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Beaches as a Factor in Achieving Competitiveness of a Tourist Product-Case Study: Istrian County

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ABSTRACT

Beaches are the main part of an integral tourist product of a destination. They represent a highly valuable resource from the aspect of natural, social, economic and recreational potential. They make a tourist product attractive, and represent a motive of arrival to a destination for a certain number of tourists. In order for a beach to be placed in a function of tourist offer and positioning of a tourist destination on the tourist market, and for destination's tourist product to become more attractive, it is necessary to enrich the offer of beaches according to the desires of market segment while respecting the principles of sustainable development. Beach offer of the Istrian County has been analysed within this paper. While preparing this paper, the authors have used the scientific methodology, which means gathering and the analysis of data from primary and secondary sources. An analysis of domestic and foreign professional and scientific literature has been carried out, as well as the valid law frame of beach managing in the Republic of Croatia. With a goal of analysing the existing state of regulation and managing beaches in the Istrian County, an evaluation of beach resources has been carried out.

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1 Introduction

Tourism market represents a very dynamic market, and is marked by fast changes from both tourists offer and demand. Contemporary trends register not only a faster growth of tourist preferences, but also that they are becoming increasingly specific. In order to achieve success on the tourist market, as well as competitive positioning, it is necessary to ensure timely adjustment of tourist offer to the tourist demand. Only those destinations, which form destination product based on the desires and needs of tourists, will achieve success (Zadel and Cerović, 2013). Within a Croatian tourist product, classical Sun, sea, sand (3S) offer has remained dominant throughout the years, and the current situation is not different. One of the counties, whose efforts and activities are emphasized in terms of development of this tourism form is the Istrian county. Many investments were made into the development of its beaches and its facilities. Within this paper, the authors will present, through adequate theoretical background, the importance and characteristics of beaches in the

Istrian county, as well as the results of an empirical research in which attitudes of tourists towards beaches and bathing tourism offer will be presented. Finally, concluding remarks will be provided.

2 Theoretical Background

Competitiveness among tourist destinations has been growing due to numerous international tourism activities, which occur on daily basis. That brings the importance of the assessment of destination performance vis-a-vis other similar and competing destinations (Kozak, 2002). Competitiveness and how to achieve it on the turbulent tourist market has been a subject of numerous scientific and professional studies for many years, and from various points of view. In order to make a clearer insight, the authors will present briefly some of them. Duman and Kozak (2010), i.e., carried out an analysis of tourism resources in Turkish cities by using the content analysis of official tourism websites of Turkish cities. They also surveyed the tourism officials in Turkish cities in order to identify

their descriptions of the cities in which promotion they are actively involved. Based on the findings they were able to determine and propose developmental directions, respectively where to focus in order to improve the level of the achieved level of competitiveness of a Turkish tourist product. Goffi (2013) undertook further efforts into developing Ritchie & Crouche's model (2000) to a higher level by adding further determinants to their original competitiveness model, and testing the model on the Italian destinations of excellence. The model contains: 1. core resources and key attractors (natural resources, green areas, leisure activities, gastronomy and typical services, etc.); 2. tourist services (quantity and quality of accommodation, food services quality, tourist oriented services, etc.); 3. general infrastructures (environmental friendliness and quality of transportation services, quality of road system, medical care facilities, sanitation, sewage and solid waste disposal, etc.); 4. conditioning and supporting factors (accessibility of destination, proximity of other destinations, destination links with major origin markets, value for money in destination tourism experience, etc.); 5. tourism policy, planning and development (political commitment to tourism, integrated approach to tourism planning, clear policies in creating formal employment opportunities, etc.); 6. destination management (effectiveness of destination positioning, effective market segmentation, tourist destination communication, effectiveness in crafting tourism experiences, etc.); and 7. demand factor (awareness of destination, level of repeat visitors, "Fit" between destination products and visitor preferences, etc.). The results of the empirical research and testing confirmed the validity of the model and its success in determining the level of competitiveness of a tourist destination and its offer. According to Dwyer and Kim (2003), in order to achieve competitive advantages for its tourism industry, any destination must enable that adequate "appeal" as well as the experience offered to the tourists, which must be superior among all the alternative destinations available. An existing and potential visit to a destination is inextricably linked to that destination's overall competitiveness.

Every destination bases its tourist offer development on comparative advantages (this refers to both natural and created destination attributes) which makes it unique and recognizable on the tourist market, and stimulates potential tourist to visit a certain destination. These attributes need to be maintained and managed carefully while upholding sustainability principles, in order to enable their preservation in the long-run (Garcia Sanchez et al, 2015; Porter, 1990), and achieve competitive advantages on the tourist market.

