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PERSPECTIVE OF HEALTH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL CROATIA

PERSPEKTIVA RAZVOJA ZDRAVSTVENOG TURIZMA RURALNE HRVATSKE

ABSTRACT

The current economic crisis still puts a significant impact on the world and Croatian tourism trends, therefore producing the necessity for creating a better and higher quality tourist product. This would enable repositioning of Croatian tourist offer on the tourist market. Health tourism of rural Croatia represents an essential element in the creation of integral rural Croatian tourist product, out of which numerous benefits will be achieved (economic and socio-demographic development of rural areas, overcoming the seasonal character of the tourism offer, meeting the needs of tourists of various profiles and age groups, creating new jobs for domicile population, achieving value for money and experience for money, increasing tourist turnover, etc.) in relation to the competitive tourist destination, and it must be given considerable attention. Despite the rich resource basis, the tourist offer is not developed according to its real potential. The previously mentioned facts point to the necessity of creating strategic guidelines for future development, and undertaking appropriate marketing activities with a goal of achieving competitive advantages. The purpose of the paper is to emphasize the importance of creating a more attractive offer of health tourism of rural Croatia with a goal of strengthening the overall competitiveness of the Croatian tourist product. The objective of the paper is to analyze the current state of health tourism of rural Croatia, and offer a proposal of strategic guidelines with a goal of further development and achievement of competitive advantages in relation to the leading tourist destinations of health tourism.

Keywords: health tourism of rural Croatia, strategic guidelines, marketing activities, competitive advantages, tourist product

SAŽETAK

Još prisutna ekonomska kriza ostavila je značajan utjecaj na svjetske i hrvatske turističke tokove, što je rezultiralo potrebom stvaranja boljeg i kvalitetnijeg turističkog proizvoda koji će omogućiti repozicioniranje hrvatske turističke ponude na turističkom tržištu. Zdravstveni turizam ruralne Hrvatske predstavlja esencijalan element stvaranja hrvatskog integralnog turističkog proizvoda, s kojim će se ostvariti brojne koristi (ekonomski i socio-demografski razvoj ruralnih područja, prevladavanje sezonalnog karaktera turističke ponude, zadovoljenje potreba turista raznih profila i dobnih skupina, stvaranje novog zapošljavanja domaćeg stanovništva, ostvarenje vrijednosti za novac i iskustva za novac, povećanje turističkog prometa, itd) u odnosu na konkurentne turističke destinacije, stoga mu se mora posvetiti značajna pozornost. Usprkos bogatoj resursnoj osnovi, turistička ponuda nije razvijena u odnosu na svoje realne mogućnosti. Prethodno navedene činjenice ukazuju na nužnost stvaranja strategijskih smjernica za budući razvoj, i poduzimanje prikladnih marketinških aktivnosti s ciljem ostvarenja konkurentskih prednosti. Svrha rada je naglasiti važnost stvaranja atraktivnije ponude zdravstvenog turizma ruralne Hrvatske s ciljem ojačanja cjelokupne konkurentnosti hrvatskog turističkog proizvoda, dok je cilj rada analizirati trenutno stanje zdravstvenog turizma ruralne Hrvatske i ponuditi prijedlog strategijskih smjernica s ciljem daljnjeg razvoja i ostvarenja konkurentskih prednosti u odnosu na vodeće destinacije zdravstvenog turizma.

Ključne riječi: *zdravstveni turizam ruralne Hrvatske, strategijske smjernice, marketinške aktivnosti, konkurentske prednosti, turistički proizvod*

