

ORNELLA ALBOLINO

THE TOURISM IN CROATIA: POLITICS, PROJECTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Abstract - The paper aims to consider the development and evolution of the tourism in Croatia and its economic and social impact. Croatia can be considered an interesting case study dealing with the relationship between tourism and sustainable development. In particular a special focus on local specificities seems to be present in policy planning and project implementation. Even if seaside tourism is prevailing, initiatives towards sustainability are concentrated on environmental, rural and cultural tourism. The Country is characterized by wide variety and rich cultural heritage and tourism development is one of the most Croatian important economic activity. Now there are many institutional documents for a sustainable tourism development but those plans are not followed by appropriate implementation instruments. Actually a coordinated and integrated sustainable tourism planning at national scale is absent. At local level, counties and Tourist offices show instead great attention to sustainability, creating projects for the development of rural and insular tourism. A particular example is the County of Istria: it is not characterized by seasonal tourism and it is able to promote an integrated tourism development.

Regions and types of tourism - This paper (*) is meant to analyze the development and evolution of the tourist sector in Croatia, also with reference to the latest policy planning concerning environmental sustainability. Croatia can be considered an interesting case study on the relationship between tourism and sustainable development. In particular, a special attention to local specificities seems to be present in policy planning and project implementation. Even if the seaside tourism is prevailing, initiatives towards sustainability are concentrated on environmental, rural and cultural tourism.

In the model of the socialist Yugoslav republic, Croatia – particularly in its coasts – represented one of the windows of prestige of the state led by Tito (Prevelakis, 1994). After independence (1991) and the tragic events of the war, Croatia has overlooked the Mediterranean tourism market picking up the legacy of a planned model, in which the domestic tourism was already side by side with the international one, but there was not the strong speculation on the coastal areas that was typical of other Mediterranean countries. So, starting from the nineties, in the context of market economy and a rapid and significant development of tourism, which brings the country to deal directly with other Mediterranean competitors, sustainability policies take much more value because they are directed to protect an environmental, historical and architectural heritage of absolute originality. A fortiori, since if we consider that the target audience of Croatian tourism comes from continental Europe.

On a general economic scale, during 2012, on the eve of EU accession, the country has one of the lowest GDP per capita (39% lower than the EU average) and the unemployment rate around 17% (with peaks of 50% through the youths)¹.

The construction of the independent State and the situation of instability and war, born from 1991 to 1995, have represented for Croatia a handicap that has enabled it to keep the pace of neighboring countries such as Hungary and Slovenia; its population, which at independence was over 4,5 million, has been reduced in a few years to 200 thousand units, for the expulsion of the Serbs from the border regions. The situation began to improve in the early twenty-first century, when the country at annual rates of between 3 and 5%, increase foreign investment and expanding the tourism sector.

In 2006-2007, the best performance was concerned with the industrial production (the leading sector was the food industry) and with the international trade. In 2008, it gets worse: in the following two years the country lost 7,2 percentage points of GDP and, even if from 2010 there are encouraging signs, the recession is still going on. In 2011, the only active sector is the tourism, which shows a total increase of 8% over the previous year. Essentially, Croatia is still living a transition phase: its economy still relies on a cumbersome and inefficient public sector, not balanced adequately by a widespread productive reality; few large private companies operate in the agri-food sector while the banking sector is mainly in the hands of Italian, Austrian and Hungarian banks. The public debt is increasing and, even if some changes to the fiscal system are expected, there is a very strong dependence on the euro area (MAE, 2013). Then, tourism is an important sector of the Croatian economy.

Focusing on tourism, the country is divided into four major regions: Istria, Kvarner and the mountain zone, the continental Croatia (including Zagreb, Central Croatia and Slavonia), Dalmatia, Zadar divided into the regions of Zadar, Split, Sibenik and Dubrovnik (fig. 1).

The main destination of the tourism is the Adriatic coast, divided into the northern and southern coast. Its accessibility, the rich environmental, artistic and cultural heritages, a better climate – less sultry than Dalmatia – make Istria the most renowned and visited area. While representing only 11% of the whole Croatian territory, it is well connected to the major European networks and it is a region of ancient traditions, that houses 50% of the tourists and has 31% of the receptive offer: along the west coasts there is the highest concentration of the main flows from northern and central Europe, heading to the town of Umag, Novigrad, Porec, Rovinj, Pula, Brijuni. Conversely, the east coast is a less desirable destination, also because it is barely accessible: areas along the channel of Rasa and Plomin are exceptions to that.

(*)The abstract of this article was presented in August 2012 at the 32nd International Geographical Congress in Cologne, session *Tourism and sustainability*. The bibliography has been supplemented by data available on the websites of government institutions (such as the Institute for Tourism, the National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of tourism and environment), of the various regions and their tourism boards, well structured and rich in content.

¹ Croatia became the 28th member of the EU on 1 July 2013.