World tourism flows experience numerous changes on daily basis. However, one thing that remained the same over the years is that Sun, Sea, Sand (3S) offer still holding the leading position, due to the fact that numerous destinations primarily base their offer on its natural and other particularities, and beaches represent a primary resource.

Beaches can be defined as a cluster of unconsolidated material (e.g. sand, gravel, clay or mixtures thereof), extending from the land edge of the beach, which can be

slopes of dunes or seawall, to the depths of the sea, where there is no significant movement of sediment (Gračan et al., 2016, p. 76; Williams and Micaleff, 2009, p. 10).

Beaches can be defined in relation to a wide spectre of physical and anthropogenic determinants, which, among other things, include sea physics (primary relates to the influence of waves), material contents, colour of beach sediment (often used in order to describe various types of beaches) and others.

In relation to the anthropogenic dimension, the beach type can be determined according to the three main criteria:

- degree of naturalness (natural or artificial beach);
- degree of use (beaches used intensively, moderately and little);
- beach environment and types of facilities that are being offered (remote, rural, local, urban or resort beach within a tourist complex).

While taking into consideration recreational characteristics of beaches, the Physical Planning and Building Act (NN 76/07, 38/09, 55/11, 90/11, 50/12, 55/12), in article 53 divides beaches into arranged and natural sea beaches. Furthermore, it is determined that:

- arranged sea beach within or outside the settlement is supervised and accessible to everybody under the same condition from the mainland and seaside, including people of reduced mobility, mostly edited and altered natural characteristics, and arranged mainland space from the point of infrastructure and facilities (showers, cabins and sanitation), immediately connected with sea, marked and protected from the seaside;
- natural sea beach within or outside the settlement supervised and accessible from the mainland and/or sea side, unequipped from the point of infrastructure, totally preserved found natural characteristics.

Rethinking beaches in the context of their use, the Regulation on the Procedure for Granting a Concession on a Maritime Domain (NN 23/04, 101/04, 39/06, 63/08, 125/10 and 83/12 – furthermore defines beaches as:

- arranged public beaches – beaches in use to the major number of tourist facilities and citizens;
- arranged special beaches – beaches that make a technical and technological unit of an accommodation unit in the sense of Law on Restaurant Business;
- natural beaches – beaches on which there was no interventions within their space in the sense of the Regulations that are regulating Spatial Planning and Building, and which must not be limited from the mainland.

According to the Bathing Area Registration and Evaluation System (BARE) within the National Programme of Managing and Setting Beaches (2014), they can be divided into the following ones:

- Remote beach: usually determined by poor access (mostly by sea path or walking at least 300 metres), they can be in the vicinity or on the edge of rural, or sometimes village (local) areas, but not urban. They cannot be reached by public transport. In the Mediterranean context, in such

areas it is possible to find a limited number of holiday houses as well as a small number of restaurant businesses open in the summer period;

- Rural beach: situated mostly outside urban/local areas, but can also be situated within the settlements. They are unreachable by public transport, but there are access routes, and they can be reached by public transport. These beaches do not have restaurant facilities. However, in the Mediterranean context, some overland recreational facilities or seasonal beach facilities (i.e. pedalling, "bananas" or water skiing) can be found in rural beaches. In these beaches, the hinterland is not built in a significant measure, however, some accommodation units can be found, but there are no, or there is a small number of permanent social facilities (elementary school, church, store, restaurant business, etc.). They are appreciated by the tourists due to peace and preserved natural qualities;
- Local beach: situated outside major urban surroundings and connected with minor, but constant population that has an access to the organized service activities in a smaller range, such as elementary school, church, stores and restaurant businesses. These beaches also can be found in tourist resorts or camps, which are used mostly in summer months, as well as within inhabited areas between urban and rural areas with developed offer of family accommodation. In relation to the rural beaches, the basic difference is their setting. While rural beaches are mostly natural, public beaches are reachable by public transport or by cars;
- City (urban) beach: situated in the urban area which serves a large population with well-organized service facilities such as elementary schools, churches, banks, post offices, centres of primary healthcare protection, restaurant businesses and other urban facilities. Nautical tourism ports can be found in the vicinity of city beaches;
- Resort beach (which makes a technical-technological unit of some accommodation) has three expressive characteristics: a) it is in the vicinity of accommodation facilities and the majority of its users are the guests of these lodging facilities; b) beach running is the responsibility of the previously mentioned tourist resort, which includes cleaning beaches, ensuring a wide variety of recreational facilities and activities – loungers, pedals, jet-skis, "parasailing", surfing, various activities which include speedboat pulling (the ring, "banana", water-skiing), sailing and diving and coffee shops/restaurants for the beach users. An excellent example for this type of beaches is the organization of the Club Med, an accommodation complex in private ownership, which consists of hotels/bungalows with plenty of restaurant, recreational and entertainment facilities. In some cases, such as "all-inclusive" arrangements, the majority of these services are free for all guests. A large majority of the beach users in a tourist resort uses these facilities for recreational purposes, and not just for relaxation (sunbathing).

