ICEMIT BLACE
The Second International Scientific Conference on Economics, Management and Information Technologies – ICEMIT 2025
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Tourist attitudes towards the cultural tourism offer of continental Croatia

Danijel Drpić[a*], Goran Perić[a], Danijel Vučenović[b]

[a] Libertas International University, Zagreb, Croatia
[b] Toplica Academy of Applied Studies, Department of Business Studies Blace, Serbia
[c] Independent researcher, Zadar, Croatia

Article info

Review paper

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.71159/icemit2539D

This is an open access paper under the license

Abstract

Today's tourist demand, although heterogeneous, tends to get to know new and previously undiscovered elements of the offer. Tourists are looking for authentic experiences provided by heritage elements embedded in the tourist offer. Heritage as part of the modern tourist offer of each destination enables the creation of a strong connection between tourists and the local community. It is the basis for creating a unique tourist offer and increasing the competitive advantage and preserving the uniqueness of the destination in the tourist market. The purpose of the paper is to determine the current state of development of cultural tourism in continental Croatia. The methodology of the paper is based on the analysis of published scientific and professional papers in the field of cultural tourism, and the TOMAS study of attitudes and consumption in Croatia for 2019 and 2022/2023. Based on the findings, development guidelines and a model for promoting the heritage of continental Croatia will be offered.

***Keywords**: heritage, cultural tourism, continental Croatia, competitiveness of tourist offer, tourist demand*

1. Introduction

Tourism, recognized as the driving force of general development, also enables the active protection and preservation of heritage elements through sustainable development, the creation of unique heritage experiences and events, creative tourism as an integral part of the offer, and the introduction of new and previously unexplored heritage elements into the tourism product (Drpić et al., 2018; Duda, 2023, Milohnić, Drpić, 2022).

The potential for tourism is great. Modern tourism is constantly growing ravelers today are no longer content with conventional sightseeing; instead, they seek authentic, immersive experiences that connect them with the diverse cultures and landscapes of the destinationsthey visit. This paradigm shift towards experiential travel is just one facet of the multifaceted evolution shaping the globaltourism industry. Advancements in technology have played a pivotal role in this transformation, with smart phones, socialmedia, and other digital platforms reshaping how individuals plan, experience, and share their travel journeys. Simultaneously, the industry grapples with a range of challenges, from environmental sustainability concerns to the strainon local infrastructures due to overcrowding in popular destinations. (Tso, 2017). In the first six months of 2025 alone, almost 690 million tourists travelled internationally, about 33 million more than in the same period of 2024 (UN TOURISM, 2025).

This presents a challenge for tourism policy makers around the world, including in the Republic of Croatia, especially if they want to develop a certain segment of the tourism offer that has not yet fully utilized its development potential, such as continental Croatia. Recognizing the requirements of tourism demand is an increasingly complex task for tourism providers.

Under the influence of modern tourism trends and the use of new technologies, modern tourists are always looking for a new, different and unique experience. The goal of the tourist offer is to satisfy the needs of the modern tourist and achieve economic benefit for all stakeholders in the tourism process. (Cerović, 2008). Tourism demand can be determined according to consumer habits and travel characteristics. These variables are often at the center of interest of scientists, managers and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. Some of them carried out market segmentation and analyzed the

*Corresponding author
E-mail address: ddrpic@libertas.hr

characteristics of market segments in different selective forms of tourism, such as health (Dryglas and Salamaga, 2017; Hritz, Sidman and D'Abundo, 2014), rural (Pesonen, 2014), cultural (Menor-Campos et al., 2020; D'Urso, De Giovanni, Disegna, M. and Massari, 2013) and wine tourism (Nella and Christou, 2014). A tourist destination in continental Croatia must select a target market segment, with the aim of easier penetration into the global tourist market. The desired tourist niche is most often determined by applying demographic (Alén et al., 2017) or psychographic variables (Srihadi et al., 2016; Stylidis et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2009), motivation (D'Urso et al., 2013; Bicikova, 2014), and a combination of several types of variables (Alen et al., 2017; Nella & Christou, 2014).

Tourism based on cultural heritage can be defined as a possible model for realizing the motives of modern tourists for a unique experience, because the heritage that grows out of human creativity and inheritance creates the identity of the destination and creates a unique and difficult to repeat experience that is difficult to offer in an identical way outside the cultural tourism destination. (Jelinčić, 2008; Jelinčić, 2010).

The cultural heritage of continental Croatia is an important segment in the creation of a modern tourism product that enables the achievement of long-term sustainable development of the destination. Although the Republic of Croatia has a significant history of tourism development, it is not equally distributed between the Adriatic and Continental Croatia. The above has a negative impact on the overall structure of the tourist offer and the desired direction of the general development of the Republic of Croatia as a sustainable, responsible and creative tourist destination where it is possible to experience unique and unrepeatable experiences throughout the year, regardless of the opportunities and threats coming from the environment. The active inclusion of continental Croatia in the tourism product enables the Republic of Croatia to become a year-round tourist destination with a unique and recognizable offer of content tailored to modern tourists. Tourism development enables the creation of numerous advantages for the local community of continental Croatia, from the improvement of the general economic and social climate and the growth of overall satisfaction with the community's standard of living to the strengthening of awareness of the identity and belonging of the local community to the area where tourist activity takes place.

