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## **RIVER TOURISM IN EASTERN CROATIA: PERSPECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

### **RIJEČNI TURIZAM U ISTOČNOJ HRVATSKOJ: PERSPEKTIVE RAZVOJA**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Tourism, and thus the tourist product is a multidimensional phenomenon with continuous and highly dynamic development, which stems from the way individuals use their free time, change of its increasingly varied needs and interests of tourists. The increasing demands of tourism consumers initiated the development of specific forms of tourism which are trying to, through organizing special forms of rest, recreation experiences, experiences, and other special facilities, adjust the travel and tourism product offer to immediate tourists, or a specific group of tourists. Consequently, it can be said that modern tourism development which is characterized by, among other things, segmentation and directing of tourist demand toward specific forms of tourism represents an opportunity for the development of river tourism as one of the specific forms of tourism. Despite the fact that the rivers are still highly neglected aspect of the global tourism industry, in recent times interests of tourists for river tourism is growing. Rivers as complex ecosystems affect many human businesses, including tourism. With the main activities that take place on rivers such as cruises, sailing and rafting, the attractiveness of its banks as diverse landscapes, and rich cultural - historical heritage of the nearby towns should be pointed out. When it comes to river tourism of eastern Croatia, and in general river Danube should be noted since it has a central role in river cruise market. Also, for the development of this form of tourism there are also potentials on the rivers Sava and Drava. Therefore, the fundamental purpose of this paper is to analyze the opportunities and constraints for tourism development on eastern Croatian rivers and provide guidance for further development of this form of tourism. The work will by interviews with operators of the tourism industry gather information needed to identify the key elements of offer of river tourism. Since the current potential for the development of river tourism is not evaluated properly and no proper infrastructures were built, offers of additional services as well as a recognizable tourist product of river tourism, based on the results of research recommendations will be defined for the sustainable development of river tourism, with emphasis on eastern Croatia.*

**Key words:** river tourism, east Croatia, aspects of development of river tourism

#### **SAŽETAK**

*Turizam, a samim time i turistički proizvod je multidimenzionalna pojava s kontinuiranim i izrazito dinamičnim razvojem koji proizlazi iz načina korištenja slobodnog vremena pojedinca, promjene njegovih potreba i sve raznovrsnijih interesa turista. Sve veći zahtjevi*

turističkih potrošača, inicirali su razvoj specifičnih oblika turizma kojima se putem organiziranja posebnih oblika odmora, rekreativnih iskustava, doživljaja i drugih posebnih sadržaja, želi prilagoditi turistička ponuda i turistički proizvod neposrednom turistu, odnosno specifičnoj skupini turista. Slijedom navedenog, može se reći da suvremeni turistički razvoj koji karakterizira, između ostalog, segmentiranje i usmjeravanje turističke potražnje prema specifičnim oblicima turizma predstavlja priliku i za razvoj riječnog turizma kao jednog od specifičnih oblika turizma. Unatoč tome što su rijeke još uvijek iznimno zanemaren aspekt globalne turističke industrije, u posljednje vrijeme interes turista za riječnim turizmom raste. Rijeke kao složeni ekosustavi utječu na mnoge ljudske djelatnosti, uključujući i turizam. Uz glavne aktivnosti koje se odvijaju na rijekama poput krstarenja, jedrenja i raftinga, treba istaknuti atraktivnosti na njezinim obalama kao što su raznovrsni prirodni krajolici, ali i bogata kulturno – povijesna baština obližnjih gradova. Kada se govori o riječnom turizmu istočne Hrvatske, ali i općenito, treba istaknuti rijeku Dunav koja ima središnju ulogu na tržištu riječnih krstarenja. Također, za razvoj ovog oblika turizma postoje potencijali i na rijekama Savi te Dravi. Stoga je temeljna svrha ovoga rada je analizirati mogućnosti i ograničenja razvoja turizma na rijekama istočne Hrvatske te dati smjernice za daljnji razvoj ovog oblika turizma. U radu će se metodom intervjua sa subjektima turističke industrije prikupiti informacije potrebne za identifikaciju ključnih elemenata ponude riječnog turizma i trendova u kretanju turističke potražnje. Budući da se trenutno potencijali za razvoj riječnog turizma ne valoriziraju na odgovarajući način te nema ni izgrađene odgovarajuće infrastrukture, ponude dodatnih usluga kao ni prepoznatljivog turističkog proizvoda riječnog turizma, na temelju rezultata istraživanja definirati će se smjernice za održivi razvoj riječnog turizma, s naglaskom na istočnu Hrvatsku.

