	39
Koprivnica-Križevci County	19	20
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	23	25
Virovitica-Podravina County	14	18
Požega-Slavonia County	13	16
Slavonski Brod-Posavina County	29	34
Osijek-Baranja County	92	99
Vukovar-Srijem County	89	81
Adriatic Croatia Total	15135	16150
Istria County	4104	4333
Split-Dalmatia County	3160	3474
Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	2789	2910
Dubrovnik-Neretva County	1864	2015
Zadar County	1559	1664
Šibenik-Knin County	923	965
Lika-Senj County	736	789
Croatia Total	17430	18666

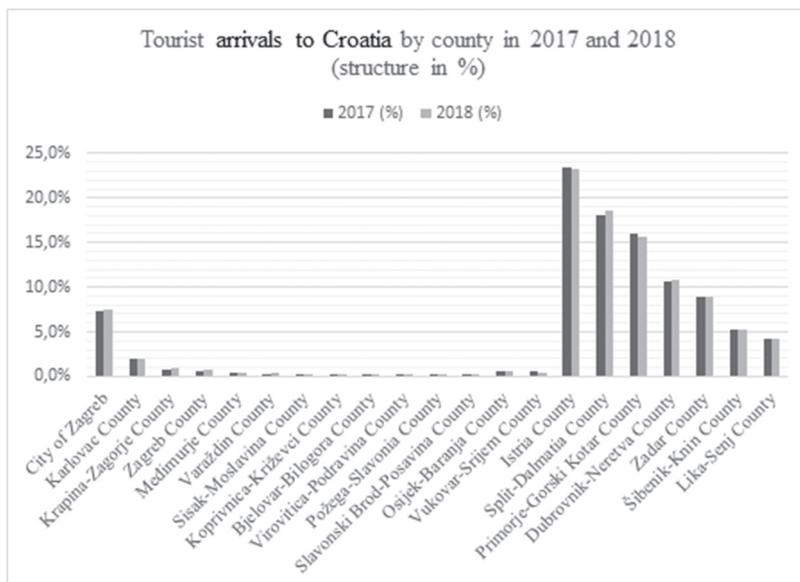


Figure 1. *Tourist arrivals to Croatia by county in 2017 (%) and 2018 (%) (DZS, 2019; Ministry of Tourism, 2018, 2019)*

Table 2. *Lika-Senj County towns and municipalities by tourist arrivals in 2018 (DZS, 2019)*

Lika-Senj County towns and municipalities by tourist arrivals			
	Total	Domestic	Foreign
Towns Total	405707	26694	379013
Gospić	20285	4550	15735
Novalja	254778	14039	240739
Otočac	43911	2982	40929
Senj	86733	5123	81610
Municipalities Total	383623	15724	367899
Brinje	2869	261	2608
Donji Lapac	375	154	221
Karlobag	36626	2721	33905
Lovinac	1408	572	836
Perušić	1476	361	1115
Plitvička Jezera	336431	11569	324862
Udbina	287	20	267
Vrhovine	4151	66	4085
LSC Total	789 330	42 418	746 912