Fig. 1 – Croatian tourist regions

Source: adapted from dominicus.malleotus.free.fr/croatie/lang_it/informations_touristiques.htm

The internal area of Istria, characterized by a hilly landscape, has a predominantly hiking tourism, linked to well-being, and the transit tourism². Localities of particular interest are the SPAs and the towns of Pazin, Motovun – medieval town that, like Pola, hold a major film festival – and Buzet, known for discoveries dated back to the paleobyzantine era. In this area developed forms of cultural tourism, rural, food and wine are developed, thanks to the presence of numerous farm holidays facilities and wine roads.

The Kvarner region covers the area that goes from the Istrian coasts up to the Velebit Mountain: it is characterized by a good network of connections, it hosts about a quarter of the tourists who visit the country, thanks to the fact that here there are concentrated renewed islands and an interesting cultural heritage; to strengthen that there is a significant development of nautical tourism. On the back of Kvarner and Northern Dalmatia, a mountainous area goes from the Slovenian border to the Bosnia

² The transit tourism involves the cities that they can count on the best road and airport, turning into a destination for day trips; not infrequently, however, this results in harmful ways of the «touch and go». To avoid the negative effects of the current policies promote incentives to lengthen stay.

Herzegovina, along the Una river. It represents a linking range between the Adriatic coast and the County of Zagreb, it is a densely wooded area with few urban centers. Seldom, tourists choose these places for long stays, even if the landscape and climate make them very similar to Switzerland. Here there are the Risnjak National Park and Plitvice Lakes, with the characteristics of tufa barriers and waterfalls.

In continental Croatia, that is the Pannonian and pre-Pannonian areas, divided into eight counties, there is the metropolitan area of Zagreb, densely populated (1,1 million inhab., of which 72% in the capital). Here the liveliness of the capital is the object of attraction for cultural, transit and hiking tourism, which is accompanied by a thermal areas into the inner areas. Although it is not yet goal of substantial tourist flows, it shows interesting prospective Slavonia, a hilly wine area, watered by Danube, Drava and the Sava.

Dalmatia is a unique area for its morphology and because of its socio-economic characteristics: particularly in the south, the rugged coastline, the typical Mediterranean villages, the many marinas are essential features. In the north, the region of Sibenik and Zadar have an enviable tourism potential, especially thanks to the landscape resources - five parks, two of which are on the islands. Among the most popular holiday destinations there is Zadar, the fifth largest city in Croatia by population (just over 75 000), which bases its economy on tourism and the naval industry and, since some years, is holds also an university.

The central Dalmatia, that is part of the Split-Dalmatia county, presents a tourist offer based on a diverse landscape and a rich historical and cultural heritage, mainly in Split³, Croatia's second city (about 179.000 inhab.), an important regional hub that is mainly transit, hiking and nautical tourism. The islands are still characterized by ancient traditions and famous wine tasting tours and they are served by frequent boat lines: Brac, which has, among other things, a small international airport near Bol; Hvar, once characterized by an important Italian community centres; the rocky Solta; Vis.

The Southern Dalmatia, which corresponds to the Dubrovnik-Neretva county, is characterized by widespread olive groves and a coastline rich in shorelines, inlets and bays; the main tourist centre is Dubrovnik (43.000 inhab.), whose old town, Unesco World Heritage Site, is frequently stay of cruises crossing the Mediterranean.

The attention that the Croatian state puts towards sustainable tourism development becomes evident thanks to the significant presence of protected areas: about 10% of the territory is protected for its geo-morphological features and cultural heritage (Frankic, 2005). Then, eight national parks were established (fig. 2): the first to be created was the National Park Plitvice Lakes, which became a World Heritage Site in 1979, with 16 lakes, between the mountains Mala Kapela and Plješivica, in the north-eastern part of Lika. At the moment it represents the first destination of the naturalistic tourism.

³ One example of that is the Diocletian palace in Split, Unesco World Heritage Site since 1979.



Fig. 2 – The main natural parks

Source: adapted from <http://www.turismocroazia.com/natura/parchi-croati.php>

In the north there is the Park North Velebit, known for trekking and horse riding, while Paklenica National Park broadens to the South and it is the favorite destination for mountaineers and hikers for its spectacular canyons. Here there are also the reserves Hajdukčki Rožanski, urbanized areas but threatened by the illegal construction of vacation homes.

In 1953 and in 1960, also the Risnjak, the Mljet and the Krka became National Parks. The Risnjak is an extended beech forest that occupies the western part of Gorski Kotar, dominated by Alpine flora and fauna and little known to mass tourism; the Mljet broadens to the north-west of the Mljet island; the Krka is characterized by interesting karst phenomena, a favorite destination of nature tourism.

Numerous Croatian islands are included in some National Parks: the Kornati National Park, established in 1980, consists of four islands and other islands in northern Dalmatia, as well as a large sea surface (more than 230 sq km); Brioni, born in 1983, is composed 14 small islands, such as the protected marine area on which they stand.