1. Introduction

Economic crisis has left numerous negative impacts on the tourist trends at the European and World level. According to Alkier Radnić, reduction of the share of personal consumption allocated for tourist travels affected changes in tourist demand, such as reduction of the number of tourist travels, increase in shorter trips in the duration from 1-4 days, increase in demand for cheaper accommodation facilities, reduced consumption of tourists in the destination, etc. (authors' adaptation according to Alkier Radnić, 2010, p.4). In order to remove negative consequences, it is necessary to enable availability of a tourist product to various groups of potential tourists (of various interests and paying capabilities). Tourist destinations are encountering the constant need of creating a high quality and unique tourist product (quality improvement of accommodation capacities and additional elements of offer), and creation of adequate strategic and marketing plans for competitive and successful tourist market approach, with the goal of stimulating tourist's interests, determined as target market niches, in order to stimulate them to allocate their available funds and visit a certain tourist destination. Development of selective forms of tourism within a tourist offer represents a key component for achieving competitive advantages, considering that their offer is adjusted to a particular target segment of users-tourists. Among selective forms of tourism is also health tourism which represents one of the fastest growing segments of tourist offer, which represents an important factor of improvement of a Croatian tourist product. In the paper, the importance of health tourism in achieving competitive position on the tourist market will be pointed out, as well as the perspective of its development in rural areas of Croatia.

2. Health Tourism of Rural Croatia-its importance and presentation of current situation

The term "health tourism" covers all types of tourist travels which relate to health. There are two driving forces for visitors of this sector. The first is to recover and recuperate – that is to say, to improve its own health from its present state. For this term, we also use the term "medicinal tourism". The second is to preserve or maintain health, which embraces prophylaxis – and which we also refer to as "wellness tourism". Health tourism is not only one of the most visibly and rapidly developing sub-branches of domestic and world tourism, it is currently one of the world's most innovative business sectors. Within the tourism sector, the development of health tourism can significantly enhance the number of guest arrivals and overnights as well as the actual tourist consumption. Major reasons for this include the fact that demand shows much lower seasonal fluctuation than is evident in general tourism and also fact that tourism for most health-related purposes requires more time to be spent at the destination. Consequently, the development of health tourism could contribute significantly in countering the normal imbalances in domestic tourism shown in terms of season, time as well as generating revenue over a broader range of locally provided, on-site services (authors' adaptation according to Bakucz, Klesch i Lamperth, 2010, p.2). Previously mentioned facts point to numerous advantages of development of this selective form of tourism for offer improvement of tourist destination. Croatia records a moderate, but still insufficient development of quality and variety of its tourist offer, despite of its high potential and resources that it has at its disposal, and in relation to the leading tourist destinations. Up until now, the development of tourist offer was mostly concentrated on coastal destinations and the 3S concept (Sun-Sea-Sand), while the rural areas were unfairly neglected. They are rich in natural (beautiful landscape, clean air, clean waters, the climate, healing minerals springs, mud, etc.) and other resources necessary for a development of a high quality tourist offer of health tourism. Health tourism represents an important factor of achieving competitive advantages of (rural) Croatia on the tourist market. It's offer combines sports and recreation, wellness, healthy nutrition, medical and other services provided under a strict supervision of top quality experts such as doctors, nutritionists, instructors, etc., which through lifelong learning continuously expand their knowledge and improve their skills, and by that are in the possibility to satisfy the needs of tourists of all profiles and age groups which are in search of active/passive vacation, relaxation, recuperation of stress or illness damaged health, etc. Successful development of this form of tourism offer will enable numerous advantages for (rural) Croatia (increasing tourist turnover, foreign exchange earnings, opening new work places, increasing quality and recognizability of the total tourist product, achieving competitive advantages on the tourist market, branding the tourist offer, etc.). Unfortunately, in spite of its great potential, the offer of health tourism of Croatia is significantly lagging in comparison with the offer of the neighboring competitive countries which have a richly developed high quality offer of the same, and by that could serve as a benchmark for Croatia. Continuous monitoring of development of tourist trends in health tourism is of great importance for improvement of tourist product of Croatia, considering that everyday tourists are becoming more demanding, and are asking specific services and individual approach, which is of great importance for segregation of a tourist destination on a tourist market, and achieving leading position.

This is supported by the research of Global Market Development Centre (GMDC) which was conducted in the USA in 2009 on the sample of 2176 users. The research defined three target groups (segments) of tourists of health tourism, and who undertook one of the most extensive researches of consumer behavior market regarding health and wellness, and according to received results determined profiles of tourists-users of services of health

tourism. According to that research, there are three segments of wellness consumers: Periphery, The middle, and the Core (see table 1).