The area of continental Croatia is largely rural, and this is one of the fundamental competitive factors for successful tourism development. Numerous authors point out the high degree of preservation of the landscape, traditional way of life, wealth of material and intangible heritage, favorable climatic characteristics and its good transport connections (Bartoluci, Hendija, Petračić, 2015; Ružić, 2009; Petrić, 2006, etc.) as the most significant development potential of the tourist offer in general, and consequently of continental Croatia.

By including a tourist offer based on tangible and intangible heritage in the overall tourism product of continental Croatia, the destination will achieve a competitive advantage (Golja, Urošević, 2016, Golja, Lekić, 2020) in the tourism market, and through innovation, the satisfaction of visitors to the destination will be improved.

Social changes under the influence of the growth of free time, free resources, knowledge and skills affect the creation of tourism demand. The digitalization and transformation of tourism towards a generally accepted and desired model of sustainable development create the need to form tourism products and experiences in a tourist destination that will highlight the uniqueness of the destination and the authenticity of its heritage and tourism product (Hristov, 2015; Dredge, et. al., 2018; González-Reverté, 2019; UNWTO, 2019). The above will be helped by the application of modern technologies, the application of which is possible in all stages of development of a new tourism product based on cultural heritage, from planning to feedback from the market.

2. Cultural heritage as a fundamental element of the tourist product of continental Croatia

Cultural heritage represents a necessary element in creating a unique tourism product and preserving the identity of a people. Heritage represents a unique legacy of human work and mind as a witness to centuries of changes and necessary and often irreversible changes in social relations, economic influences and changes in the environment.

Cultural heritage is a comprehensive element based on which a unique tourism product can be created, and it includes: customs, rituals, law, literature, language, script, mythology, religion, art, and various fields of science.

In the presented mosaic, Croatian culture is marked by, for example: the Baška Tablet, the Vinodol Code, the Istrian Divorce, the Poljica Statute; adopted Roman law; Slavic mythology, ancient deities, Roman Catholic Christianity; the Croatian language, along with Old Church Slavonic and Latin; the uninterrupted flow of literature from the 11th century to the present day, with the representation of all European spiritual and historical periods – Carolingian Renaissance, Romanesque, Gothic, New Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism, modern trends; until the 15th century, tropism (Glagolitic, Cyrillic, Latin), and after the 15th century exclusively Latin; significant figures for Croatian culture such as Penkala, Tesla, and others (Stamić, 2010.).

Culture and tourism are intertwined and interdependent phenomena. Culture builds on the tourist product, and tourism enables the creation of a new heritage value - its restoration and revitalization and tourism valorization. Through tourism,

heritage acquires a new value for the entire community and becomes a permanent part of the community's identity and consciousness.

Tourism development has a dual role and importance for the preservation and improvement of cultural heritage. Positive elements of tourism valorization can be determined as strengthening the recognition, preservation, creation of new functions and purposes of cultural heritage and preservation of the tradition of localities through tourist events, but there are also numerous shortcomings such as the destruction of authenticity, greater pollution, increased waste, intentional or unintentional devastation of heritage, but also the depopulation of urban centers that are abandoned by the local community due to the transformation of urban centers into dormitories, or disagreements with tourist development (noise, crowds, price increases - food prices, housing, etc.).

A large number of old city centers are becoming inaccessible to local residents, and the city itself ceases to be a city and becomes a kind of a museum. The above examples are visible in cities such as Venice, Dubrovnik, Poreč, Zagreb and other tourist destinations (Krajnović et al., 2020).

The basis of successful tourism development is closely related to the preservation of cultural heritage. In order to maintain the desired tourism development, in such a way that it becomes a sustainable and fundamental element of the preservation of continental Croatia, its cultural resources must be offered on the market as a cultural "product".

According to research conducted by the Institute of Tourism, cultural heritage and local resources represent the foundation for the development of specific forms of cultural tourism, such as thematic routes, events and cultural products related to tradition and history (Institute of Tourism, 2020).

Tourism, with a carefully designed development policy in cooperation with interested stakeholders in destinations, can contribute to a significant number of elements of cultural heritage becoming a tourist resource.

A tourism product based on heritage elements represents a complex set of products and services that uniquely combine heritage elements into a higher-order product. Such a product is characterized by the quality of promotional material and a set of clear and verified information that, through modern technologies, becomes available to any tourist who comes to a destination motivated by culture as the primary motive for coming, or to any tourist for whom heritage is an additional element of interest that they become aware of only in the destination itself. The information offered on applications, websites and services of heritage sites influences the first expectations of tourists from visiting a particular attraction, helps create a strong visual impression, facilitates access to the attraction, shows the appearance, ambience, attractiveness of the heritage element itself, from the very entrance to the attraction, to the impression left on the tourist by the employees (hospitality, exposition, presentation and interpretation of heritage elements). Also of great importance is the high quality of audiovisual materials, the use of gamification (*Pasca, Renzi, Di Pietro, Guglielmetti Mugion, 2021)*, in creating experiences and presenting heritage, augmented reality and other elements that influence the recognition and acceptance of heritage elements as excellent tourist products that guarantee a unique and difficult to replicate combination of tourist offers.

The Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 emphasizes the importance of respecting the natural and cultural heritage and the unique identity of all regions in order to create sustainable year-round tourism that will be desirable for investment, work and life and that contributes to the harmonious economic development of Croatia. The development of sustainable tourism in the Republic of Croatia aims to improve the quality of life and work of the local population and the economic and social progress of Croatian society as a whole. According to the Strategy, the key characteristic of Croatia as a whole, and thus of continental Croatia as a tourist destination, is its authenticity, which is reflected in hospitable, open and warm-hearted people, the diversity of its regions and its rich natural and cultural heritage (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2022).

3. Characteristics of tourist demand for cultural tourism in continental Croatia

If we consider the motivation of tourists to come to a destination, it should be established that it represents a theoretical concept that determines the reasons why individual tourists choose a certain destination, at a certain time and under certain conditions (Beck, 2003, 4; Solomon et al., 2015, 177). Motivation as a phenomenon is the most frequently researched component in tourism, and consequently, numerous theoretical ideas have been developed and numerous studies have been conducted on the factors that influence tourist motivation (Pesonen et al., 2011; Bozic et al., 2017; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Said & Maryono, 2018).

Tourists' motives for coming to a destination reflect demand preferences, but also indicate the destination's tourism offer and are directly reflected in guests' activities in holiday destinations. In the TOMAS Croatia 2022/2023 survey (Institute of Tourism 2023,32), respondents were first offered seven primary travel motives (business, holiday, visiting relatives and friends, health reasons, religious reasons, education and something else), according to *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (IRITS 2008, Institute of Tourism, 2023,32).

According to data from the Institute of Tourism (2023,32), in Continental Croatia in 2022, every second guest came for a holiday, followed by work (22%) and visiting relatives and friends (14%). Guests go on a business trip primarily for business meetings (60%), followed by conferences (16%), seminars (12%), team building (5%) and incentive, motivational or award travel (1%). Respondents whose primary motive for coming to the destination was vacation were additionally offered 14 vacation motives, from which they could choose a maximum of three, one main and a maximum of two additional motives for their vacation trip.

In 2019, the share of guests coming to continental Croatia for vacation was 63%, followed by business with 22%. Guests traveling to Croatia for business travel primarily come for business meetings (46%), followed by conferences (18%), seminars (13%), team building (5%) and award trips (2%). Among other reasons for coming to continental Croatia, it is worth mentioning visiting relatives and friends, which is why, for example, as many as 19% of guests visit Slavonia (as part of Continental Croatia) in this way. (Institute for Tourism, 2020,33). From the previously stated it follows that the motivation for cultural factors is not at a high level, which is contributed by the insufficient recognition and inclusion of continental Croatia in the overall tourism product of the Republic of Croatia. Table 1 shows the motives for visiting cultural heritage-based tourists, including primary and additional holiday motives.

Table 1. Selected motives of tourists who visit ontinental Croatia

Motive	2019	2022	Change
Visiting cities	25.9%	23.1%	-2.80%
Culture and art	15.7%	13.4%	-2.30%
Gastronomy	6.6%	11.0%	4.40%
Villages and rural areas	9.6%	7.8%	-1.80%

Source: Institute for Tourism (2020,38; 2023,40)

The largest number of visitors come to continental Croatia to visit cities (23.1%). In 2022, the share of motivation for visiting cities is slightly decreasing compared to 2019, when it was (25.9%). Culture and art as a primary or additional motive is the reason for the arrival of 13.4% of respondents in 2022, which is a slight decrease compared to 2019 when it was 15.7%. In terms of tourism, the aforementioned motive can be supplemented by elements of high importance for the presentation and preservation of the cultural heritage and heritage of the destination, such as gastronomy, which is a significantly more prevalent motive for tourist arrival in 2022 compared to 2019 (11% vs. 6.6%) and visits to villages and rural areas (7.8% in 2022 compared to 9.6% in 2019). Interest in heritage elements is very significant and constitutes an important motive for the arrival of tourists in continental Croatia.

In the top ten reasons for visiting tourist destinations in continental Croatia in 2019, according to the TOMAS survey, visits to events and celebrations (6.3%) were also among the reasons (4,4% in 2020). From the above, it can be concluded that the reasons for tourists' arrival are changing, as is the demand for elements of cultural heritage. There are numerous opportunities for improving the tourism offer based on heritage, which should be designed in such a way that it becomes a creator of tourist demand and therefore a reason for tourists to come to a destination in continental Croatia.

4. Tourist activities and tourist satisfaction in destinations in continental Croatia based on cultural tourism

Tourist activities in a tourist destination encompass everything visitors can do, from classic sightseeing (cultural, historical, natural sites) to specialized niches such as gastronomy (wine tasting, local cuisine) and adventure (hiking, rafting, diving), and also include events (festivals, concerts), wellness, shopping, and unique experiences.
Tourists staying in continental Croatia participate in numerous activities during their vacation. From the perspective of cultural tourism, in the author's opinion, the most significant activities are: (Institute for Tourism, 2020,38; 2023,40).