As a tourist resource, on which bathing tourism offer is based, beaches significantly enrich the tourism offer of the destinations located along coastal areas as well as on

river and lake banks. They represent the natural, social and economic (recreational) source. Beaches in tourism represent a highly valuable resource due to the fact that beaches represent one of the main motives for undertaking a journey. The quality of the bathing tourism product depends on how beaches are evaluated. Bathing tourism is characterized by a mass of tourists, so it is necessary to bear in mind that tourism evaluation must reflect the tourist preferences, and, at the same time, the offer must be developed in such a way as to uphold sustainability principles. Only through this, it is possible to achieve tourist satisfaction with the economic effects at the same time (Zadel, 2015).

This is also acknowledged by Semeoshenkova & Williams (2011 according to Bojanic, 1992; Vaz et al, 2009), who also emphasized in their work that within tourism industry, as the fastest growing economic sector on world level, beaches are being considered as the main and most important factor which influences that growth. For the majority of tourists, the presence and good quality of a beach and its facilities represents the most important and the most attractive factor in the process of decision-making when choosing a holiday destination. Beaches and near shore-based waters provide for tourists a possibility for sunbathing, relaxing, and other activities such as swimming, surfing, yachting, fishing, jet skiing. Beaches represent the most important recreational and leisure areas which significantly influence the development of coastal countries' economy.

In order for a tourist destination to achieve a higher level of development of its tourist offer, and to achieve competitiveness on the tourist market, it is important to determine its state, as well as the attitudes that tourists have, in order to rethink which are the best possible ones and how to improve them in the best possible way. In the world, beaches are a significant source of income, and in the last few years, the interest is growing due to the possibility of using their recreational and economic potential. The Republic of Croatia has made significant breaks through the years in terms of this form of tourist offer development.

Besides numerous regulations and projects of the European and world councils and organizations dealing with ecology and sustainable development, and on the national level as well, documents and action plans of beach running have been brought with a goal of increasing beach quality and competitiveness, which necessarily brings to the increase of their economic evaluation. In 2018 the Ministry of Environment and Energy has brought the Strategy of Managing Sea Environment and Coastal Area aimed at protecting the marine environment. The significance of beaches for the further development of tourism in the Republic of Croatia was recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, which, in 2014, brought the National Programme of Managing and Arranging Sea Beaches with a unique database of all beaches and their facilities out of which the process of their theming arose. Regional plans of beach theming were made further on the county level. One of them is the Istrian County, which is the subject of research in this paper.

Many activities have been focused towards development of various specific forms of tourism, but bathing tourism still remained the leading within the tourist product. One of the Croatian counties which need to be pointed out in particular is the Istrian County. In the following chapter the authors will present a brief theoretical review of the state of the tourist offer of the Istrian County with a particular emphasis on its beach resources, as well as tourists' attitudes towards beaches within the Istrian County. Based on this, they will offer a direction of the future development of bathing tourism in Istria.

3 Characteristics of Beaches as a Part of the Istrian County's Tourist Offer

According to the 2015 – 2025 Master Plan of Tourism of the Istrian County (2014), Istria is the most western county in the Republic of Croatia, and territorially organized into 41 units of local self-government, respectively 10 cities and towns and 31 larger rural municipalities with Pazin as the seat of the county. Its area covers 3,476 square kilometres, of which the majority, 3,130 square kilometres (90%) belongs to the Republic of Croatia, while the rest belongs to the neighbouring Slovenia and Italy. The majority of the Croatian part of the Peninsula is

situated in the Istrian County (2,820 km²). Its climate is conditioned by the fact that Istria, as a peninsula, is surrounded by the sea from three sides, so the climate varies from the Mediterranean to the Continental one. Summers are dry and warm. The temperature is influenced by the mainland, sea, and the elevation. In the summer period, it can reach up to 40°C. The temperature of the sea is the lowest in March (9°-11°C), and the highest in August (up to 24°C). The sea salinity is 36-38‰. In terms of traffic connection, it is well connected by sea, air and road. Over the years, many activities have been invested in the development of a competitive tourist product on the county level (with particular emphasis on specific forms of tourism, such as bathing tourism, rural tourism, nautical tourism, etc., the offer being based on Istria's comparative advantages), which is witnessed by the growing tourist turnover presented in the following table.