There are also many natural parks (Kopački rit, Medvednica, Biokovo, Telašćica, Papuk) and some of them are included in the Unesco network of geo-parks.

In Croatia tourism development has been a meaningful pattern since the 60s of the XX Century.

After the Second World War, despite the Yugoslavian socialism gave a great importance to the development of the heavy industry, tourism activities, and especially the hotel sector, was already accounted as a significant aspects of the Croatian economy; in addition to international tourism, the federal policy promoted also the domestic tourism⁴.

The decade 1965-1975 was characterized by a significant development, thanks to the completion of some important infrastructures: the airports of Pula, Split and Zadar; the Adriatic highway, the coastal road that crosses the main coastal cities; the tunnel under the mountain chain of Učka, that connects more effectively Istria to the country. At the same time, the awareness of the importance of a kind of tourism, which is related not only to the seaside, lead to the creation of the national parks of Plitvice (1960) and Risnjak (1963). All that reinforced the role of the country as a destination for the international tourist flows.

In the Eighties, with the economic and political crisis of the Yugoslav republic, even the tourism marked a setback; however, in short time, the situation improved so much that in 1985 there were over 10 million (68 million nights), to which 84% were foreigners; at the end of the decade, the accommodation offer could count on just under 1 million beds places⁵.

The establishment of the first airline in Croatia, Zagal (Zagreb Airlines) – that in 1990, became Croatia Airlines – gave new impulse to the tourism development.

From 1991 to 1995, the declaration of independence and the war with Serbia hindered the tourism sector, because the facilities and the transport infrastructures were often considered war targets, the so-called *soft targets*⁶. Generally, there is a drastic reduction of arrivals (-20%) and nights (15%); only Istria resists and in Dalmatia the nights decrease from 20 million in 1989 to 129 thousand in 1992 (Klarić, 2009).

Seaside tourism is still the main and the better organized activity: between June and September, over the 90% of nights was concentrated in the nine coastal counties and the regions of Zadar and Dubrovnik were the favourite destinations. For over 10 years the Croatian sea has attracted mostly German tourists, followed by Italian, Slovenian, Austrian and Czech tourists.

The nautical tourism sector has been continuously improving and after the war it has slowly renewed by the promotion of both the port facilities that the network connections, so that in the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century it invoiced more than 700 million Euros between direct and dependent activities⁷.

Naturism is very popular: it has been promoted since the Thirties of the Twentieth century and it's a well-established tradition that uses good facilities – as evidenced by the international attestation

⁴ In this period, the country had already 60% of the beds places of the whole federation.

⁵ In 1987 it was also founded the Institute for tourism, that promotes a periodic intense research on the development of the tourism sector.

⁶ It's easy to imagine that the war was had disastrous effects on incoming flows, with indirect consequences for tourism in neighboring countries. The mines in the area – since the beginning of the war of independence 2,000 deaths resulted – still today causes casualties. The Croatian Mine Action Centre estimate that on national territory there are more than 200,000 unexploded ordnance scattered throughout in fields that should be used for agriculture. On these issues and, in particular, on the relationship between war and tourism, see Undp, 2008.

⁷ Since the Seventies, thanks to the Adriatic Club Yugoslavia - today Adriatic Croatia International Club, with over twenty marinas along the coast and on the islands - Croatia has been at the forefront, organizing adequate facilities to accommodate tourists especially from neighboring countries.

received – protecting tourists and the environment. The country is followed by France – which has the widest range (at least 180 structures) – and it occupies the 20% of the European market. There are over 100 resorts, campsites and beach destinations⁸ of tourists from Germany, Austria and Italy. At the moment naturism receives special attention from the National Board for Croatian tourism.

It should be emphasized, however, that the growing needs of new tourist flows are encouraging widespread forms of cultural tourism and also of rural and ecotourism, even if not properly structured. The intense urbanization and the desertion of the internal areas have not encouraged the development of rural tourism but by the end of the Nineties there has been a growing interest for this kind of practice. Ecotourism spread but the lack of infrastructure and an appropriate organization to its development were the main obstacles, mainly because there are activities still strongly oriented to the beach tourism, because of its profits. However, it appears interesting the twinning that, since 1997, involves Istria and Tuscany, which aims to promote models and practices prevalent in the Italian region.

Analyzing the various types of the Croatian tourism and the national and supra-national policies a lack of policy coordination appears, even if the national government and, principally, the Ministry of Agriculture have promoted initiatives to give new impulse to the local economy and to reduce the depopulation that characterizes internal areas or small islands. A significant role is played by the Office and by the Council for Cultural Tourism, structures that define specific policies: they take care of training courses, of the organization of promotional campaigns and of the implementation of cultural programs and they coordinate the agencies involved to offer packages that promote cities of art, archaeological sites and other cultural attractions⁹.