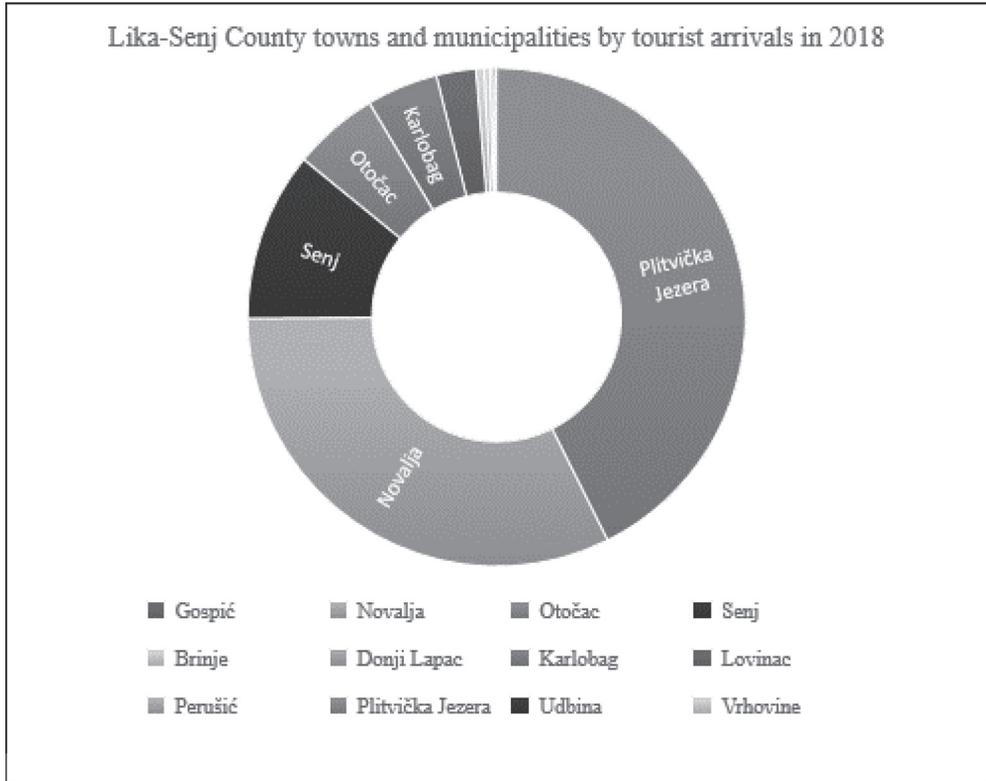


Figure 2. *Lika-Senj County towns and municipalities by tourist arrivals in 2018 (DZS, 2019)*

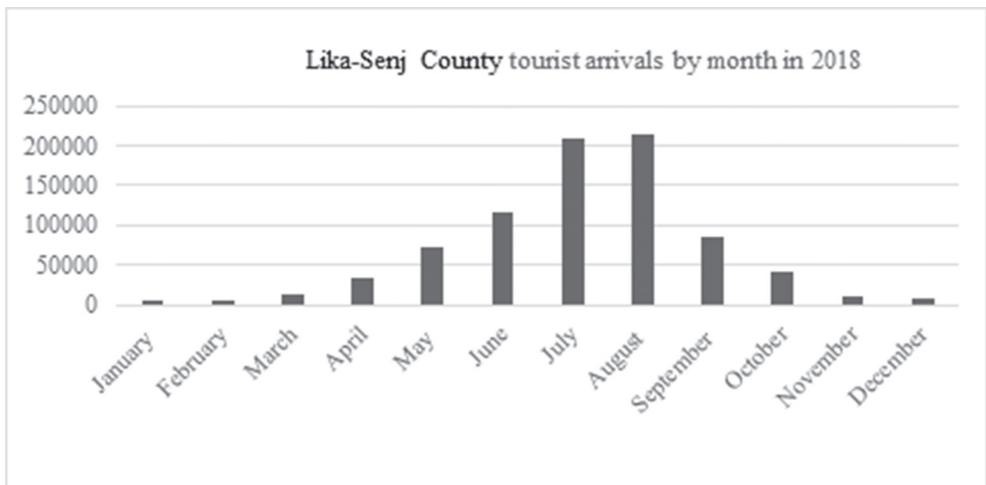


Figure 3. *Lika-Senj County tourist arrivals by month in 2018 (HGK Otočac, 2019).*