Table 2. Tourist activities in continental Croatia

Activities	2019	2022	Change
City sightseeing	40.4	49.6	9.2
Visiting historical buildings	23.7	17.5	-6.2
Visiting museums, galleries and exhibitions	22.5	25.0	2.5
Visiting entertainment events	6.7	4.4	-2.3
Touring thematic roads	2.8	1.5	-1.3
Visiting traditional events	5.8	1.8	-4.0
Visiting cultural events	4.5	3.5	-1.0
Visiting Christmas/Advent fairs	6.2	5.0	-1.2

Source: Institute for Tourism (2020,38; 2023,40)

The authors consider that the above elements of tourist activities form the basis for creating a unique cultural tourism product of continental Croatia. In addition to the above activities, numerous others can be added when forming tourist offer. For this to be possible, it is necessary for all stakeholders to actively participate in researching the needs and desires of modern tourists in order to provide them with a unique tourist experience in continental Croatia.

Tourist satisfaction with the cultural tourism offering in continental Croatia

Tourist satisfaction can be defined as an individual's cognitive-affective state based on the tourist experience (del Bosque and San Martin, 2008, 553). Tourist satisfaction with the tourism offer of continental Croatia indicates the determinants of service quality, destination image, motivation and perceived value of the tourist experience (Mathis et al., 2016). Travel satisfaction assessment is the final stage of the travel planning and purchasing process. After staying in a destination in continental Croatia, tourists make a judgment about the destination's tourism product, including the quality of the tourism offer based on cultural heritage and heritage (Gundersen et al., 1996). By expressing the level of satisfaction, tourists assess whether products or services have met their needs and expectations (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). Evaluating tourist satisfaction with the offer of continental Croatia is of crucial importance for the future and desired tourism development on the supply side, and on the demand side it is of exceptional importance for the future tourism activities of tourists (demand) because the experience (positive or negative) remains permanently recorded in the cognitive consciousness of tourists and becomes a credible source of information in future travel planning processes.

The goal of every tourist product, including the one of continental Croatia based on cultural heritage, is to create and offer a unique set of tourist products that will achieve lasting customer satisfaction, in order to create long-term tourist loyalty to the tourist product of continental Croatia (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

In order to investigate satisfaction with individual elements of cultural heritage, the authors identified several key factors that influence satisfaction with the offer of tangible and intangible heritage content in a destination's tourism product.

Table 3. Satisfaction with the cultural tourism offer in continental Croatia

Elements	2019	2022	Change
Atmosphere, ambience	88.2	92.8	4.6
Hospitality of the local population	99.1	92.6	-6.5
Gastronomic offer in the place	82.7	90.6	7.9
Landmarking	79.6	85.5	5.9
Culture and art	82.7	91.4	8.7
Events and manifestations	61.8	82.2	20.4

Source: Institute for Tourism (2020,40; 2023, 43)

The authors argue that the satisfaction of tourists visiting continental Croatia is significantly influenced by the atmosphere and ambiance of the destination (92.8%) and the hospitality of the local population (92.6%), which represents a kind of intangible heritage of the destination, complemented by the gastronomic offer in the destination (90.6%). In terms of cultural infrastructure, tourists from continental Croatia are very satisfied with the marking of landmarks (85.5%), the offer of cultural and artistic content (91.4%), and events and manifestations (82.2%). If we compare the indicators of 2022 with 2019, the level of tourist satisfaction is increasing in almost all observed elements. The most significant growth was recorded in the indicators of events and manifestations (82.2% in 2022 vs 61.8% in 2019), marking of landmarks (85.5% in 2022 VS 79.6% in 2019), while a decrease in satisfaction was recorded in the indicator of the hospitality of the local population (92.6% in 2022 vs 99.1% in 2019), which is not a favorable indicator, given that modern tourists want to get to know the local community and its way of life during their stay.

The overall experience of tourists and their satisfaction with heritage elements is influenced by a significant number of factors, from tangible elements of the offer, the service provided, the expectations, behavior and attitudes of the tourists themselves to a whole series of uncontrolled variables, such as crowds during sightseeing, crowds on access roads, good or bad weather, etc. (Vrtiprah, 2006).

From the previously conducted S.W.O.T. analysis of cultural tourism offers in continental Croatia; it can be concluded that continental Croatia has not fully utilized the considerable potential it possesses in the development of tourism as a complementary activity to culture and heritage. This is evidenced by the previously mentioned research conducted by the Institute of Tourism in Zagreb (2008,2020,2023) as well as numerous scientists such as Rudan & Drpić (2019), Rudan et al. (2025), Drpić et al (2018), etc …

The lack of experts (from all domains important for tourism development), knowledge and skills, demographic problems and low awareness of the importance of heritage preservation (Rudan, Zadel, Agbaba, 2025) in continental Croatia significantly affect the reduction of its competitive advantages in the tourism market (. A more significant involvement of all stakeholders in creating a new and innovative approach to the development of the cultural tourism product of continental Croatia represents one of the main development opportunities for creating a unique and unrepeatable tourist offer. The development of cultural routes, and their integration with food and wine and tradition, represents a key direction for improving the competitiveness of continental Croatia (Babić, 2021), as well as innovative interpretive content, digitalization and the involvement of local residents in creating the tourist offer. The development of cultural routes, and their integration with food and wine and tradition, represents a key direction for improving the competitiveness of continental Croatia (Babić, 2021), as well as innovative interpretive content, digitalization and the involvement of local residents in creating the tourist offer.