In particular, the joint Action Promotion and enhancement of cultural, environmental and historical heritage between Istria and Varaždin is innovative. It is realized in the *SeeNet* framework¹⁰ and it proposes specific initiatives for the enhancement of the cultural, natural and historical heritage through a marketing strategy that involves the territories and their main actors.

Nowadays Istria is the only region that have started a program to compete at European level, by number of beds available and the presence of functional and well renovated accommodations. They pay attention to the protection of the environment and the quality of the service. The farm holiday is the most widely used service but there are also rural houses renovated *bed & breakfast* or small family hotel¹¹.

Tourist flows and Mediterranean competitiveness - It's with the creation of the new independent state that tourism received a new spurt, as it was considered as an integrated asset of the economic development of the Country (Hall, Smith, Marciszweska, 2006; Romita, 2010): in 1991 an *ad hoc* ministry was established and the *Master Plan of Croatian Tourism* was developed to outline the priorities of tourism development and to enhance the diversity of the offer. The focus is on whether to improve the

⁸ In 1961 Istrian Koversada was the first naturist campsite in Croatia and today it's one the first in Europe.

⁹ It was established the brand for quality in cultural tourism, called *Experience Croatia*, aimed to four specific categories: destination, institution, event and itinerary.

¹⁰ *SeeNet* is a three-year program of decentralized cooperation which brings together local Italians and south-eastern Europe institutions, in order to enhance the forms of territorial governance, promoting sustainable local development.

¹¹ The Stone lights project aims similar targets in order to renew and convert the Croatian lighthouses for tourism purposes: it promotes the so-called *Robinson tourism* to enhance an important cultural heritage (Opacic, Favro, Perisic, 2010).

abandoned countryside and so, initially in Istria, the first holiday farms were born, to give vitality to the local economy; although the main tourism is the seaside one.

Marketing campaigns promote a new image of Croatia - with its own strong identity, which completely differs from the old Yugoslav state - ensuring its repositioning in the safe countries: among the most famous advertising campaigns, in 2001, there was the slogan *Volim Hrvatsku* «I love Croatia», which focuses on the environmental protection and aims to educate to a responsible tourism. Later the Croatian national Tourist Board replaced the slogan *Small country for a great holiday* with *Mediterranean - as it once was*, emphasizing the Croatian cultural identity and presenting a pristine landscape, through a traditional lifestyle¹².

State also invests in infrastructure development, improving the road network which connects the centers of Zagreb, Rijeka, Zadar, Split and Sibenik¹³.

Although the numbers still do not reach the pre-war period, in 2000, the year of recovery, Croatia was the destination of more than 7 million visitors (more than 80% are foreigners), these values are almost doubled compared to 1996. Since the end of the conflict there has been a steady increase, so that in the years 2000-2010 there was an increase in tourism arrivals that exceed 60%. Since 2009, domestic tourism has decreased while the foreign tourists has still represented over 90% of admissions. Since the middle of the decade to 2012, despite the international crisis, nights and arrivals have showed a continuous increase (tab. 1).

Tab. 1- Tourist movement in Croatia (2000-2012)

Year	ARRIVALS			NIGHTS		
	Total	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	Total	Domestic tourists	Foreign Tourists
2000	7.137.000	1.305.000	5.832.000	38.405.930	5.098.522	33.307.408
2001	7.860.000	1.316.000	6.544.000	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.
2002	8.320.000	1.376.000	6.944.000	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.
2003	8.877.000	1.469.000	7.409.000	46.635.139	5.311.991	41.323.148
2004	9.412.000	1.500.000	7.912.000	47.797.287	5.280.962	42.516.325
2005	9.995.000	1.528.000	8.467.000	51.420.948	5.434.431	45.986.517
2006	10.385.000	1.726.000	8.659.000	53.006.946	5.985.002	47.021.944
2007	11.162.000	1.856.000	9.306.000	56.005.492	6.430.862	49.574.630
2008	11.260.807	1.845.702	9.415.105	57.103.494	6.477.972	50.625.522
2009	10.270.490	1.576.694	8.693.796	54.988.432	5.799.030	49.229.508
2010	10.604.116	1.493.374	9.110.742	56.416.379	5.424.058	50.992.321
2011	11.456.000	1.529.000	9.927.000	60.354.000	5.603.000	54.751.000
2012	11.835.000	1.466.000	10.369.000	62.743.000	5.221.000	57.522.000

Source: adapted from National Institute of Statistics and Istitute for tourism, different years

The tourists are mostly Germans (over 1,5 million, about 23% of the total), Slovenes, Italians, Austrians and Czechs who use to stay, on average, 3/5 nights. Hotel is the preferred accommodation

¹² While reiterating these elements, in 2012 the spot of the Croatian tourism presented to the international press five months ago is 'The new star on the European Union; it holds together the aspects of the next joining of Croatia to European union and the new role of the international tourist destinations.