Lika-Senj County recorded 736 thousand tourist arrivals in 2017 and 747 in 2018. Compared to its two neighboring counties that are also situated in Adriatic Croatia (NUTS 2 level) – Zadar County (with 1.5 million arrivals in 2017 and 1.6 in 2018) and Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (with 2.7 million arrivals in 2017 and 2.9 in 2018) – the figures for Lika-Senj County testify to a tourism sector which is in its initial stages of development and which (save for the Plitvice Lakes Municipality on the mainland and the town of Novalja on the Island of Pag) does not rely on mass tourism (Tables 1 and 2, Figures 1 and 2). Since this paper discusses sustainable rather than mass tourism, the lower number of arrivals will be taken as an upside as this means lower environmental and communities' pressure. On the other hand, if the towns and municipalities in Lika-Senj County which are not part of the Lika Region⁹ (see Table 2) are omitted, then the number of arrivals (409 thousand) goes down. Furthermore, if this group is considered while arrivals to the Plitvice Lakes Municipality (primarily driven by mass tourism specific to this site) are excluded, then there were only 73 thousand arrivals in the Lika Region in 2018.

The answer to the question as to whether Lika-Senj County should seek to increase the number of arrivals or the quality of services it offers lies in the analysis of data on tourist arrivals and overnight stays by type of accommodation. Specifically, the highest number of visitors pertains to accommodation in households, followed by campsites, non-commercial accommodations, and hotels. The lowest number of arrivals is to family farm facilities, i.e. peasant households (HGK Otočac, 2019:15). The average length of stay in 2017 for all visitors is 4.4 days, and for destinations in Lika (Perušić 2.9, Gospić 1.8, Vrhovine 1.7, Plitvice Lakes 1.4, Otočac 1.2 and Brinje 1.1 days) the average length of stay is barely 2 days (HGK Otočac, 2017). The same data are shown for 2018, the average length of stay of foreign guests is 3.8 days, and of domestic guests 8.5 days. The average length of stay for all visitors is 4.7 days, and for destinations in Lika it is the same as in 2017 (HGK Otočac, 2019:9-14). This figure supports the assertion that the development of Lika's tourism is in its initial stages. Accordingly, there is indeed room to design a sustainable tourism product. This is supported by Figure 3, which shows that the arrival of tourists to a county belonging to Croatia's mountainous region is concentrated mostly in the summer months, which gives it a natural predisposition for year-round tourist activity. Another argument for the possibilities of developing a sustainable tourism model is connected to the country origin of the guests: Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Great Britain, and Slovakia. Some of these countries are developed EU countries that have a higher level of environmental awareness, and the assumption is that sustainable destinations could be their first choice in vacation planning.

⁹ The towns and municipalities that belong to the Lika Region are: Municipalities of Perušić, Vrhovine, Donji Lapac, Udbina, Brinje, Lovinac and Plitvička Jezera (Plitvice Lakes), and the Towns of Gospić and Otočac. The Karlobag Municipality and the Towns of Senj and Novalja belong to the coastal and island section of the county.

On the other hand, if we talk about mass tourism and the example of overtourism in Lika-Senj County, then it is necessary to consider the number of arrivals to the Plitvice Lakes National Park (for structure see Figure 2). Namely, Table 2 shows 336 thousand arrivals during 2018. However, every year approximately 1.4 million visitors enter the Plitvice Lakes Municipality, or more accurately the National Park. Most of these arrivals are not recorded in the information system for the registration of tourists (eVisitor) because visits to the Park only last a single day, and these are visitors, not tourists. But the consequences are the same; Lika-Senj County, i.e. the Lika Region, is visited by twenty-seven times more people annually than those living in that county (1,400,000:51,000). It is here that Lika encounters its problem of overtourism, particularly because 1.4 million tourists / visitors are concentrated exclusively in the territory of the Park and possibly the Plitvice Lakes Municipality, while the remaining municipalities and cities in the county are attempting to exploit their role as undertourism destinations, even though these attempts are still in the nascent stage. Thus, the Town of Gospić, or rather its rural environs, has started to develop a story about rural tourism with an emphasis on accommodation in family farms and village vacation cottages. Similarly, the Town of Otočac, thanks to Gacka, one of the cleanest submerged rivers in Europe, continues to place emphasis on fishing as a tourist attraction. The Perušić Municipality is developing tourism with an emphasis on speleology and caving; the Vrhovine Municipality is developing recreational tourism; while the Municipalities of Donji Lapac and Udbina are the county's undiscovered tourism gems, even if they have considerable potential for developing hunting tourism. The Karlobag Municipality and the Town of Senj are focusing their tourism on summertime, mostly bathing tourism, even if their summer season is relatively short because of the cool water temperatures of the sea, while the possible overflow of tourists from the Town of Novalja, which is also experiencing overtourism¹⁰ during the summer months, to these two locations is not occurring nor has a plan for something like this been devised (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019). One of the possible solutions for the development of sustainable tourism in all of Lika-Senj County is the concept known as *drive tourism*, and which may be described as being compatible with the concept of undertourism. One example of such tourism can be found in Ireland. Noting that the western side of the island was developing more slowly, the Irish decided to launch economic growth with the help of tourism. The Wild Atlantic Way, a 2,500 km coastal road, is a route that is well-known today on the global tourism market (Fáilte Ireland, 2017). The places and amenities that can be found along it are an integral component of the tourism product (Wild Atlantic Way, 2019). As such, each developmental actor (town, municipality or village) that wishes to try its hand at tourism has an opportunity to participate. The concept of such a route running through Lika-Senj County would first and foremost require involvement at the natio-