Table 4. SWOT analysis of cultural tourism in continental Croatia

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
– proximity to emitting tourist markets – transport connections (road traffic) – significant degree of preservation of heritage sites – growth of tourist interest in heritage elements in Europe and the world – safety	– lack of cooperation between the tourism and cultural sectors – insufficient level of knowledge of all stakeholders – numerous tangible forms of heritage are neglected and unmaintained – unclear development perspective of cultural tourism in the Republic of Croatia – failure to recognize tourism as a possible element for creating sustainable programs for the revitalization of heritage – outdated programs for the presentation of content
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
– inclusion of continental Croatia's cultural tourism offers in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes – nomination of rural areas rich in cultural heritage for the UN Tourism Best Villages award – creation of new and innovative tourism products based on the postulates of sustainability and creative tourism – nomination of projects for the restoration of material heritage elements for financing from EU cohesion funds – creation of a quality system for the Croatian cultural tourism offers – interpretation of heritage	– depopulation – disappearance of intangible heritage elements – degradation and destruction of tangible heritage elements – strong competition from surrounding destinations – security risks – misunderstanding of local, regional and national authorities – value for money

Source: Author's creation

From the previously conducted S.W.O.T. analysis of cultural tourism offers in continental Croatia; it can be concluded that continental Croatia has not fully utilized the considerable potential it possesses in the development of tourism as a complementary activity to culture and heritage. This is evidenced by the previously mentioned research conducted by the Institute of Tourism in Zagreb (2008,2020,2023) as well as numerous scientists such as Rudan & Drpić (2019), Rudan et al. (2025), Drpić et al (2018), etc …

The lack of experts (from all domains important for tourism development), knowledge and skills, demographic problems and low awareness of the importance of heritage preservation (Rudan, Zadel, Agbaba, 2025) in continental Croatia significantly affect the reduction of its competitive advantages in the tourism market (. A more significant involvement of all stakeholders in creating a new and innovative approach to the development of the cultural tourism product of continental Croatia represents one of the main development opportunities for creating a unique and unrepeatable tourist offer. The development of cultural routes, and their integration with food and wine and tradition, represents a key direction for improving the competitiveness of continental Croatia (Babić, 2021), as well as innovative interpretive content, digitalization and the involvement of local residents in creating the tourist offer. The development of cultural routes, and their integration with food and wine and tradition, represents a key direction for improving the competitiveness of continental Croatia (Babić, 2021), as well as innovative interpretive content, digitalization and the involvement of local residents in creating the tourist offer.

5. Guidelines for further development of cultural tourism offering in continental Croatia

Contemporary tourist demand is increasingly heterogeneous, tourists are looking for unique experiences based on getting to know the tradition and local way of life, a part of which they want to become during their trip. According to the author Duda (2023), there are numerous challenges faced by tourism providers in modern cultural tourism destinations. In order to satisfy contemporary tourist demand with their products:

- enable individual visits to heritage sites;
- create an appropriate organizational and information infrastructure related to the visited location, the product is fully based on the local/regional cultural heritage, explaining its importance for the development of the region, its specificity and uniqueness in relation to neighboring cultural regions; demonstrating its value in the context of the social and historical development of the region,
- creating stories, which will at the same time be part of the appropriate interpretation of the place, keeping in mind that information itself is not yet an interpretation – it is only a certain discovery, revelation, based on a layer of information (according to one of the principles of interpretation by Freeman Tilden – 1957),
- allow an individual approach to each visitor (participant in heritage interpretation – the story should be adapted to the visitor's age, knowledge, interests, desire to learn about and understand the heritage site,

- breaking down intercultural, interreligious, linguistic or social barriers between different stakeholders, especially those with different viewpoints resulting from unfavorable historical and political relations (states, wars, regimes); building an appropriate narrative in cross-border areas that are areas of shared cultural heritage,
- create activities and actions that involve the recipient (visitor, tourist) in the process of interpreting the place – using dialogue, joint discussions, games or narrative tours,
- activities aimed at understanding the meaning of the visited space by the visitor. All stages of interpretation should aim to develop a dialogue between the space and the visitor; contentious issues should be clarified and coherent issues strengthened.

The previously mentioned guidelines for a modern approach to including heritage elements in a tourist product based on heritage interpretation must also be applied to the formation of a tourist product of cultural tourism in continental Croatia.