Table 1 Segmentation of health and wellness tourism consumers

Periphery (25% or 77 million consumers)	Middle (62% or 190 million users)	Core (13% or 40 million consumers)
<input type="checkbox"/> Consumers "beginners" <input type="checkbox"/> They have an aspiration for stronger inclusion in health and wellness, but are still not behaving that way <input type="checkbox"/> They are mostly reactive, but not proactive consumers	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderately included in healthy life and wellness <input type="checkbox"/> They are trying to follow the trends set by the Core <input type="checkbox"/> They spend significant sums on conventional, but also on unconventional products related to health and wellness <input type="checkbox"/> The price and convenience are somewhat giving them limitations, but at the same time are led by knowledge and experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Most involved in healthy life and wellness <input type="checkbox"/> Trendsetters, role models to others <input type="checkbox"/> Health and wellness represent their central point of their life <input type="checkbox"/> They are led by sustainability, authenticity and local sources

Source: GMDC and the Hartman Group. *Consumer Shopping Habits for Wellness and Environmentally Conscious Lifestyles Study: Insights for Health, Beauty and Wellness*, authors' adaptation according to <http://www.pacific.edu/Documents/school-pharmacy/acrobat/Consumer%20Shopping%20Habits%20for%20Wellness%20-%20Presentation.pdf> (19.02.2014.).

It is evident from the previous table that the target segment of users of services of health tourism can be monitored considering their habits and service price-ranges. According to previously mentioned study, consumers can be differentiated on "Periphery" who just started using the services of wellness and are mostly recreationists. The next group is characterized as the "Middle". This group contains the users who are actively included in using the services of wellness, but they give equal importance to use of conventional and non-conventional methods of preservation and improvement of quality of health. The price of services has a significant role for mentioned users. As the most important segment of users of wellness services, so called users from the segment "the Core" can be determined, which represent the target market niche, based on those needs and experiences of marketing and tourist destination experts (destination management) who create their product. It is about the users of higher/high purchasing power, for who wellness and healthy life represent the life's backbone. Istarske, Daruvarske, Bizovačke, Varaždinske, Tuheljske, Krapinske, Topusko and Sveti Martin on Mura Spa are spas which by providing their services, make the tourist offer of health tourism of rural Croatia. Despite of positive movements regarding improvement of quality of spas tourist offer, it has been noticed that its level is uneven. The offer is still mostly based on classical services of sports recreation, wellness, medical services, etc., while innovative and creative models of tourist offer are missing. Unfortunately, when the total spas' offer is monitored, and when comparing it with the competitive destinations of health tourism, in most of Croatian spas there were no significant movements on the existing quality of services which would enable, in terms of quality and diversity, for Croatia to become the leading destination in the Mediterranean. Competitive destinations offer a whole range of services of equable and high quality for the whole family, all year round, in a high quality