10 During 2018, the Town of Novalja was visited by 255,301 tourists (Novalja Town Tourism Board, 2019) while having only a population of 3,663 (2011 Census). It has developed *party tourism* as its main touristic attraction.

nal level, which was the case with Ireland, where national development actors invested money and hired experts to design and execute the initial idea to launch the overall campaign and its promotion. However, local developmental actors must also be educated and prepared to engage with the initiative from the bottom up.¹¹ In other words, here it would be appropriate to employ the neo-endogenous developmental model together with some carefully selected elements of the creative economy model. This combination could be a starting point for shaping sustainable tourism in the Lika Region and Lika-Senj County, thus in a rural area where the natural environment is preserved, and the social phenomenon of overtourism already exists.

In contrast to the overtourism of the National Park in the interior and Novalja on the Island of Pag, certain destinations in Lika-Senj County serve as examples of measured, sustainable tourism. The developmental actors contributing to sustainable and, in particular, rural tourism are divided into those belonging to the private, public and civil sectors. Those belonging to the private sector include: 1) Rizvan City Adventure Centre, also known as the first glamping camp in Lika (connected to Velebit Nature Park); 2) Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch, also known as the first all-inclusive luxury cowboy ranch in Croatia (linked to Velebit Nature Park); 3) Beware of the Bear Zipline, also known as the largest zipline in Croatia and one of the largest in Europe (connected to Plitvice Lakes National Park). Public sector sustainable tourism actors include Grabovača Cave Park, Northern Velebit National Park, and Velebit Nature Park. The most original sustainable tourism NGO actor is Kuterevo Bear Sanctuary. All of these actors are developing tourism within the context of using the wild pristine natural environment, local organically-grown food and local community traditions as the main attraction (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019). These tourism actors are attempting to attract a portion of the tourists from overtourism destinations, even though a development plan or national media campaign aimed at developing undertourism destinations in Lika-Senj County have not yet even begun.

4.1.1. Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch – social responsibility in the local community – CIDER

Residents play a vital role in developing sustainable tourism, as they are the cultural agents and social group that deliver tourism. Their goodwill is considered crucial to the success and sustainability of any tourism development (Muler Gonzalez et al., 2018:277). The owner of the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch¹² together with the local community in Velika Plana, the village in which the Ranch is situated, are part of the initial stage of sustainable tourism development in Lika-Senj County, especially in the Lika Region. This can also be seen as an alternative tourism and undertourism destina-

¹¹ A project by the Lika Local Action Group (LAG Lika) called “Stay Three Days in Lika” was aimed at extending the stay of tourists in Lika, i.e. enticing a certain number of visitors to the Plitvice Lakes National Park to remain in Lika. The result, however, was not entirely satisfactory.