**Ključne riječi:** riječni turizam, istočna Hrvatska, aspekti razvoja riječnog turizma

## 1. Introductory remarks

Modern tourism is characterized by different socio - economic trends that directly affect changes in behavior of tourism consumers, especially their attitudes towards the quality and content of the tourism product. Tourists today are becoming more demanding, travel more frequently but stay shorter and are more increasingly turning to the specific forms of tourism in search of new experiences and adventures (Čavlek et.al., 2011), they are well informed, seeking access to individually organised travel, they are unpredictable, spontaneous, have preserved sense of nature conservation and ecology, are sensitive to the quality of services and are looking for more comprehensive tourist experiences and thus for a more complex tourism product. It is these changes in affinity of tourists, increased market competition between destinations, changes in the environment and adaptation to the new system of market values are bringing about the destruction of traditional offers (Stipanović, Gračan, 2005) and initiate the appearance of selective forms of tourism which are striving to enrich the tourism offer and provide tourists with meaningful travel product tailored to their needs. In this context river tourism should be pointed out as one of selective forms of tourism which is becoming increasingly popular among tourists. Rivers are a major tourism resource providing spectacular settings, recreational opportunities, waterfront landscapes in many centres of tourism interest, a means of transport and an essential source of water for human consumption (Prideaux et al., 2009, 14). In addition to main activities that take place on rivers such as cruises, sailing, rafting and fishing, an important role in the formation of tourism offer of river tourism have their coasts with their attractive natural landscapes and rich cultural and historical heritage of cities through which the rivers flow. Therefore, in this paper the term

river tourism will imply tourism activities on rivers and on their coastal areas, activities on owned or another boat for recreation, leisure and sports, while the vessel is anchored or sailing on the river. River tourism defined in this way can offer a meaningful and attractive tourism product, tailored to the needs of tourism demand and aspirations of tourists to travel and learn about new destinations, cultures and customs. Consequently, aim of this paper is to show the features for development of river tourism in the eastern part of Croatia or in the region of Slavonija and Baranja, with emphasis on Sava, Drava and Danube rivers, and to make recommendations to improve tourism offer of this area. During the writing of this paper, various secondary research data will be used as well as data collected by an interview with the subjects of tourism offer (travel agencies) and the directors of the tourist boards of Vukovarsko-Srijemska county, Osiječko-Baranjska county and Brodsko-Posavska county.

## **2. Characteristics of river waterways of eastern Croatia and development possibilities for river tourism**

Special importance among the rivers of eastern Croatia have rivers Sava, Drava and Danube, which are favorable for the development of various segments of river tourism, from drifting, canoeing and fishing to cruising.

The Danube River is the most important river for the internal transport in the Republic of Croatia because of its length and natural features that enable the sailing of largest ships throughout the year and due to its significant position with regard to international transport corridors. The Danube is one of Europe's longest rivers (2888 km) and connects Central with Southeast Europe. Throughout Croatia Danube is navigable along the entire length from Batine to Ilok (from 1433rkm to 1295.5rkm) and is capable and marked for day and night navigation (<http://www.mppi.hr/default.aspx?id=890>). Today the Danube river sailing is regulated by the principle of free navigation. According to the European Economic Commission the Danube waterway through Croatia belongs to the class IV<sup>88</sup> waterway (Kovačić et.al.,2010, 253). Croatia has one of the smallest, but very attractive share of the Danube waterway, which can be used for tourism purposes. There is a rich archaeological site Vučedol situated on banks of the Danube towards Ilok which is among other things, a popular spot for fishing with a sandy beach on Eagle Island. Furthermore, in this part of Danube is the Nature Park Kopački rit, which is located in an area where Drava river flows into Danube. Nature Park Kopački rit is one of the largest and most authentic of wetlands in Europe and is visited throughout the year by many tourists and scientists from all over Europe. The largest and most important city and port in the Croatian part of Danube is a Baroque city of Vukovar with many cultural and historical monuments. Largest and most important city and port in the Croatian part of the Danube is a Baroque city of Vukovar with many cultural and historical sites (Eltz Castle from the 18 century, Baroque edifices in the city center, Franciscan monastery the church of Sts. Philip and Jacob, monuments dedicated to victims of the Homeland War, etc.) that can be included in the tourism cruise offer of Danube. Dock in Vukovar was adapted for passenger transport and has the hospitality - tourist facilities (souvenir shops, restaurant, sports bar, etc) which is necessary if it is to position itself on the tourism market as a port for nautical tourism. Also, during the period from 2002-2004. on the Danube River a dock was built in the city of Ilok which with promenade and a hotel makes the recreational-tourist complex. Ilok City could be interesting for tourists due to its medieval core, which is a protected cultural and historical complex of the highest category, Odeskalchi Castle in which city museum is situated, shrines, churches and monasteries of St. John of