accommodation units and fun attractions for all age (pools, children's playrooms, sports activities, one-day trips, etc.), which enables them a high level of occupancy all year round, high utilization of services (by domicile population as well), and by all that, overcoming the seasonality of the offer, while the spas in Croatia (in relation to the competition) in a significant measure offer accommodation services on a lower level, with insufficiently developed system of providing additional services which enables achieving extra service consumption and achieving higher profit. One of the problems is also that certain objects are more oriented in providing medical services, while providing whole services of health tourism is given less attention. According to Alkier Radnić et al., modern visitors of world's and Croatian tourist destinations are constantly searching for experiences which will provide them a sense of connection with nature, tradition and peaceful way of life, and complete inclusion in the life of the local community, in order to fully learn about its tradition and all the particularities offered by a certain tourist destination (Alkier Radnić, Milojica, Drpić, 2012, p. 8). Contemporary tourists are more and more ecologically aware, and aim towards preservation and quality of health improvement, and their interest in staying in tourist destinations of health tourism, in accommodation capacities which base their business on respecting the postulates of sustainability (high standards of eco business) is greater and greater. Previously mentioned is confirmed by the data of the research Europeans and Tourism from 2009, where 35% of respondents from the EU member countries answered that they prefer staying in eco-tourist destinations (authors' interpretation according to http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_281_en.pdf, p.27). Rural Croatia and the offer of health tourism based on sustainability and ecological standards of business can for certain achieve previously mentioned tourist's motives. In order to achieve a stronger competitive position of health tourism, it is necessary to establish a joint "Green Rural Health resort" of Croatia by applying postulates of sustainable development (preserving resource basis, using of renewable energy sources, and successful waste management) whose members will coordinate their standards of ecology and quality among themselves, by which they will align and advance the quality of services, which will standardize and improve the quality of services, taking into account reduction of lacks of the existing offer with strengthening all the advantages of the offer of sustainable health tourism of rural Croatia at the same time. When speaking about positive experiences, in the example of Slovenia, Rogaška Slatina spa can be singled out as a good example, which in their programs include the surroundings as well, and besides providing services of health tourism, enable for tourist the experience of a destination in total, and various segments of tourist offer (connection of health, rural, summer and wine tourism). The importance of health tourism was recognized in Slovenia already after its independence, in 1995 to be exact, when the promotional brand was shaped in a form of a bouquet of flowers, it consisted a special green flower which symbolized the cluster of health resorts and health tourism. In order to enable successful managing the development of services, it is necessary to monitor the achieved tourist turnover (achieved arrivals, overnights, and if possible, tourist consumption), considering that an insight can be received, in how much health tourism contributes economically to the total tourist turnover of Croatia. The following table presents the number of tourist overnights achieved in Spas of rural Croatia in the period of 2005-2013.

Table 2 Achieved overnights in spas of rural Croatia in period 2005-2013.

Spas	2005.	2006.	2007.	2008.	2009.	2010.	2011.	2012.	2013.
Istarske*	68.083	69.318	72.283	67.841	58.206	54.112
Daruvarske	14.103	16.439	16.558	18.434	15.677	9.790	13.520	12.870	13.738
Bizovačke	37.579	30.887	31.442	32.095	27.360	23.980	25.356	20.122	14.172
Varaždinske	56.521	61.566	55.593	51.634	45.273	38.195	44.197	34.080	23.652
Tuheljske	30.998	44.917	54.069	58.111	56.299	55.476	45.424	50.270	65.597
Krapinske	25.955	29.422	38.869	44.322	36.902	30.783	35.994	37.451	36.903
Topusko	42.262	40.413	49.574	49.939	48.729	49.220	47.946	40.779	35.830
St. Martin on Mura	8.211	28.330	37.104	37.446	34.815	50.107	49.149	64.142	66.001
Total	283.712	321.292	355.492	359.822	323.261	311.663	261.586	218.935	153.393

Source: Authors' analysis according to the data received by e-mail from the spas of rural Croatia

*The authors of the paper contacted Istarske Spa with a request for the data in the period 2011-2013. The data wasn't delivered.

Previously presented data point on significant oscillations in achieved total tourist overnights in spas of rural Croatia. Moderate growth was recorded in the period 2005-2008, while in the following years a decrease of overnights was recorded (it has to be noted that the amounts for the period 2011-2013 do not contain Istarske Spa overnights due to non-provision of informations). However, the authors consider that the reason of the decrease is mostly the economic crisis, but also insufficiently profiled tourist offer in total in relation to the competitive destinations. In order to have an insight in types of users of health tourism and wellness and their real interests, it is of great importance to continuously research their desires and their level of satisfaction with the total offer and experience during their stay in spas, so that possible errors could be removed on time, and in order to successfully manage total quality of health tourist offer, and through that provide them total fulfillment of their wishes and desires. This is supported with the excellent example of the conducted research in the USA in 2009, which was previously mentioned in this paper. Also, it is of great importance to give additional attention to the improvement of other elements of tourist offer (gastronomic offer of traditional Croatian cuisine, enological offer of Croatian wines and spirits, shopping, organization of traditional events, etc.) which will not only enable value and experience for money, but it will also enable the Croatian tourist offer to stand out among numerous other offers of competing destinations. According to available resources, in order for health tourism of rural Croatia to reach the desired highest possible level of quality of offer and total competitiveness, it is necessary to create a developmental and marketing strategy which needs to be coordinated with the complete developmental strategy of tourism of Croatia. Health tourism in rural areas represents the possibility for qualitative upgrade of the existing tourist offer, which will enable strengthening socio-demographic development and regeneration of rural areas, and repositioning of tourist product of Croatia as a destination on the tourist market.

