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TRAINING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

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Abstract

Ecological education is a complex process which not only covers events, but also points out the importance of developing a society as a whole. In this work authors also analyse ecological education in Croatia, specially in Istria, which represents the most developed tourist region of Croatia. Based on that research, a notion to implement ecological education in the national education system is being promoted - starting from kindergarden and up to college level. Survey research shows results of respondents - tourists during the year 2015, when they visited Istria, their preferences regarding organic food and the satisfaction of the offer. A survey research of the local population was also performed in order to assess their involvement in development of tourism programs of Poreč destination.

Keywords: *tourism, ecology, ecological consciousness and eco-education, local community, education, tourist development.*

Preface

In today's world, any form of organizational structure, even an individual one, is unimaginable without an applicable ecological concept, especially ecological standards and criteria. The root of Reasons for ecological awareness in every human activity should be sought since the time of the first ecological shock – the oil crisis in 1973. Since then, the world of politicians, businessmen and strategy development has accustomed a notion that natural resources are limited and that they need to access this situation rationally. Gradually, this developed an idea of safe management of all types and forms of resources. Tourism is, amongst them all, one of the most specific and dependant.

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Croatia, as a whole, and especially the Adriatic region is highly ranked by its natural components, cleanliness of sea and nature, climate and vegetation. Tourism and environment are tightly related. Every tourist destination is linked to environmental, natural, cultural and social resources. When compared to other sectors, tourism, in relation to ambient and natural changes that are being affected, can be listed under cultural eco-systems. Therefore, this broad complex problem of the 21st century related to tourist phenomenon indicates inseparable links between:

- tourism and territory,
- tourist attraction and scenery and
- tourism and spatial planning.

Amongst above mentioned links between tourism and scenery, managing structure holds a great importance in implementing and condition of dynamics of development of a tourist destination. We must not neglect the fact that a tourism destination is becoming a target destination of potential tourists. This type of tourist regionalization was established as an answer to global processes and the globalization in which economy, politics, culture and social level co-create globalization (Magaš, 2003.). A tourist chooses a tourist destination that will fulfill his needs and expectations, based on product content and ecological efficiency of the destination.

Social responsibility in tourism

The concept of sustainable development, which comprises of economic success and social responsibility and at the same time protects natural and human resources, has been present on an international level since 20 years ago. The awareness of necessity of creating a cult of sustainable development was spread after the 1992 world global conference in Rio de Janeiro.

Sustainable development implies excellence, and high-quality results in the field of commerce, emphasized social responsibility and constant concern for the preservation of the environment. Proponents of sustainable development advocated and implemented a development that contributes to balanced economic growth with responsibility to wider community and the environment. However, the very idea of sustainable development, which is presented with us, is not enough. For the idea to be transparently achieved, it must be implemented in practice. What is the

position of Croatia and its most developed tourism destinations? Great efforts were made by Croatian entry into the EU and reinforcement was placed in order to improve the area of sustainable development.

Survey research, made for this study, was made amongst tourists that were on vacation in Istria in the year 2015. The results show how much the environment preservation is actually vital in terms of motive for choosing a tourism destination. However, one can ask a question to what extent the companies in the field of hospitality and tourism industry, agencies and other services in the tourism industry, care about the preservation of nature, the relations with consumers, tourists and local people and what is their social responsibility behavior.

The questionnaire that was used in the 2015 survey on tourists located on the coast of Istria contains 18 questions. One third of the questions are of classical nature and refer to information about Istria, the manner of tourist arrival, length of their stay, etc., while most of the remaining issues are related to the motives of their arrival, whether they would be willing to choose to spend their holidays in the rural part of Istria, what the contents offered they find most desirable for them, and how they evaluate ecologically produced food (organic food) in restaurants and shops, and whether they are willing to pay more for such products - if yes, how much more. As for the motives of tourist arrivals, we can say that the content of the available resources and the quality of supply is a clear indicator of a tourism destination. These motives are constantly changing. What impact do the natural beauties have on the choice of Istrian destination is shown in Chart 1.

