

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF HOTEL OFFER – CASE STUDY ISTRA COUNTY

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### **Abstract**

The aims of this paper are to analyse the current hotel offer in Istria County, to define goals and means for improving operational strategies for sustainable development in order to achieve competitive advantage in challenging turbulent markets. Research methods include interviews and questionnaires. Hotel managers and tourists are asked to define the competitiveness of existing offer and to predict future development based on principles of sustainable development. Authors' arguments, proposals and scenario analyses are also presented in the paper. The paper critically compares guidelines of contemporary and future business strategies in selected and representative hotel companies in Istria (comparison of business activities, defining goals, distinguishing and promoting the offer in order to improve the vision of the destination, emphasising unique advantages, orientation towards sustainable development). The influence of integration into brand companies (a comparison of Arenaturist, d.d. before and after integration into Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts) as an impetus for qualitative response to globalisation processes (synergy of localisation, globalisation and sustainable development) as well as the effect and implementation on sustainable development and the eco-oriented business philosophy on the competitiveness and repositioning of Istrian tourism and hotel industry are analysed. Research results are compared with the results obtained by other authors (a comparison of hotel offer in Croatia with other developed countries).

In economic crisis conditions, qualitative advantages, innovation and uniqueness of the destination and the hotel offer (examples are set by leading receptive destinations) which are based on valorisation (not destruction) of natural resources and cultural wealth become key variables for destination choice.

The research raises new questions, but it also provides qualitative solutions (a contribution to existing studies and research) for the transformation of tourism and hotel industry in Istria, emphasising the necessity for continuous improvement and optimisation of all segments of tourist and hotel offer.

**Keywords** hotel industry, development concept, branding, Istria, sustainable development

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