

# From Genuine 'Greenery,' Tradition, . . . , to Rural Tourism

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Individual business ideas are, besides courage and a favourable business environment, the essence of rural tourism development. Local, regional, national and international funds undoubtedly help to realize ideas as well as create entrepreneurially friendly business environments. Thus, many private initiatives and training opportunities for established entrepreneurs and beginners are supported. This way unspoiled nature and many examples of fascinating (autochthonous) traditions could be economically valorised, which means for a certain price offered to visitors/tourists: traditional customs and events, cuisine and other examples of tangible and intangible heritage as well as diversity of landscape (including cultural landscape), abundant animal and plant life, various habitat types, and diverse geography. In this special issue, some socio-cultural and economic topics of rural tourism are highlighted.

Kavrečič and Hrobat Virloget, in their ethnological research, focused on traditional festivities of the countywide. They investigated how people of North Istria perceive local intangible heritage. The results show that a significant element of the break of the tradition of *šagre* (a typical Istrian village event/festival) can be found in the massive post-WWII migrations in the rural part of Istria. It has also been shown how vital for the tradition to survive is its adaptation to the contemporary needs of the present and, this way, these events are already linking to the so-called special interest tourism. However, local people do differentiate between traditional *šagra* and the contemporary 'massive' events that are more tourist-oriented. This means that they offer thematic products to tourists/visitors,

which include the presentation of 'olden days' customs, dresses etc. that represent a 'staged authenticity.'

Similarly, Drpić and Rudan focused on a heritage-based event, but in continental Croatia (Slavonia). Đakovo Embroidery Festival, significantly marked by rural character, is considered more from a commercial tourism perspective; issues related to the promotion (of Croatian rural destinations), respecting their characteristics (quality) and uniqueness are at the forefront of research (including empirical analysis). In order to increase/promote competitiveness of heritage-based cultural events of rural areas, the authors suggest an event certification model – CroRuralisHeritage Awards Certification Model – which includes three dimensions: heritage (tangible and intangible), event (Đakovo Embroidery), and rural destination (Đakovo). The proposed model should find its place in the pool of all possible models focused on assessing and thus promoting different types of rural tourism and their quality.

Memorial heritage, which is considered as a distinct type of heritage, also attracts people. Memorial sites as well as memorial events (commemorations), also called 'dark events,' reflect past traumatic events in the present time. In this context, Šuligoj investigated the media-constructed social reality related to dark events in the countryside of the trans-border region of Istria. World War II, as that events' historical background, dominates in all areas of Istrian countryside. Events, according to media, mostly occurred at memorials or internment sites. To some extent, this research complements the research of Kavrečič and Hrobat Virloget in a substantive way. Although, since it is

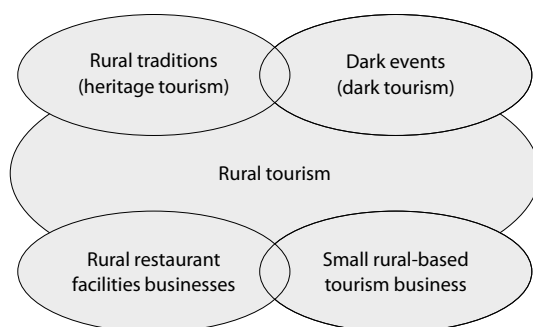


Figure 1 Thematic Structure of the Special Issue

focused on tourist exploitation, it is in this sense more related to the research of Drpić and Rudan.

Research in which rural tourism is linked or illuminated in a socio-cultural context is followed by research in which tourism is considered as an economic (or entrepreneurial) activity. Interesting research has been carried out in a particular socio-economic environment, in the post-conflict laggard economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the development of rural tourism has a different dynamic. Their evolving practices should be of interest at least to other developing countries in the wider region or elsewhere. Thus research obtains a sense of the policies/programmes that foster the growth of these types of places. Činjarević, Peštek, and Tufo, in this context, find that local providers (small rural-based tourism business) seem to have an entrepreneurial and professional attitude toward marketing actions. Their businesses promote the outstanding natural beauty to visitors, where, according to findings of abovementioned authors, the following themes can be extracted: product variety, the authenticity of experience, marketing capabilities, and business challenges.

The paper of Planinc and Kukanja has an entirely different focus with an analysis of efficiency performance of restaurants operating in the rural areas of Slovenia (the OECD and EU member state has development problems in rural areas). The authors establish that the identified lower average efficiency score is not in line with other studies of restaurant efficiency. They justify this result as being a consequence of a rural environment that is significantly different from the ur-

ban environment (or the established tourist centres), which means that the paper contributes to the growing body of literature in the field of restaurant efficiency measurement. In their second paper, the same authors investigate service quality using the DINESERV tool in restaurants operating in the rural area of Slovenian Istria. Research results indicate that restaurant managers in rural areas should emphasise the importance of the two identified quality dimensions:

1. Empathy, Responsiveness, and Assurance (ERA), and
2. Tangibles.

These findings should interest not only restaurant managers but also destination managers, who systematically work on destination quality and development strategies (not only in Slovenian Istria).

The set of topics in this special issue consists of four areas, as shown in Figure 1. Trendy sustainability is not in the forefront but is not completely ignored. An especially natural environment (merely symbolically marked in the title as 'greenery'), one of fundamental pillars of rural tourism, is not discussed in the context of (natural) sustainability. Interestingly, authors have thoroughly discussed the practices of some post-Yugoslav countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), mainly in ethnically mixed areas (Istria, Slavonia and state of Bosnia and Herzegovina). It should not be neglected that, from the tourism perspective, cultural diversity is a relevant circumstance and potential for tourism development, also in the often forgotten rural areas.

The last three articles that are not a part of the thematic issue. They have been included in this issue as they were accepted after the end of the previous editorial.



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