3. Propositions of future development of health tourism of rural Croatia

In order for creating successful strategic guidelines and marketing strategies, it is necessary to undertake following necessary steps:

- To determine the target tourist market and a focused marketing and promotion mix to that market;

- To design and create communication channels towards target markets (new (e-) media and similar);
- To create tourist products and facilities which combine programs based on improvement of health, state of mind, vitality in general and life with the landscape;
- Based on previously mentioned, to create a unique and recognizable brand of health tourism of rural Croatia.

For successful creation of an innovative tourist offer of health tourism of rural Croatia, it is necessary to perceive all the advantages and disadvantages that rural Croatia has in relation to the competitive destinations. The following is presented in the SWOT matrix of health tourism of rural Croatia.

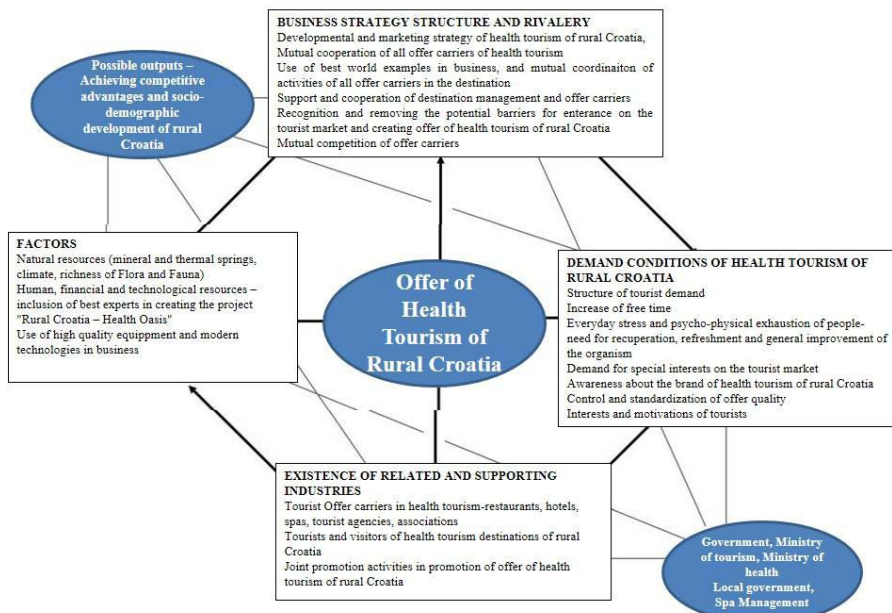
Table 3 SWOT analysis of health tourism of rural Croatia

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Convenient geographical position – Adequate and preserved resource basis (clean air, preserved landscape particularities) – Rich and various Flora and Fauna – Rich cultural-historical heritage – Springs of thermal and curative waters – Traditional architecture of rural Croatia – Tradition in tourism and hospitality – Good traffic connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Non-existence of clear developmental strategy of health tourism – Lack of starting and developing new tourism forms – Lack of private initiatives and entrepreneurship in tourism in relation to its real possibilities – Inadequate and incomplete marketing and promotion of tourist attractions – Lack of educated personnel in tourism – Relatively high labor cost – Insufficient communication among tourist employees
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trends of increasing the share of health tourism in world tourist flows – Increasing demand for preserved destinations – Possibility of offering an eco-product in tourist offer of health tourism – Quality and more innovative offer of health tourism of rural Croatia – Use of cohesion EU funds – Use of "good practice" of the neighboring countries – Connecting the offer of coastal and rural Croatia – Spontaneous arrival of tourists in destination – High-income market of health tourism – Vicinity of outbound tourist markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Insufficient and unregulated legal basis – Environment pollution, violation of natural preservation – Disrespect of postulates of sustainable development in tourism development – Climate changes – Strong and developed competition of health tourism – Insufficiently motivated human resources – Incoherence, misunderstanding and disharmony of health personnel and tourist employees