Based on the presented S.W.O.T. analysis and data on the satisfaction of visitors to continental Croatia with cultural and heritage attractions, the following guidelines for further sustainable development and valorization of heritage in/through tourism can be determined:

- determine the elements of the tourist offer that need to be systematically developed and improved with the aim of achieving sustainable development of the destination and preservation and improvement of heritage elements.
- determine the quality standards that will be used to quantitatively and above all qualitatively evaluate the quality of the offer of cultural tourism in continental Croatia in a unique way.
- to adopt a new development strategy for cultural tourism in the Republic of Croatia, which would take into account new trends in the tourism market, especially in the use of modern information technologies in the planning, promotion and implementation of cultural tourism products themselves.
- strengthen educational efforts of all cultural tourism stakeholders directed towards the local community
- raising awareness of the need to preserve and clearly present identity as an integral and indivisible element of the cultural tourism offer
- determining clear guidelines for the sustainable inclusion of heritage elements in the tourism product (tangible and intangible)
- incorporating the interpretation of heritage elements wherever possible.

Based on the above presented, it is possible to develop a plan of activities that need to be implemented in creating unique tourist events based on heritage elements with the aim of preserving the identity of the local community and creating fundamental competitive advantages in an increasingly demanding and heterogeneous tourist market.

Table 5. Possible implementation activities in the development of cultural tourism in continental Croatia

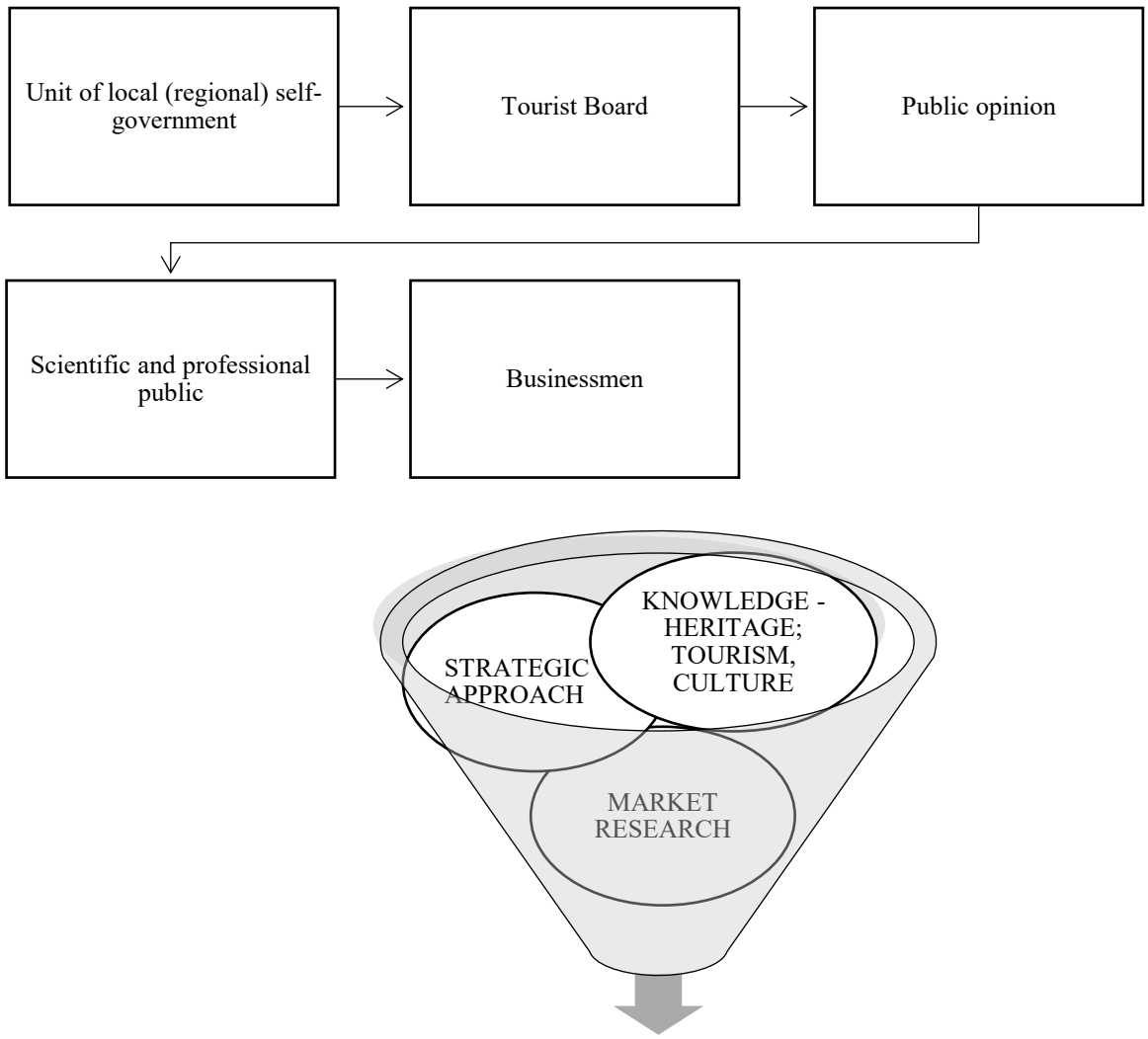
Activity	Performer	Implementation deadline
Creating a new development strategy for cultural tourism in the Republic of Croatia	Government and relevant ministries	1 year
Creating a development strategy for cultural tourism in continental Croatia	Counties and Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Culture and Media	1 year
Implementation of modern technologies (mobile application based on gamification) for the promotion of the cultural heritage of continental Croatia	Counties, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Culture and Media, local TZ	2 years
Education and workshops for all stakeholders participating in the creation of the cultural tourism product of continental Croatia	Scientists, practitioners	Continuously
Introduction of a system for standardizing products and services in cultural tourism in continental Croatia	Experts, scientists, ministries.	1 year / Continuously
Određivanje pokazatelja koji će se redovito pratiti i o kojima će se redovito izvještavati zainteresirana javnost	Experts, scientists, Ministries, Institute of Tourism, Institute of Economics, Scientific institutions	1 year / Continuously