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<sup>88</sup> Class IV of waterways – bottom width is 24m, water depth is 3,5 m and width of water level is 45m,for 1,500-ton vessels

Capistrano and Ilok wine roads. Specificity of Ilok's coast is a steady backwater Dunavac, between the Danube and the old city on the hill, which adds to the charm of the landscape and the variety of suitable forms of recreation on the water for water sports and nature enjoyment ([http://www.turizamilok.hr/index.php?lang=hr&article\\_id=25](http://www.turizamilok.hr/index.php?lang=hr&article_id=25)). Furthermore, for the utilization of economic potential of Osijek-Baranja County, especially for revival of tourism in Park Kopački Rit and Wine Route Zmajevac-Suza of great importance is the possibility to receive river boats on which tourists travel on Danube. Furthermore, for the utilization of economic potential of Osijek-Baranja County, especially for revival of tourism in Park Kopački Rit and Wine Route Zmajevac-Suza of great importance is the possibility to receive river boats on which tourists travel on Danube, also as the most suitable locations for construction of new passenger ports are Batina and Aljmaš (Medium-Term development plan for waterways and ports of Croatian internal waters for the period from 2009.-2016.year). Aljmaš is located at the confluence of Drava and Danube rivers and it is the most significant Marian shrine in eastern Croatia. Also, the city Erdut is near with the remains of the medieval town of Erdut from the end of the 15th century, the castle Adamović - Cseh from the 19th century and there is also the site of signing of the world famous Erdut treaty (Tourism development strategy of municipalities Erdut). Also, Erdut is the center of wine production, the headquarters of Erdut winery manage over 500 hectares of vineyards and have the largest wine barrel in the world (<http://tz.opcina-erdut.hr/o-turizmu/>). Enological offer is complemented by a dozen of independent wine producers which tourists can visit during the touring of wine road of vineyards of Erdut. Therefore, the construction of the said ports would further enhance river tourism, and tourism in general in the area along the river Danube and better valorize the existing tourism resources.

Rivers Sava and Drava are less favorable for navigation due to low water levels. Sava River is the longest Croatian river. The most important port in Croatia on the Sava River is the city of Slavonski Brod that can offer to tourists many additional contents such as visiting historical sites (Fort Brod, Franciscan Monastery, house of Brlić family), walks through the rafters Street (the street with anchored ships, where their owners live in the summer months), participating in various events and visiting the nature reserve Gajna. Of the total length in the Republic of Croatia, Sava river is navigable at 380.2 km, ie, from Račinovci (Republic of Serbia) to Sisak (Medium-Term development plan for waterways and ports of Croatian internal waters for the period from 2009.-2016.year). It is possible in small percentage to sail to Zagreb. The main disadvantage of the waterway of the river Sava is that it is not suited for navigation all year round because of the numerous bends in the waterway that slow down sailing, shallow places during a minimum water levels and a variety of obstacles such as sunken vessels. Renovation and modernization of the waterway of Sava could encourage the development of river tourism, especially cruise segment, and thus further construction of river ports in order to develop tourism. Drava River flows through the country in for the length of 330 km but much of this waterway is not adapted to navigation. Most intense part of the Drava river navigation takes place from the mouth of Danube to Osijek and that part of Drava River Waterway meets the requirements of class IV navigability (<http://www.mppi.hr/default.aspx?id=890>). The most important port on river Drava is Osijek, which can accommodate larger vessels. The city of Osijek can offer to tourists except the rich cultural - historical heritage (Fort, the parish church of Sts. Peter and Paul, the castle of Count Pejačević, Capuchin Church and Monastery, etc.) many cultural events. Also, close by is Baranja with a diverse range of tourism related family farms. Except for the cruise, rivers Sava and Drava, and other smaller rivers in the area of Slavonia and Baranja are suitable for fishing, sport fishing, bicycling (bike path Danube and Drava bike tour), swimming, boat rides and canoeing.