¹² For more details on the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch, see Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch, 2019; Bušljeta Tonković, 2019:207-219.

tion. This rural estate was established in 2008 and opened to the public in 2010. The Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch operated through the WWOOF network and in collaboration with foreign universities up to 2016. The author of this paper has been monitoring its efforts from 2012 to date, conducting a kind of longitudinal study, observing changes and phases in the property's development: 1) as a sustainable center connected to national and international universities (student exchange); 2) as part of the WWOOF network; and 3) as a sustainable (elite and alternative) tourism destination. It could be concluded that Linden represents a kind of reconciliation between environmental and economic interests, which has gradually shaped opportunities for further development and cooperation with other actors in agriculture and tourism¹³.

This paper considers this elite form of tourism as one kind of "positive practice" of the concept of creative economy. Namely, the Plitvice Lakes National Park covers 5.5% of the county's surface, on the other hand 1.4 million people are concentrated in only 5-10% of the Park's territory. Here, a tailored version of elite tourism could be imposed on the local context as one of the solutions to the growing pressure on the local community and the environment. Linden, an alternative elite tourism destination, could be a starting point for adapting this concept as one of the possible solutions, especially because of the abovementioned development stages.

Linden can be described as an alternative elite tourism and undertourism destination: it hires local staff, everything built on the property was made by local craftsmen and artisans, and guests are served food grown organically by local farmers. Those visiting the ranch are not passive spectators, but rather active participants. It operates on the basis of a specific principle which the ranch owner and initiator of the concept calls CIDER (Community, Integrity, Development, Evolution and Responsibility). This principle is based on the sustainable (rural) development and tourism concept and is connected to the neo-endogenous and some elements of the creative economy concepts.

1. Community: attempts are made to obtain new know-how and expertise from visitors that will contribute to protection of the environment and sustain the local community (intellectual capital and creativity of local community and visitors is used; Linden as a cultural exchange site).
2. Integrity: includes multiculturalism, respect for diversity and preservation of the environment (criteria of sustainable development – the balance between ecological, socio-cultural and economy dimension – is used).
3. Development: the business approach at Linden is oriented toward the implementation and promotion of the fundamental principles of sustainability, community involvement and making and offering high-quality products.
4. Evolution: refers to the constant exchanges and improvements, as well as further development of the skills and knowledge available in the local community, and their fruitful encounters with the skills and knowledge of visitors.

¹³ These actors are small and mid-size local family farms, Local Action Group (LEADER program), Gospić and Lika-Senj County tourist boards and the above-mentioned actors in Lika's tourism.

5. Responsibility: this pertains to the effort to ensure that all activities organized there are conducted in compliance with the mission to protect the environment.

During a longitudinal observation of the property, the following conclusions were made. In the course of its decade-long development, Linden has passed through the process from fighting for sustainability to a sustainable local environment and economy. As such, it remains a unique example of tourism in the Lika Region and beyond. In some of its praxis, the Linden example could be transferable to other undertourism areas. The lessons learned in this rural estate can be summarized as follows:

- Minimizing any environmental impact as a background in planning of the development is the successful path to long-term business model achievement;
- The sustainable business approach must be oriented toward the implementation of the fundamental principles of sustainability (in all four dimensions), but also connected to the positive elements of the creative economy concept;
- The process of self-sustainability can be achieved only in cooperation with the local community and active participation of visitors;
- Only the process of multicultural contact (between locals and visitors) creates new, creative, and in particular sustainable knowledge and skills.

5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Given the fact that modernization (industrialization and environmental pollution) has bypassed Lika-Senj County, and that as a result it has a well-preserved, sparsely populated natural environment (over the past century there was a wave of emigration to other parts of Croatia and beyond), this rural area has an ideal predisposition to become a Croatian sustainable tourism destination. Lika-Senj County has two overtourism destinations (Plitvice Lakes National Park in the interior, and the Town of Novalja on the Island of Pag) and several potential undertourism destinations (in the private, public and NGO sectors), of which the Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch is closest to the concept of integral sustainability and as such may serve as a model for planning sustainable tourism development. In this vein, contemporary concepts such as neo-endogenous development and the positive elements of creative economy presented herein could certainly help in the formulation of a developmental orientation for the county.