*author's assessment based on available data collected through desk research and Drpic, Rudan 2019.
Source: Author's creation

The table above shows some of the basic activities that need to be carried out in order to create a sustainable cultural tourism product for continental Croatia. It is necessary to create a unique development strategy for cultural tourism in Croatia, set clear standards for monitoring the success of cultural tourism, and arouse interest in the preservation and tourism valorization of heritage among interested stakeholders in the local community through ongoing educational activities carried out by people with a high level of scientific and professional knowledge with the aim of creating a unique, unrepeatable and highly valuable tourism product based on heritage as the foundation for the preservation and development of the (European) identity of the local community.

The following is an overview of the process of designing a unique cultural tourism product for continental Croatia, which aims to create a unique and top-notch tourist offer based on cultural heritage and inheritance (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. CoolCulConCro – the process of creating a unique tourism product for continental Croatia



Source: Author's interpretation

The process of creating a unique tourism product for continental Croatia is a complex process that requires the involvement of all interested stakeholders, including local authorities, local communities, business people, scientists and experts in the fields of tourism, culture, and numerous other stakeholders, in order to make the process of creating a unique and unrepeatable experience of heritage elements through a tourism product possible (Drpić, Rudan, 2019). The process should be based on prior market research and knowledge of the factors that influence tourism demand in order to meet the needs of modern tourists and ensure their loyalty and return to the destination in continental Croatia, thereby ensuring long-term sustainable development, economic sustainability, demographic renewal, and complete tourism transformation.

6. Conclusion

Cultural heritage is the basis for creating an innovative and unique tourism product that largely meets the needs of modern tourists who want to experience the specifics of local culture, get to know the traditional way of life of the local population and become an integral part of the community by visiting a destination. Tourists will transfer the experience they have in the destination to their place of permanent residence, and some determinants of local culture will certainly become part of their new "upgraded" culture. Stakeholders in the cultural tourism of continental Croatia should first of all determine

clear development guidelines and standards for evaluating the offer of cultural tourism, so that they can more easily determine the shortcomings of the existing offer and the necessary corrective actions that should be implemented in order to increase the competitive advantage of the tourist product, increase satisfaction with the visit and strengthen the identity of the local community of continental Croatia. By fulfilling the presented guidelines in the paper and including all stakeholders presented in the CoolCulCoCro project in the planning process, the desired result of creating a unique, unrepeatable and highly valuable tourism product based on heritage as the foundation for preserving and building the (European) identity of the local community will be achieved. In order to create a tourism product for continental Croatia based on cultural heritage and inheritance, it is necessary to conduct systematic research on the tourism market in the future with a special emphasis on the motives of tourist visits and satisfaction with the existing offer, while recognizing the views of the local community and all stakeholders in the destinations of continental Croatia, whose level of satisfaction is the basis for creating a new, sustainable and competitive tourism offer for this area of the Republic of Croatia.

References

Alén, E., Losada, N., & de Carlos, P. (2017). Profiling the segments of senior tourists through motivation and travel characteristics. *Current Issues in Tourism, 20*(14). https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2015.1007927

Bartoluci, M., Hendija, Z., & Petračić, M. (2015). Possibilities of sustainable development of rural tourism in continental Croatia. *Acta Turistica, 27*(2), 191–219.

Beck, R. C. (2003). *Motivacija: Teorija i načela*. Slap.

Božić, S., Kennell, J., Vujičić, M. D., & Jovanović, T. (2017). Urban tourist motivations: Why visit Ljubljana? *International Journal of Tourism Cities, 3*(4), 382–398. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-03-2017-0012

Chen, J. S., Huang, Y. C., & Cheng, J. S. (2009). Vacation lifestyle and travel behaviors. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 26*(5–6), 494–506. https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400903163038

Cerović, Z. (2008). *Animacija u turizmu*. Fakultet za menadžment u turizmu i ugostiteljstvu.

del Bosque, I. R., & San Martín, H. (2008). Tourist satisfaction: A cognitive-affective model. *Annals of Tourism Research, 35*(2), 551–573. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2008.02.006

Dredge, D., et al. (2019). *Digitalisation in tourism: In-depth analysis of challenges and opportunities*. https://ehrl.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Digitalisation-in-Tourism-Report-2018.pdf

Drpić, D., & Rudan, E. (2019). Event competitiveness in heritage tourism in rural Croatia. *Academica Turistica, 12*(2), 161–172. https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.12.161-172

Drpić, D., Milenkovska Klimoska, A., & Milojica, V. (2018). Heritage as a factor of achieving competitive cultural tourism offer of the Republic of Croatia. In *Proceedings of ICESOS'18* (pp. 253–264).