As the chart data show, seaside vacation is still the leading motive of tourist in comparison to earlier years, when it topped between 60% and 70%. This confirms our hypothesis that the tourism concept of “sun and sea” is rapidly changing and that it needs to be enriched and upgraded with arrivals in Istria (37%); however, it has significantly decreased in the various types of offers. This is where we see an opportunity for promoting cultural and other selective forms of tourism within a sustainable development. Essential reasons of tourist arrivals are natural beauties, accessible prices, possibilities of engaging in sport activities and vicinity of Istrian countryside.

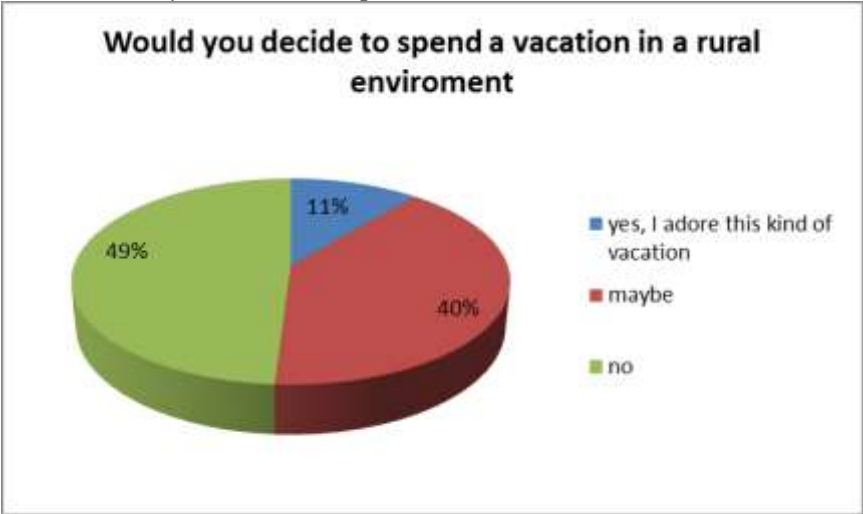
Chart 1: *Motives of tourist arrivals in Istria*



Source: *author's research*

Considering the distinct ecological preservance and rich cultural history of Istria, vicinity of the sea, eno&gastro offer of authentic food and beverages, the purpose of this research is to find out whether tourists would be willing to spend their summer vacation in rural Istira, on the countryside, 30 kilometers away from the sea shore. The results of this survey research are shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2: *Would you decide to spend a vacation in a rural environment*



Source: *author's research*

The data in Chart 2 confirms a significant trend of interest in tourism in rural areas, even more so if we consider the fact that the interviewed tourists were those residing on the bay area of Istria. Rural areas offer guests comfortable accommodation, peaceful and quiet surroundings, as well as natural attractions, possibilities of sport activities, variety of organic food, wine roads and various gastronomical specialties – all of these are considered to be significant reasons for one to decide and visit the rural areas.