The completion of the quantitative and qualitative research initiated in this paper will contribute to the understanding of how to better shape the model of sustainable tourism in the county. Furthermore, comprehensive research on a sampling of a cross-section of the local population would contribute to the formulation of a developmental orientation for the Lika Region and the entire county. Research must be conducted primarily on those who live in overtourism destinations, and then with those who could transform their villages and towns into undertourism destinations. It is vital to learn of the aspirations and developmental plans of local communities in Lika. Here particular attention

should be accorded to research into social and human capital in order to gain insight into the potential for implementation of bottom-up and top-down approaches, i.e. the possibility of applying the neo-endogenous principle in developmental planning.

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(NE)ODRŽIVI (RURALNI) TURIZAM: STUDIJA SLUČAJA LIČKO-SENJSKE ŽUPANIJE

Anita Bušljeta Tonković

Sažetak

Održivi turizam obuhvaća pažljivo planirane aktivnosti s jasnim, konkretnim i dugoročnim ciljevima kojima se teži izbjeći razaranje okoliša i poštovati društvenu, ekološku, kulturnu i ekonomsku vrijednost prostora u kojem se održava. Cilj je ovog rada prikazati (ne)održive prakse ruralnog turizma u Ličko-senjskoj županiji na primjeru studije slučaja Plitvičkih jezera i „Linden Tree Retreat & Ranč”. Radi boljeg razumijevanja pojmova održivog ruralnog turizma, prekomjernog ali i turizma smanjenog kapaciteta, ova studija slučaja započinje analizom statističkih podataka, sekundarne literature te primjera prekomjernog turizma u Lici (Nacionalni park „Plitvička jezera”). Zatim, uz pomoć kvalitativnih podataka (promatranjem i polu-strukturiranim intervjuima), istražuje „Linden Tree Retreat & Ranč” i njihovu kampanju CIDER (engleski akronim za zajednica, integritet, razvoj, evolucija i odgovornost) kao primjer dobre prakse za razvoj turističkih destinacija smanjenog kapaciteta.

Ključne riječi: *neo-endogeni razvoj, prekomjerni turizam, održivi turizam, turizam smanjenog kapaciteta*

(UN)NACHHALTIGER TOURISMUS (AUF DEM LANDE): FALLSTUDIE DES LIKA-SENJ-DISTRIKTS

Anita Bušljeta Tonković

Zusammenfassung

Der nachhaltige Tourismus ist eine sorgfältig geplante Aktivität mit klaren, spezifischen und langfristigen Zielen, die keine Umweltzerstörung verursacht und soziale, ökologische, kulturelle und ökonomische Werte des Raumes beachtet, in dem er stattfindet. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist deshalb, die Praxis des (un)nachhaltigen Tourismus auf dem Lande im Lika-Senj-Distrikt am Beispiel der Fallstudien von Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch und Plitvicer Seen zu zeigen. Um das Konzept des nachhaltigen Tourismus auf dem Lande zu verstehen, den Overtourism und den Undertourism, fängt diese Studie mit der Analyse der statistischen Daten, der Sekundärliteratur und Beispielen des Übertourismus (Overtourism) in Lika (Nationalpark Plitvicer Seen) an. Danach wird mit Hilfe der qualitativen Einsicht (vorläufige Daten) die Kampagne des Linden Tree Retreat & Ranches, CIDER genannt (community, integrity, development, evolution und responsibility) reflektiert, was als Ausgangspunkt für die Steigerung der Entwicklung des Undertourism betrachtet werden kann.

Schlüsselwörter: *neo-endogene Entwicklung, Overtourism, nachhaltiger Tourismus, Undertourism*