Dryglas, D., & Salamaga, M. (2017). Applying destination attribute segmentation to health tourists: A case study of Polish spa resorts. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 34*(4), 503–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2016.1193102

Duda, T. (2023). More regionality than globality: New trends and challenges of contemporary cultural tourism. *European Research Studies Journal, 26*(4), 27–34.

D'Urso, P., De Giovanni, L., Disegna, M., & Massari, R. (2013). Bagged clustering and its application to tourism market segmentation. *Expert Systems with Applications, 40*(12), 4944–4956. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2013.03.005

Golja, T., & Lekić, R. (2020). Destinacijski menadžment u funkciji razvoja kulturnog turizma kontinentalne Hrvatske – primjer destinacije Križevci. *Studia Polensia, 9*(1), 103–141. https://doi.org/10.32728/studpol/2020.09.01.06

González-Reverté, F. (2019). Building sustainable smart destinations: An approach based on the development of Spanish smart tourism plans. *Sustainability, 11*, 6874. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236874

Gundersen, M. G., Heide, M., & Olsson, U. H. (1996). Hotel guest satisfaction among business travelers: What are the important factors? *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, 37*(2), 72–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/001088049603700222

Hristov, D. (2015). Tourism versus the visitor economy and the shifting landscape of destination management. *Tourismos, 10*(1), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.26215/tourismos.v10i1.435

Hritz, N. M., Sidman, C. L., & D'Abundo, M. (2014). Segmenting the college-educated generation Y health and wellness traveler. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 31*(1), 132–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2014.861727

Institut za turizam. (2020). *Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj: TOMAS Hrvatska 2019*.

Institut za turizam. (2023). *Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj: TOMAS Hrvatska 2022/2023*.

Jelinčić, D. A. (2008). Cultural tourism in Croatia and some European countries: Recommendations for sustainable development. *Croatian International Relations Review, 16*(50/51), 11–15.

Jelinčić, D. A. (2010). *Kultura u izlogu: Kratki vodič za upravljanje kulturnim dobrima*. Meandarmedia.

Krajnović, A., Raguž, I., & Gortan-Carlin, I. (2020). Strategic management and demarketing in UNESCO WHSs. *Bulletin of Geography: Socio-economic Series, 48*, 113–128. https://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2020-0016

Mathis, E. F., Kim, H. L., Uysal, M., Sirgy, J. M., & Prebensen, N. K. (2016). The effect of co-creation experience on outcome variables. *Annals of Tourism Research, 57*, 62–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.11.023

Menor-Campos, A., Fuentes Jiménez, P. A., Romero-Montoya, M. E., & López-Guzmán, T. (2020). Segmentation and sociodemographic profile of heritage tourists. *Tourism and Hospitality Management, 26*(1), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.26.1.7

Milohnić, I., & Drpić, D. (2022). Interrelations between the quality of facilities and visitor satisfaction. In *RED 2022 Proceedings* (pp. 504–518).

Pasca, M. G., Renzi, M. F., Di Pietro, L., & Guglielmetti Mugion, R. (2021). Gamification in tourism and hospitality research. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice, 31*(5), 691–737. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-05-2020-0094

Pesonen, J. A. (2014). Testing segment stability: Insights from a rural tourism study. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 31*(6), 697–711. https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2014.884965

Pesonen, J., Komppula, R., Kronenberg, C., & Peters, M. (2011). Understanding the relationship between push and pull motivations. *Tourism Review, 66*(3), 32–49. https://doi.org/10.1108/16605371111117531

Petrić, L. (2006). Izazovi razvoja ruralnog turizma. *Acta Turistica, 8*(2), 138–170.
Rudan, E., Zadel, Z., & Agbaba, R. (2025). Tourism and sustainable development in the Croatia–Slovenia cross-border rural area. *Sustainability, 17*(24), 11345. https://doi.org/10.3390/su172411345
Ružić, P. (2009). *Ruralni turizam*. Institut za poljoprivredu i turizam.
Seebaluck, N. V., Munhurrun, P. R., Naidoo, P., & Rughoonauth, P. (2015). Push and pull motives for choosing Mauritius. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 175*, 201–209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.1192
Solomon, M. R., Bamossy, G., Askegaard, S., & Hogg, M. K. (2015). *Ponašanje potrošača: Europska slika* (4th ed.). Mate.
Stylidis, D., Sit, J., & Biran, A. (2018). Residents' place image. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 35*(6), 715–725. https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2018.1425176
Tilden, F. (1957). *Interpreting our heritage*. University of North Carolina Press.
UN Tourism. (2025). *International tourism up 5% in first half of 2025.* https://www.untourism.int/news/international-tourism-up-5-in-first-half-of-2025-despite-global-challenges
Vlada Republike Hrvatske. (2022). *Strategija razvoja održivog turizma do 2030.* https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2023_01_2_18.html
World Tourism Organization. (2019). *UNWTO guidelines for institutional strengthening of DMOs*. https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420841
Yoon, Y., & Uysal, M. (2005). Effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty. *Tourism Management, 26*(1), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2003.08.016
Zeithaml, V. A., & Bitner, M. J. (2003). *Services marketing: Integrated customer focus across the firm* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.