### 3. River tourism analysis of eastern Croatia

The term river tourism includes various activities that take place on rivers such as cruises, sailing, rafting, fishing, and activities that occur on river banks. In this paper, special emphasis will be placed on the segment of river cruises. River Danube, which passes through eastern Croatia has a central role in European river cruising market. The most popular of itineraries in Europe are on the Danube and its tributaries, the Rhine and its tributaries, the channel Rhine - Main - Danube Canal and Dutch waterways and they are constituting 48% of the market of river cruising (Vojvodić, 2008, 30). European river cruises are marked by seasonality with concentration of cruises generally to the period of eight months a year, from March to November (Vojvodić, 2006, 50). Boats for cruising on rivers are generally smaller than those for sea cruises since the river paths water depth is limited and can not accommodate large vessels, which of course affects the number of attractions and other services that are offered to passengers on board for the purpose of rest, leisure and entertainment during their travel. Typical passenger on a river cruise has more than 55 years, he is experienced traveler who usually travels with a partner, is highly educated and interested in culture and history (Vojvodić, 2008). Cruising on Croatian rivers are mostly concentrated on the river Danube, which is proved by the fact that the largest number of cruise ship entries are recorded in ports of Vukovar and Ilok. In port of Vukovar in 2011. a total of 182 cruise ships visited with 21 914 passengers, while in the same year Ilok visited 1 589 passengers who arrived on 14 cruise ships (Port Authority Vukovar). By contrast in 2011. in Osijek there have been only two anchored cruise ships with a total of 145 passengers (Port Authority Osijek). These data are the result of objective circumstances that can not be predicted and which can not be influenced, since the problems with water levels particularly affect the navigability of the rivers (Kovačić et.al.,2010). Also a tendency of growth in passenger numbers is recorded, particularly in the port of Vukovar, where the number of passengers increased from 400 passengers in 2002. to 21 914 passengers in 2011. Leading operators who organize cruises on the Danube are Luftner Reisen, Croiseurope and Grand Circle Travel (GCT). Tourist arrangements of cruises on the Danube have a complex content. They can include air transport, rail routes between cities in the itinerary, welcoming by the representatives of tour operators, hotel accommodation on ships and in hotels of individual cities, exclusive tours (sightseeing, wine tours, ....) and certain additional services (Dragin, 2005, 106). Receptive agencies also have an impact on the formation of the tourism product in the form of making proposals the components for its final form and provide services of tourist guides. In Vukovar, travelers that arrived with cruisers typically stay for 2-3 hours and are usually looking for a tour of the Baroque town center with a costumed tour guides, tour of the Museum of Vukovar War hospital and Ovčara. Also, there is a growing interest of tourists to stay on indigenous family farms in order to learning about local customs, culture and local cuisine. Furthermore, tourists arriving with cruisers, depending on their wishes, have organized tours of Osijek and Baroque Fortress, visits to Nature Park Kopački rit, tours of Baranja wine road, wine cellars and wine tasting, and they also have the possibility to rent bikes and kayaks for a ride on Danube. In addition, except for cruising travel agencies organize and offer a variety of trips that include activities on and along rivers. They can be included in some segments of river tourism. These trips usually last for 1-3 days and main activities that are offered within them are rides on a bicycle or boat, kayak and canoe, enjoying the lush vegetation and areas of untouched nature, exploring the fauna of rivers and tasting of specialties of local cuisine. Also, on all rivers of eastern Croatia the city and bays sightseeing by tourist boats is possible and fishing with the possession of appropriate licenses.

#### 4. Closing remarks and recommendations

On the tourism market there is constant escalation of market competition and the tourist destinations are forced to continuously develop and innovate their tourism facilities through which they highlight their competitive advantage and place on market their tourism product that will meet consumer preferences. Since rivers of eastern Croatia possesses natural preconditions and numerous interesting and attractive locations along its waterways, river tourism has good perspectives to become one of the most recognizable forms of tourism offers in Slavonija and Baranja. All could have economic benefits from the development of river tourism from the Port Authority in which tax is paid to receptive travel agencies, rural households engaged in tourism, nature parks, etc., therefore it is necessary to take certain measures to improve this type of tourism. First of all, it is necessary to improve and modernize the infrastructure that will enable the reception of ships, particularly those for cruising, then update and renew waterways for smoother day and night sailing as well as develop and offer additional tourism services (restaurants, entertainment facilities, gift shops) and other services such as boat renting, supplying services to river boaters with various goods and equipment, services which are content increasing and complementing the stay of tourists, such as sports and recreational services, etc.. Also, it is necessary to encourage a permanent dialogue and cooperation between the tourism industry, local communities, public and private sectors and other interest groups particularly in the area of promotional activities and further investments in the development of river tourism.

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