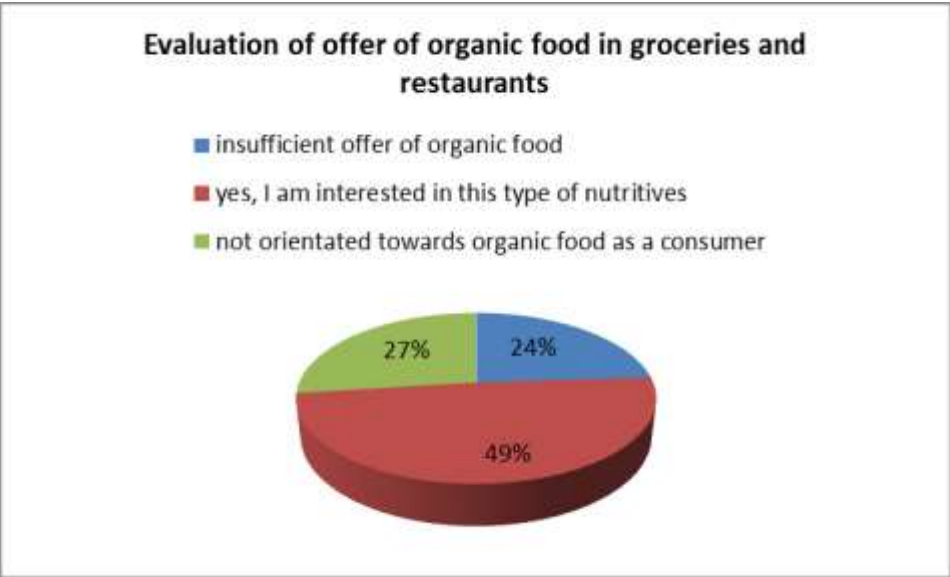
Among interviewed tourists which provided the answer „maybe“, there is a vast majority that will soon decide for this type of location. This also denotes that rural Istria is a very interesting tourist location, especially because of near emissive markets, sea, natural, cultural, historical and other resources and that it intensively must keep developing rural tourism in a sustainable environment. This way, the current mass tourist offer of Istria may be restructured and the economical resources in rural areas may be revalorized.

Considering that similar researches had not been made, authors of this survey research had an objective to confirm the hypothesis about the emerging demand - of foreign and domestic tourists - for organic food. As the results show, interviewed tourists are not content with the offer of organic food (24%) and almost half of all interviewed (50%) are interested in this type of nutriment. These results should impact on embarking a larger volume of organic production in rural areas, as well as growing demand and interest of hotels, tourist agencies, traders and distributors for these products.

Hoteliers and carriers of catering tourism supply should start considering the conversion of at least one hotel in each particular destination to an eco-hotel, as well as offering more restaurants and markets with an extensive offer of organic nutriment.

Considering that many organic food producers claim that organic food production is significantly more expensive than conventional food production, due to lower yield and absence of organized buy out, using survey research, we decided to find out whether tourists are willing to pay more for organic nutriment, and if so – how much more. Meanwhile, these trends in demand for organic food and significant possibilities for production are not being utilized enough.

Chart 3: *Evaluation of offer of ecologically produced food in groceries and restaurants*



Source: author’s research

In Chart 4, we can see that 77% of examinees answered that they would be willing to pay 15-20% more for organic nutriments, in comparison to conventionally produced food. There is far less of those, who would be willing to pay 20-30% more - only 9% of the respondents.

Chart 4: *Evaluation of acceptance of steep prices of organic food*



Source: *author’s research*

Position and Role of Tourism in Sustainable Development

We can say that tourism significantly contributes to environment preservation. The contribution is contained mostly in its positive attitude towards waste, preserving the natural habitat (environment), balance towards usage of space, purity of tourism destinations (cities) and environment, as well as preserving ecological balance of sea and sweet waters.

However, although some contributions are outside the social scope of tourism organizations, they have great possibilities to exploit the public voice and influence it. Likewise, it also applies to the choice of offer, where organic products can significantly change the food culture and contribute to the preservation of health. Certainly, it is one of the most important components of tourism, in terms of social responsible behavior towards the consumer, suppliers, employees and local community and population. These relationships are necessary to build on principles of mutual trust and partnership. This is the only way in which a successful entrepreneurial image, that is based on honesty to the market and consumers, business partners and ultimately to employees, is built. However, one may wonder whether this is so in our daily practice in our tourist destinations.

Socially responsible companies, regardless the business they are in, achieve good business results and thereby contribute to the prosperity of local community and society as a whole. However, not all successful companies are socially responsible. There are numerous negative examples in tourism destinations, particularly in those where owners of travel companies are foreign citizens, where it is all about profit. Such a setup is necessary to change and accept new relations and operations on the basis of the set formula: Destination + environment = pleasant holiday.

If we start from the fact that natural beauty is one of the main motives of tourist arrival to Istria - 23% (see Graph 1) and vacation at sea 37%, then it becomes clear how these resources, that God has given us to, should be nurtured and kept for generations to come.