¹³ In particular, the highway Zagreb-Split – nearly 400 km – completed in June 2005.

shortly followed by the campsite. The main destinations are the Plitvice lakes and the regions of Istria, Zadar, Dubrovnik.

Statistics from 2013 confirm, at least for attendances, a positive trend: 11,5 million arrivals and 69,3 admissions.

Although still considered an emerging destination in the Mediterranean Basin¹⁴, Croatia is one of the most dynamic tourist destinations for rapid growth: in 2005, due to the increase in flows, it preceded Syria (15,7%), Egypt (11,7%), Algeria and Turkey (little over 10%). In 2011, there was a further increase of 9% in arrivals and so Croatia approached or even exceeded the growth of countries such as Cyprus (+10,1%), Greece (+9,5%), Portugal (+7,3%), Spain (+7,6%) e Turkey (+8,7%), where tourism was already a consolidated sector¹⁵ (ONT, 2012a, p. 18).

In 2011, the Mediterranean region has been visited by 306 million tourists, although the effects of the economic crisis and the «arab spring» resulted in a redistribution of the flow, generally favoring the Europe and in particular Croatia. « [...] The destinations of the Middle East and North Africa have lost respectively about 31% and 10% of international tourist arrivals (11 million tourists in less than in 2010), while Europe has recorded an increase of 6.4% in terms of arrivals» (ONT, 2012b, p. 1). 88% of tourists in the Mediterranean (269 million) is directed to Europe: 71% to the so-called «advanced economies» and 17% to the «emerging». The main destinations were France (79 million), Spain (57), Italy (46), Turkey (29) and Greece (16). In contrast with other African countries, Morocco recorded an increase of 9%.

More than a quarter of the income generated by international tourism in 2011 – about € 300 billion – was produced in this area, which shows its role of impulse in terms of economic development and employment growth: the sector is on average 11 % of the GDP of the Mediterranean countries and in 2010 the workers were about 12% of the total region (Unwto, 2012).

In 2012, tourism in Croatia represents approximately 16% of GDP: for each year from 2008 to 2012, the income have been about € 6 billion; The industry employs more than 6% of the labor force, even if statistics from 2012 underline the paradox of a steady increase in tourist flows compared to a sharp decline of workers (EC, 2013).

The accommodation facilities have significant differences for each region, although, for about ten years, a steady improvement in the quality and an increase in the number of beds have affected the whole country. The accommodations are more and more diversified: big hotels and resorts, camping, hostels and the so-called *Robinson accommodation facilities*, an expression of «adventure tourism». Recently, the tourist hotels (632 hotels by 2012, more than 100.000 people) has been enhanced with high quality facilities even if sometimes the service is not in line to the proposed classification¹⁶.

The most popular Croatian hospitality is camping: campsites are mainly in coastal areas and for their development characteristics they in part contributed to the consolidation of the lower parts of the Croatian coast and campsites have also received awards for environmental protection and quality. In

¹⁴ Valérie Brun and Thierry Sebahg ranked the countries by size of tourist flows: «the group of 75» comprising France, Spain and Italy, which accounts for 75% of international tourists in the Mediterranean; «the high growth group» consisting of Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, with very high growth rates and a significant share of arrivals; the «convalescent group» – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories – has been or still is subject to major political and military tensions and these counties are faced with launching or re-launching their tourist activity; the «latent group» (Albania, Syria, Libya and Algeria): they are countries which are relatively closed to tourist development (Unep/Map/Plan Bleu, 2005 e 2009).

¹⁵ Also in other republics of former Yugoslavia, even if tourism is still limited, the arrivals show, in 2011, increases: Macedonia (25,1%), Serbia (11,9%), Montenegro (10,4%) and Bosnia (+7,2%).

¹⁶ The experience of Bale is also noteworthy: an Istrian town transformed in a widespread hotel.

2012 were surveyed over 500 camping sites – of which more than half were small family facilities – concentrated in Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia; they registered about 16 million overnights (25% of total), more than half in Istria¹⁷.

The presence of houses and rooms (*sobe*) offered privately in an informal way is a dominant element. They represent approximately 45% of tourist accommodation facilities and will focus 77% of arrivals¹⁸.

In 2012 the Croatian accommodation offer had more than 880.000 beds (with a 10% increase compared to the mid-2000s), about half of which were in private homes, 28% in campsites and 15% in hotels (National Institute of Statistics, 2013)¹⁹.

Sustainability and tourism: efforts under way - Since the Nineties of Twentieth century, tourism activities have been seen through the lens of sustainable development paradigm (SGI, 2007). There are a lot of new topics: for example, the awareness of human impact, environmental risk, pollution, the pressure on the coasts and the urban sprawl. In 1996, this brings to the elaboration of *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*²⁰.