Source: Authors' analysis

Previously presented SWOT analysis indicates that rural areas of Croatia possess significant resources for achieving a successful and high quality offer of health tourism, and rich experience that Croatia has in tourist offer development, which was until now unfortunately mostly limited to coastal Croatia, which is witnessed by numerous scientific and professional researches. Based on the conducted SWOT analysis, following was created Porter's Diamond of comparative advantages of offer of health tourism of rural Croatia (see pic.1).

Picture 1 Porter's Diamond of comparative advantages of offer of health tourism of rural Croatia



Source: Analysis according to Drpić, Milojica (2012) according to Porter, M., E. (1998) *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. New York: Free Press

Creation of Porter's Diamond of comparative advantages of health tourism offer of rural Croatia acknowledges the necessity of creating a new and more competitive tourist product which will enable satisfaction of needs and desires of contemporary tourists, in a way to maximize the usefulness for a destination, but also for tourist offer carriers with preserving natural particularities of rural Croatia. The basic purpose of creating the Diamond is to ensure that the offer of health tourism of rural Croatia in the future becomes one of the principle and leading carriers of a new tourist offer with a goal of promoting Croatia as the closest tourist destination which bases its offer on preservation of resources, care for prevention of diseases and health preservation, and its further development bases on sustainable development. Furthermore, the diamond of competitiveness will enable strengthening of mutual cooperation between all offer carriers in a rural destination, strengthening mutual integration of different forms of selective tourist offer, and during that establishing understanding between different economic and social sectors, etc. These activities represent the foundation for creating a unique and competitive tourist product of Croatia, which in the future needs to become unique, same valuable, indivisible, and by all that, recognizable to the wide circle of potential users of a tourist product of Croatia. Following a plan of implementation activities of health tourism of rural Croatia is given. The prices and periods of implementation activities are of indicative character and are subject to changes, depending on the sort and comprehensiveness of projects in a certain area of rural Croatia.

Table 4 Plan of implementation activities of creating an offer of health tourism of rural Croatia

Activities/ Measures	Enforcer of the activities	Target group	Deadline	Possible financial resources	Target priority	Potential budget in Euro
Production of promotion flyers, brochures, websites, promotion shows and videos	Ministry of tourism, specialized marketing agencies, interested spas	Offer carriers, Local community	Continuously	Ministry of tourism, Tourist Board, community, PPP	Maximum	100.000,00
Seminars and workshops for human resources employed in spas- education with a goal of raising the quality of offer and creating the awareness about the brand "Rural Croatia – Health Oasis"	Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health Destination Management Spa Management	Offer carriers	6 months - Continuously	Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health Spas	Maximum	50.000,00
Seminars/educatio ns and workshops with the topic of active life and preservation of health by target groups	Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health, professionals in the area of health tourism, health personnel	Destination' s visitors, Local community	continuously	Ministry of Tourism, Tourist Board, county, PPP, Spas	Maximum	50.000,00
Free marketing for offer carriers of health tourism in rural areas	Tourist Board	Offer carriers	Continuously	Tourist Board, Ministry of Tourism, county	Maximum	150.000,00
Help in creating marketing strategy of an individual offer carrier	Tourist Board, Local government and self- government, Ministry of Tourism, interested spas	Offer carriers	Continuously	Tourist Board, Ministry of Tourism, county	Maximum	100.000,00
Creation and developing a Brand "Rural Croatia - Health Oasis"	Tourist Board, Local government and Self- government, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health, interested spas	Offer carriers	1 year – continuously	Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health, Tourist Board, county, PPP	Maximum	270.000,00
Project Green rural health resorts Croatia- branding, support to construction, establishing interest Associations	Private Investors, Financial institutions	Visitors of a destination and owners of new objects	3 years	Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EU cohesion funds, entrepreneurs, Ministry of Tourism, public-private partnership	Maximum	500.000,00