We must not forget the possibilities of production of organic food which is present in Croatia and Istria, as well as expressed demand from tourists for this kind of nutritive.

Croatia as well as the Istrian tourist offer requires its favorable location and the possibility of differentiation of global competition. One possible way of doing this is by offering genetically unmodified and organically produced food. This can be achieved primarily through various selective forms of tourist offer, such as health tourism, sports and recreational tourism, conference tourism, nautical, wine and food tourism, ecotourism, etc. Most of these forms of tourism are consumed by people with greater purchasing power in order to preserve their health. Today's tourists are environmentally conscious and take extremely great care of their health. Amongst other things, they travel on vacation for nurturing their health. Therefore, tourist offer of organically produced food segment has played a major role in promoting and repositioning Croatian and Istrian tourism (Bošković, 2005). This is the chance and the possibility to create a competitive advantage of our offer in comparison to the world tourist markets.

Thematic Priorities in Environmental Preservation

Strategy of tourism development initiates broad discussions regarding its existence. An ethical question, which preoccupies tourist planners on a global scale, discovers relational problems between antropocentric and ecocentric directions (Stettner, 1997). Common ethical approach in the development of economic society is antropocentric – humanly orientated. It has, in a way, derived from a dogma that nature has no reason for existence, if it does not serve to human (Đukić, 2001). American version of this concept points out that there is an unlimited pool of resources for human exploits, regardless of influence of other kinds, that nature must be controlled. Ecocentric and earth ethics are based on traditional “primitive” societies, pointing out the significant fact that the human is not the only living creature. Therefore, the ecological awareness is being pointed out here, which also includes individual responsibility for Earth's health. Earth ethics is based on sustainable development and sharing the same rights with other species and communities. Of course, there are many problems in this area and we should be looking at them in our relationship towards the environment. A significant aspect of this is population increase. However, on the other side, these increases do not take place in the same areas. For instance, industrial countries are the largest polluters and resource consumers, although they have the smallest increase of population (Weizsacker et al., 1995). However, despite this cognition and anempirically proved high level of ecological awareness, this is not enough to cope with pollution and destruction of environment.

It seems that the gap between ecological awareness and ecological actions is getting bigger. Within that concept, if we start from our individual and social level, we could say that the most vital aspects of our behavior towards the environment are ethical, psychological, social and ecological. This observation also refers to our everyday life and to our behavior during our free time when on vacation.

We should note two aspects when observing mutual relations of ecological problems and ethics (Muller, 2000):

- Ethics, comprehended as a system of values, determines which life aspects may be marked as problematic and
- Ethics, as a system of values, determines individual and collective activities.

Contribution of Tourism

Innovation of a particular activity is a proof of its future capabilities. When dealing with tourism, we can compare its innovative strength to information technologies, biotechnology and telecommunications. According to previous activities and results, one cannot expect spectacular results, despite the fact that recently World Tourist Organization has presented certain programs, which were initiated by the UN. The plea is common for all subjects who perceive social responsibility for sustainable development as a key factor – tourism should become the world's greatest organization for environmental protection, in terms of bio-diversification and human benefit. Besides tourism, social responsibility for sustainable development should also be a priority to other complementary segments, such as agriculture, commerce, industry, etc. Local pollutions, derived from agriculture are very diverse. The ones that stand out are:

- Adverse impacts on soil, water and air,
- Depletion of soil and erosion,
- Loss of natural habitat for animal species and
- Pauperization of scenery (Nisbet, 1994)

Relations between tourism and mountain agriculture are complementary when one side profits from another. Without mountain agriculture, there is no maintenance of scenery, and without maintenance of scenery there are fewer tourist attractions. A setback in agriculture would inflict at least four effects on tourism (Masserk, 1989):

- Less agriculture denotes less maintenance of scenery,
- Less agriculture denotes loss of attraction, needed to bring guests from urban environments,
- Less agriculture denotes further vanishment of old customs and subsequently – cultural heritage and
- Less agriculture denotes further vanishing of rural conservatism.