In the same year the Mediterranean Commission for sustainable development was born and in 2005 it was adopted a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development²¹; later reports (the most recent one in 2012) have underlined the need to promote a common platform for a policy of synergic cooperation among the Mediterranean tourist destinations, in order to enhance their competitiveness in the context of sustainable development (Plan Bleu, 2012; Unwto, 2012).

Along the Mediterranean shores, environmental urbanization and degradation have sometimes produced irreversible damage mainly to French, Italian and Greek coasts.

This is the most polluted sea basin by different hydrocarbons and toxic chemicals: in here it concentrates 25% of the traffic of oil, even if this basin represents the 0,7% of the world's waters, and the rate of exploitation of resources is 2,6 times more fleeting than that of recovery, compared to the global value of 1,5 (Sabban, 2013). To this it is necessary to add the eutrophication processes in place.

Although Croatian coast is still relatively well preserved by degradation in comparison with the majority of Mediterranean countries, the increasing pressure on the coast is the main result of the so-called *apartmanizacija* (in Croatian *apartmanizacija*), a term generally used to indicate touristic residences.

¹⁷ The campsites have an average daily capacity of over 230.000 units. The main users are German tourists (over 32%), followed by Slovenians (18%), the Netherlands (10%), Italians and Austrians (9%). The data is made available by the Croatian Camping Association and the Institute for Tourism.

¹⁸ Between private rooms and apartments approximately 500,000 beds are available.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the numbers are almost equal to Greece and the Netherlands (1.2), while Portugal and Cyprus amounted to values much lower (respectively about 500,000 and 90,000 beds). In Europe, the larger receptive endowment (more or less equally distributed between hotels and other types of accommodation) is France (to 2010 about 6 million people), followed by Italy (4.7), Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom (which are around 3.5) (ONT, 2012a, p. 36). In relation to the area of each state, the higher density is recorded in the Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom.

²⁰ In this document World Tourism Organization, World Travel and Tourism Council and l'Earth Council define the sustainable tourism and tourism role compared to the communities and the territories involved.

²¹ This strategy promotes sustainable tourism, reducing the adverse territorial and environmental effects of tourism; Moreover, since 2002, an international group is working on the same issues: it consists of 18 countries – including three Mediterranean countries (Croatia, France and Morocco) – who work on key aspects of sustainable tourism (pollution, protection of biodiversity and heritage cultural adaptation of local governance) in order to carry out and disseminate good practice (Klarić, 2009).

Actually the term «tourist apartments», used by building companies hides the rising phenomenon of second homes on the coast, which is considered favorably in terms of employment development.

By the end of the nineties, however, the government has published several documents on environmental protection and tourism planning and it has started the constant monitoring of the coastal strip to limit the various forms of pollution: through the *Environmental Strategy* and *Environmental Action Plan national in 2002*, the islands were identified as a privileged place for the implementation of sustainable tourism.

The country has also ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2007 and it is one of the countries monitored by the United Nations Department for Sustainable Development; it controls the implementation of *Agenda 21*, in order to promote a sustainable tourism development that is able to assess the carrying capacity of the land. There are also important initiatives that affect the Croatia under the Blue Plan plan that promotes the sustainable planning in the Mediterranean region. This plan is put into practice through the collection of data, information and statistics on the state of the area, to promote the implementation of Agenda 21 for the Mediterranean. At the moment the projects focus on collecting data about the monitoring of the Adriatic ecosystem. In 2009 the remarkable pilot project that involved the area of Baska Voda in Dalmatia, near Split, has put in place a structured and co-ordinated planning to reduce the pressure in the coastal area (Unep, 2009).

It should also be pointed out that a lot of projects, which are often promoted and carried out under the auspices of the United Nations, have as main objective the protection of the coast, the recovery and integration of rural and fishing activities to ensure a more efficient planning tourist resort. 6% of Croatian territory is an island: the attention of the policies and projects that promote sustainable tourism focuses in these areas, which represent the main summer destinations, through initiatives which operate in parallel to the development of traditional agriculture and organic farming, preserving and strengthening local production, protected by trade marks

Among the most significant programs, we would mention the IPA Adriatic CBC Programme: it concerns the planning period 2007-2013 EU of Member States and candidate States. It is aimed to realize through the Structural Fund development policies across the Adriatic regions²². With a comprehensive strategy - organized into 4 Priorities and numerous measures - IPA promotes political stability of the area and the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral relations between the countries concerned²³ (fig. 3).

The involvement of institutional actors and local communities has been one of the strong points of this program. It has been realized, in the first two years, through a number of seminars and conferences aimed to share the measures to be implemented using the available resources in a coordinated manner²⁴.

The realized experience is considered, at European level, a guiding framework the issues of cross-border cooperation, and a number of interesting elements emerge: the validity of the inter-institutional

²² Specifically, in Croatia the following administrative regions are involved in (Nuts III level): Dubrovnik-Neretva, Istria; Lika-Senj; Primorje-Gorski Kotar; Šibenik-Knin; Split-Dalmatia and Zadar. It includes 7 National Parks, numerous islands and part of the Croatian Unesco sites.