Source: Authors' analysis

Creating a unique promotion activity for offer carriers is anticipated in the project, as well as organizing educations for spa employees with a goal of strengthening the offer's quality, organizing educations and workshops about health for service users, and creating a unique offer of health tourism of rural Croatia within the project Green Health Resorts and Rural Croatia – Health Oasis. Green Health Resorts would consist of health resorts of rural Croatia (the existing or new ones) which would base their offer on programs of health preservation, encouraging ecological offer (cooperation and placement of products from family farms), creating the offer that achieves the connection of service user with nature, use of renewable energy sources, respecting the postulates of sustainable development, etc. Through project

Rural Croatia-Health Oasis, all the comparative advantages of rural Croatia need to be emphasized, in relation to the competitive destinations.

The goal of developing previously mentioned project is multi-significant, and its realization achieves:

- Strengthening the competitive position of health tourism offer of rural Croatia
- Growth of quality of health tourism offer of rural Croatia and strengthening the total competitiveness of tourism of Croatia
- Socio-demographic and economic regeneration of rural Croatia in total
- Creating an innovative and unique tourist product
- Enabling inter-sector cooperation between ministries of tourism and health, offer carriers in tourism and spas
- Possibilities are created for destination management for development of further tourist products and prolonging of tourist season
- Creation of associations of spas of Croatia – Green Health Resorts.

Besides its own innovative solutions, in this paper presented offer will be based on international experiences and world practice of competitive countries which have progressed so much in relation to Croatia, which will enable a strong and successful repositioning of health tourism offer of rural Croatia, as an undivided unit of a Croatian tourist product on the world tourist market, which is very important especially today when numerous new developmental potentials are created, in a form of free knowledge exchange, free trade and available funds for projects of rural development from the cohesion funds of the European Union. In order for development of health tourism in rural Croatia to be possible, it is necessary that the country respects the postulates of sustainable development, and that the destination management is included in creation of a new and innovative tourist product. There is a possibility for developing small and medium entrepreneurship, especially for family farms which can offer services of accommodation, and under controlled conditions produce ecologically grown groceries which can be used within the gastronomic offer of health tourism, but also in production and selling of original and highly valuable products for preservation and improvement of health (i.e. creams, peelings, oil massages, etc.). On family farms various services of recreation, and various sports facilities (horseback-riding, trekking, walks in nature, etc.) can be offered, by which the existing offer of spas and hotel facilities in spas may be complemented.

4. Conclusion

The economic crisis affected the tourism on a world level, as well as in Croatian tourism. In order to reduce all the negative implications, and improve its current state, it is of great importance to use adequately all the resources Croatia has, and profile an even more diverse, more recognizable and higher quality tourist offer based on postulates of sustainability, particularly since the modern tourists tend to stay in eco-tourist destinations. Health tourism has a great potential in Croatia, particularly in rural areas. However, its offer is undeveloped in relation to the competitive destinations (Slovenia, Hungary, etc.). A significant lack in forming developmental models is the non-existence of database about the movements in health tourism of rural Croatia, which aggravates formation of a clear development and marketing strategy which would enable competitiveness on the tourist market. The development of health tourism would bring significant advantages in rural areas (higher employment of local population, stimulation of development of small and medium entrepreneurship, increase of tourist turnover, contribution of tourist offer of rural areas to the

total tourist offer of Croatia, achieving higher recognizability in the European and world level). Active marketing activities will enable the entrance in the potential customer's awareness, and will point out the advantages that a specific tourist offer contains (uniqueness, high level of quality, providing value and experience for money, etc.). Success of further tourist development of health tourism of rural Croatia will be enabled if in development of tourist offer suggested implementation activities are included, they need to be coordinated and upgraded according to the needs of a certain destination of health tourism of rural Croatia.

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