Competitive relationship between tourism and agriculture should not be neglected, as they are both competing for the same production factors – land and labor force. When it comes to land market, tourism is the one which grasps fertile lands, along with constructional lobbies, who use the help of political powers to urbanize agricultural areas and subsequently commercialize them. A special type of disharmony is present between tourism and industry, especially in tourist destinations, both sea and rural areas.

Considering that tourism is one of the key factors of growth and development, not only of particular tourism destinations, but also of the global economy, we can ask ourselves what we can expect from it by the end of the 21st century. The fact is that domination of multinational companies, the main carriers of globalization, is one of the fundamental characteristics of modern tourism. In the last couple of decades, massive companies were formed in the fields of hotel commerce, tour operating and agency business and air traffic – these types of companies go beyond national borders with their business orientation. The sheer basis of their successful business is comprised of development and application of information technologies. Process of globalization has contributed to strong expansion of tourist markets and creating a surplus in offer capacities. There has been a significant increase of destination offer, as well as the time interval of surplus of capacities, accommodation and traffic. Competition in tourist market between equal subjects is being realized when they share the same preferences. Due to globalization, traditional tourist countries have lost their advantage of being the tourism development generators, and are now facing an unexpected pressure of newly found tourist destinations. In the future, globalization of tourism will induce these effects:

- standardized procedures of quality control,
- sharper competition,
- establishment of strategic associations,
- a change in management approach,

- changes in HR practices,
- adoption of new ways of running business and
- adoption of global distribution systems.

So, globalization is forcing small and medium-sized companies in tourism sector to fight under circumstances of heavy competition with massive multinational companies, in order to survive.

There is no doubt about it, that preserved nature of tourist destinations will have a critical role when dealing with demand in tourism. Therefore, social responsibility of all tourist subjects is of great importance. A number of experts believe that tourism in 21st century may endure many things: wars, crisis, catastrophes, but certainly not devastation of nature. Pragmatists, however, claim that, although it is not considered a strategic principle, hope remains as the biggest force of mankind. Therefore, for instance, Agenda 21 predicts a planned relation towards our planet. This idea is comprised of global balance of responsibility, a global dialog and global cooperation. However, without establishing a system of social responsibility on all levels (top down), we cannot reckon on existing preservation of our life habitat and the competitive benefits it carries.

Educating local communities for tourism development

In the context of tourism development, education should be considered more of a one-dimensional process, which offers counseling to local communities. It is characterized by following elements: ecological education, outer expertise, possibility of learning and selection, capability of bringing a decision and conducting it, and bearing the responsibility for brought decisions, actions and their consequences (Sofield, 2003).

However, in order to qualify these tourism orientated communities, social and institutional changes are required as a prerequisite for dispersion of power, which will later result in changes. These changes must be implemented in three levels: macrolevel, mezolevel and microlevel (Petrić, 2007). Tourism is relying on good will and cooperation of local inhabitants, as they comprise a constituent part of the local tourist offer. However, where development and planning is not in accordance with local aspirations and possibilities (which is often the case in Croatia), then resistance and hostility may destruct the entire process (Murphy, 1985). According to Lidija Petrić, education of local community is defined as a process, where positive results are visible especially in economical,

psychological, social and political area (Petrić, 2007). The table below denotes this:

Table 1: *Education of local communities for sustainable development*

Type of education/training	Signs of education
Economic	Tourism brings long term financial benefits to the destination. Money is spread within the community. Improvement of quality of local services and infrastructure.
Psychologic	Growth of self-confidence, as recognition of uniqueness and value of their culture, natural resources and traditional knowledge. Growing trust that community leaders will seek further options for education and training. Access to work positions and money enriches the social status of local inhabitants
Social	Tourism accelerates the balance of local community and contributes to its establishment. Interconnection in local community is growing, as individuals and families cooperate in order to develop a successful (business) activity. Some resources are being used for developing initiatives, like educational and infrastructural
Political	Political structure is a representative forum, where people may ask questions and come out with problems, linked with tourist initiatives. Agencies, which run or establish tourist companies, are seeking opinions of interest groups and community members, as well as giving them a chance to cooperate in decision making process.