²³ There are, in particular, under Priority 2, Natural Resources, Cultural and risk prevention, the following measures: Protection and development of the marine and coastal environment; Management of natural resources, cultural and prevention of natural and technological risks; Energy saving and renewable energy; Sustainable tourism. The financial framework for the period 2007-2013 (spendable no later than 2015) provides for a budget of around € 290 million of EU funds, national and appropriate instrument for pre-accession EU (IPA Adriatic CBC Programme, 2013).

²⁴ The previous cooperation programs have shown, in fact, that one of the weak element was the inability to secure a joint decision-making in terms of actors and resources.

approach to the planning. Besides the validity of using a partnership process, to ensure a high participation of local communities; the role of the joint evaluation of the projects, identified for their strategic importance, reduce the financial fragmentation, highlighting aspects of innovation and transferability; the importance of transferring best practices, including specific procedures.



Fig. 3 - The territorial partitions involved in the project IPA (2007)
Source: adapted from *IPA Adriatic CBC Programme*, 2013

Also noteworthy is the COAST project - Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in the Dalmatian Coast, a five-year project, launched in 2007 to promote sustainable tourism development; it will improve the integration between fisheries and agriculture and protecting biodiversity. Implemented within the framework of UNDP actions, it has as key partners the Ministry of Environment and the regional institutions of the Dalmatian coast, that involve actively local associations – social and business – and many NGOs (Petrić, Pranic, 2010). Among the more than 300 proposals, 97 projects were approved. They were aimed to the development of «green companies» that have developed a program that will enhance local agricultural productions; then the major tourist attractions were surveyed and mapped, defining appropriate environmental impact assessments²⁵ (Undp, 2007; 2013).

Following the same logic there is the project MODRO – *Network for sustainable development of the islands*, aimed to train local communities and conduct, in particular, by the educational center for sustainable development of the islands that is involved in education – particularly targeted at the younger generation – about the role of special marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It was initiated in 2007 and it carries out its activities – funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs – through the MATRA program as part of the *Contribution to the sustainable development of the islands of Šibenik region*, under

²⁵ The projects, that last one year, started in 2008, and pledged a total budget of \$ 360,000.

the coordination of the University of Wageningen and ecological association Argonauta, engaged in the design and implementation of training courses on sustainability issues. These activities are also able to reduce the depopulation that affects some insular realities.

The launched initiatives have contributed to give the international recognition of the best project of 2011 to the Eco-center Caput Insulae Beli, created on the island of Cres, during the 72nd International Congress of the World SKÅL International in Turku, Finland, in the framework of sustainable development of tourism in the category *General Countryside*. The activities carried out have resulted, in addition to the identification of a network of eco-trails, in the creation of various museums, ethnological and for the protection of biodiversity, contributing to the revitalization of rural areas of the insular territory²⁶.

Since the late nineties, a special attention to the development of a sustainable tourism characterizes, in general, rural areas and especially Istria; in effect, both national and local institutions promote specific initiatives, generally coordinated by the local tourism institutions under the auspices of the Ministry, designed to restore and enhance the local productions, creating food and wine trails that encourage the rediscovery of places and re-launch the rehabilitation of villages and farms: it reinforces the range of accommodation from the *built*, curbing the spread of urbanization process which is concentrated along the coast.

In Istria, among the more structured activities, there are those implemented under the *Wine Roads of Istria*, through the definition of itineraries passing through small towns, taverns and wine cellars, for the rediscovery of the inner territory, even during traditional seaside holidays. Since 1994, the Association of Istrian winemakers has been coordinating activities involving producer members, offering expert support and an intense promotional activity at national and international level. The same criterion was used for the streets of the Istrian truffle and oil, organizing themed trails to explore the inland areas. Linked to this initiative there is the creation of routes for cycling fans, well-organized activity aimed at professionals and amateurs.

Also noteworthy is the project *Po Sutli i Žumberku*, that involves the region on the border with Slovenia: in 2003, the two countries and Zagreb have launched an initiative to collaborate on the development of rural tourism in this area, involving a hilly poorly urbanized area of over 1,000 square kilometers, home for about 130,000 people and that was suffering a socio-economic crisis. So, it was possible to boost eco-tourism, cultural tourism and sports activities related tourism. It has been an initiative of some success that produced a more efficient network of tourist facilities and accommodation and business activities related to local products.

Preliminary conclusions - Tourism is a leading sector of the Croatian economy and policies inspired by sustainability presents undeniable advantages, both for the international image and for the exploitation of the extraordinary environmental and cultural heritage.