Source: *Scheyvers 1999., by Petrić, Lidija., Osposobljavanje lokalnih zajednica za turistički razvoj: Primjer Hrvatske.*

Each of the specified education types is offering some benefits to local community population. Therefore, economic education is important, as it offers financial benefits from tourism. Psychological education encourages development of confidence, as well as feeling of pride of local culture and traditional knowledge. Social education keeps in order the social balance of the local community. Political education includes representative democracy, which enables the locals to express their opinion and ask questions in regard to development initiatives. Power of the state can affect tourism development implicitly or explicitly. Local power has a different role, as its assignment is to repel negative influences

as well as to increase positive effects of tourism and tourist consumption. Local authorities define the scenarios and directions of tourist development of the community.

Results of local population's attitude towards tourism development of Poreč destination

Concept realization of tourism destination development and promotion of quality of offer is almost inconceivable without including local community in the process of planning and developing of those tourism sectors which will bring most benefits (Magaš, 2003). To this day, there have been only a few cases in Croatian tourism where the local population has actively been included in creating the development of the destination's tourist offer. The attitude of local population towards tourism development may be analyzed in two ways (Blažević & Peršić, 2007):

- perception of local population about tourism development and
- function of domicile population in tourism prosperity.

Perception of local population is shown through: attitude towards tourism development, satisfaction with locally tailored, custom fit offer (culture, sports, and recreational activities), and inclusion of autochthonous elements in tourist offer. The importance of local population is determined by the level of awareness and integration in tourism decision making process, as well as inclusion of local population in public services, dealing with tourism specifics.

For discovering the attitude towards local tourism development, local population custom fitted offer satisfaction, quality of life in a tourist destination and their participation in decision making process, a method of interview was employed on 105 respondents, the local inhabitants from Poreč and the surroundings, where all age groups were represented. Interviews were made in the month of May 2014 in three different public spaces.

Interviews led to following results: most of the respondents (66%) have a positive attitude towards tourism development in Poreč. This positive attitude is a result of the possibility of using numerous contents of tourism offer, available to the local population. Mainly, these are contents of sports-recreational and cultural-amusement offer.

We recorded that 14% of respondents have a negative attitude and 20% of the respondents have a neutral attitude. Inconsiderable amount of negative, as well as neutral attitude, originates from the following reasons:

- deduction of the number of employees in tourism, on behalf of rationalization and implementation of new technologies,
- dissatisfaction with working conditions and salary,
- inability to employ young and educated human resources and
- the seasonality of business.

One of the questions in the interview was: *What do you dislike the most during the peak of the tourist season in Poreč?* Following answers were given:

- city overcrowded with tourists,
- traffic gridlocks and parking lot jams,
- crowded beaches,
- pollution of nature and
- excessive noise, coming from city restaurants and entertainment objects.

Majority of the respondents (71%) believes that tourism development has positively affected the inclusion of autochthonous products in tourist offer (food products, groceries, industrial products, confection, souvenirs, crafts, and services). However, the representation of these products is far less than expected, due to general import orientation of the country.

Aim of this interview was also to establish the satisfaction of the locals with being informed and included in the decision making process regarding tourism of their own destination. Regardless that development of a destination should be based on integration of all destination stakeholders (Poreč), unfortunately, this is not the case. More than 85% of respondents believe that they should be informed and included in the decision making process, whereas 15% of them believe that this is not necessary. Respondents were also served with a question: *What is your opinion about the sustainable development of our destination?* or *On which way does the industrial development and real estate building endanger our destination?* Over 88% of respondents stated that tourism development is not endangered, whereas 12% thinks otherwise.

Ecologic education of local population

Active talks about ecological education started in the last 20 years, globally, as well as here in Croatia. Appropriate efforts have been made in order to adopt certain educational programs that fit the ecologic needs of local society. These efforts, however, were not enough socially valorized, and even not well justified on the bases of scientific and ecologic concepts, not to mention ecologic projects. In the past, traditional ecological patterns were used for searching new environmental educational solutions. Therefore, we should not wonder, if some of them are still simple and superficial, sometimes even exposing frivolous understanding of environmental problems. This situation raises a number of questions, like: what are the present and future needs of economy and society in general, related to environmental education; what our society expects in the near future from educational institutions, from the lowest to the highest possible level; and, especially, what it expects from science, which otherwise is not exploited enough when dealing with environmental issues. These are just some of the questions. Of course, many of them still exist and are present in everyday life and work. However, the answers to these questions should contain a starting point for designing a sustainable future for generations to come.

If we start from necessities which set the imperative that educational institutions finally become a cornerstone of life, then a number of further changes is indispensable. All of this is feasible, but only after the satisfaction of certain preconditions or prerequisites are met. The basic prerequisite for this is a change in general perception and attitude towards ecological functions of individual educational institutions and society in general. It is certain that various forms of connection and immediate ecological-educational work would accelerate acceptance and encouragement of new eco-social needs.

If we start from pre-school education, then in primary and secondary schools it would be safe to say that they would already have certain knowledge and achieved preconditions for a far more active involvement in an environmentally sound way of life. An adequate expertise of teachers and professors is an absolute prerequisite on all levels of education, as they should possess proper ecological knowledge, attitudes and views.

In order to fit into global processes, Croatia must implement various reforms: political, economical and educational. The entire process of reforming should use ecologic knowledge. This process should implement the national ecological potential in its basis and seek for solutions of ecological problems and sustainable development. Therefore, education of all subjects on all levels is just as important. A special part of environmental education is an adequate production of literature and its application in reality. Educational process represents a conscious and planned development of ecological knowledge during the entire human's life span. It is the fundamental objective of raising awareness of the basic features of the human environment, relations within it, based on which man will seek the preservation and improvement of the environment.

Environmental education should provide a very detailed knowledge of basic environmental issues of contemporary society, as well as developing a critical attitude towards the increasing trend of environmental degradation. Furthermore, it should suggest a necessity of rational use of natural resources.

It is a well known fact that environmental awareness does not consist only of knowledge, but also of vital emotional components, because knowledge without beliefs and practical activities does not mean much. It must be remembered that environmental education and the formation of ecological thinking begins in early stages of childhood and therefore the role of educational organizations is ever so significant at all levels of acquiring knowledge (primary, secondary school and college).

Conclusion

Modern society is directed towards the green paradigm. It is in a way a response to growing contradictions which are initiated by globalization. This guidance is only a confirmation that the concept of sustainable development is becoming a focus of modern management of the tourism sector of the economy. Rural areas are particularly sensitive to environmental issues and the interest of the whole tourist destination of Istria should be to protect and preserve nature.

Tourism development affects the enhanced urban development of tourism destinations and thereby stimulates the transformation of formerly rural areas to modern urban coastal areas. In these areas, an essential part of planning for tourism development is becoming ecological education and

planning of sustainable development that will meet all the expectations of the tourism offer stakeholders, as well as that of the current and potential users.

One of the goals of this study was to demonstrate forms of training the local community, particularly environmental education for sustainable tourism development and the role of local government, as well as representatives of the public sector, which play a role in this process. Particular survey researches have been made on local population in the tourist resort of Poreč with the aim to determine their satisfaction about their level of being informed, about satisfaction with planning the tourism development and about being included in the decision-making process. The results show the views and opinions of the respondents on the positive and negative effects of tourism on local communities and their residents.

When it comes to environmental education in Croatia, it needs to be said that it is necessary to introduce it to all educational institutions, and clearly define the purpose, objectives, activities, actors and all input-material resources.

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