As frequently happens, even in presence of interesting policy statements, the concrete realizations clash with many difficulties related to the coordinated and consistent policies at different scales, the management of financial resources, local interests, the full effectiveness of the processes of

²⁶ The association SKÅL International, founded in the Thirties is a leading international organizations of professionals in the tourism sector, since it considers comprehensively all the sectors related to the tourism industry on five continents, involving 20,000 members, affecting 90 countries and over 500 locations. In 2002, it created the award *The Year of Ecotourism and the Mountains* that has been recognized by the UN since 2011 and called «Sustainable Development in Tourism».

consultation involvement and partnership. So, despite the initiatives taken, there are important weaknesses for an effective sustainable development: tourism is still strongly seasonally, the *sea, sun and sand* model is dominant, the country lacks a coherent and coordinated tourism planning at a national scale. Although in the past 10 years is emerging a significant change of direction, there difference between the seaside tourism development and the rural and cultural one is still considerable, also for the competition that comes from the best, different and convenient supply of Slovenia and Austria.

To promote an approach inspired to sustainability, in national and local policies, two major lines of action emerge: stop the most important forms of illegal building and control the impact of nautical tourism.

To cope with the *cementification* of the coastline for tourism, considered the main threat to the seaside tourism, since 2004 has been passed a decree that prevents the build in the range of 1,000 m from the sea. It's rather effective: many buildings have been demolished, especially in northern Dalmatia.

We must also consider the impact of nautical tourism. There is often no synergy between the port and the urban reality behind and there aren't adequate plans to deal with pollution, even if since 1989, local and regional plans have established an upper limit for private boating places in each berth marina.

While the building of new port terminals – as in Zadar – raises some doubts²⁷, the policy that requires the creation of small marine equipped with appropriate systems for waste treatment and mooring buoys that, in the long run, may eliminate the wild anchor, appears more effective.

Heavy damage also result from the cruise tourism (Camarsa, 2003), involving in particular the cities of Split and Dubrovnik and the island of Korcula. The cruises in the Mediterranean in recent years represent an important source of income for the countries involved: in Europe, this type of tourism affects about 330.000 employees and more than \$ 50 billion of spin-off for year. After the well-known case of Venice, however, even in Dalmatia, the Croatian Institute for Tourism is starting to present the damage caused by the impact of both cruise ships and the presence of a million cruise passengers, a number four times higher than 10 years ago. The «cruise ship tourism» is now turning into mass tourism, discouraging other types. For now, no concrete measures have been taken.

Presently the objective of greater sustainability is pursued through a planning able to coordinate, at the national and local levels, the arrivals of ships and tourists in the various ports and, at the same time, it provide an adequate plan for the disposal of waste and wastewater (Undp, 2014a-b).

In a so fragmented and often contradictory context²⁸, next to the territories involved in the programs described here, Istria is the region most perceptive to the sustainable policies: it is dynamic, not burdened by seasonal phenomena, and it is able to promote the development of tourism well integrated with the sectors of agriculture and fisheries; in this way, unlike what happens frequently elsewhere, in the majority of Istrian centers, tourism does not represent the principal economic activity.

It is also interesting to note that compared to the prevalence of destinations in Croatia, Istria is characterized by a limited dependence on foreign multinationals, so economic activities are managed and coordinated directly by the local government which is not forced «to undergo» the influence of a strong subject that tends to control the economy of the area. In this context, Rovinj is an interesting case: the development of tourism has not been governed and controlled by large international tour

²⁷ Although in this case the stated purpose is to separate the lines and ferries passengers by reducing the impact of the excessive traffic in the city center.

²⁸ The great attention to ecotourism is accompanied, however, to the construction of big resorts.

operators; there is the strong participation of local entrepreneurs and restrictions on foreign investment; the predominant type of accommodation is still camping (representing 40% of supply), followed by private homes today, which has reduced in part the *cementification* caused by large structures; protected natural areas representing 30% of the territory and they are carefully protected by a strict legislation requiring non-buildable area near the coast and outside of urban centers; the protection of biodiversity of flora and fauna is severe (Klarić, 2009)²⁹.

The new tourism strategy for 2020 is based on a strong coordination of the subjects who plan tourism policies. Around the central role of the Ministry of Tourism, there is the integrated action of the National Tourist, local authorities, regional and local government, chambers of commerce and the main socio-economic stakeholders, all under the direction of the Parliament and Government. Since 2011, the Croatian government, in order to have easier access to EU funds for the development of tourism-related activities, has brought legal consultation and direct participation of these institutions, businesses and local communities in order to plan the new tourism strategy at the national level, able to offer diversified modes of tourism and to improve the competitiveness of Croatia's position on the international market. This strategy, as demonstrated in the case of Rovinj, is finding concrete application demonstrating its effectiveness to ensure new forms of sustainable tourism development.

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²⁹ It should be noted, however, that even in the presence of a better and a more effective governance, there is also a model of a growing seasonally tourism.

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