The data in the Table 1 have indicated a positive growth of both tourist arrivals and overnights, with foreign tourists as a significant majority, thus indicating that Istria has been indeed recognized as a tourist destination on the international tourist market. Bathing tourism has justifiably remained a dominant tourist product in this county due to high investments in beach running and development.

Table 1 Tourist Arrivals and Overnights in the Istrian County in the 2014-2017 Period

	Arrivals			Overnights		
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign
2014	3,059,226	174,289	2,884,937	19,545,303	616,781	18,928,522
2015	3,369,905	189,711	3,180,194	20,966,561	661,409	20,305,152
2016	3,763,174	222,421	3,540,753	23.128.233	741.019	22,387,214
2017	4,104,018	228,926	3,875,092	25.426.476	723.578	24,702,898
2017/2014	34.15%	31.35%	34.32%	30.09%	17.32%	30.51%

Source: Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Croatia www.dzs.hr

Table 2 Characteristics of Beaches in the Istrian County with the Blue Flag Awarded in 2017

Name	City	Type	Sort of beach	Contents
Beach Katoro	Umag	Natural/arranged	Pavement, gravel, sand	Showers, changing cabins, aqua gun, bars, restaurants, tennis and volleyball playground, children's playground
Beach Kanova	Umag	Natural/arranged	Rocks, pavement	Public parking, sunbathing lawn, benches, natural shady places, ice cream, fast food, beach bar, coffeehouse, restaurant, supermarket, kiosk, shop with beach accessories, beach chair rentals, beach umbrella rental, showers, changing rooms, public toilets, lifeguards, inflatable floating island, children's playground, beach volleyball, rent a boat, rent a bicycle, parasailing, diving, table tennis, tennis
Beach Laguna Stella Maris	Umag	Natural	Concrete plateaus, fine gravel, gravel	Public parking, sunbathing lawn, benches, natural shady places, ice cream, fast food, beach bar, coffeehouse, restaurant, kiosk, beach chair rentals, beach umbrella rental, showers, changing rooms, public toilets, barrier-free access to the sea, first aid, lifeguards, seawater slide, inflatable floating island, beach volleyball, rent a bicycle

Name	City	Type	Sort of beach	Contents
Beach Coral	Umag	Natural/ arranged	Rock plates	Canopies, pillows, loungers, grass beach in a natural shady place, showers, changing cabins, hanging chairs above the sea level or in woods, access for disabled guests
Beach Sipar	Umag	Arranged	Pavement	Loungers and sunshades (for renting-limited amount, free of charge-limited amount)
Beach AC Mareda	Cittanova	Natural/ arranged	Stone	Beach for pets, showers, bar, beach restaurant, water sports (renting kayak, pedals, water scooters)
Beach Sirena	Cittanova	Natural/ arranged	Pavement, pebbles	Showers, changing cabins, loungers, relax nook, massage studio, water sports (kayak, pedals, water scooters), beach for pets
Beach Maestral	Cittanova	Natural	Gravel	Loungers, sunshades, massages in the open, centre of summer entertainment Punto Mare with daily entertainment programme, and tide swimming, parasailing
Beach Špadići-Materada	Poreč	Natural	Grassy, paved and rocky	Sun beds and umbrellas (additional charge), showers, restaurants and bars
Beach Donji Špadići	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	low combination of pebbles, cement and rocks	Lifeguards, life-saving facilities, first aid, recyclable waste facilities, lockers, etc., camp reception giving all relevant information, eco-activities (waste collection, energy saving, eco-messages), signs, gazettes, regulations.
Beach Gradsko kupalište	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Concrete plated, rocks, tiny gravel, gravel	Beach massage, parking, renting equipment for water sports, sunbathing area, bar, fast food, kiosk, shop with equipment for bathing and beach, sunshades and loungers, showers, public toilet, toilet for disabled people, pedals, waterslides, children's playground, beach volleyball, diving, table tennis, water polo
Beach Ulika Naturist Centre	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Concrete, rocks, grass and gravel	Showers
Beach Hotel Laguna	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Gravel, paved, rocks	Showers, restaurants and bars, beach volleyball
Beach Laguna Bellevue	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Gravel, rocks, concrete	External showers, changing cabins, toilets, sunshades, loungers, sports-recreational facilities (pedals, bananas, jet-ski, waterslides, scuba-diving, tennis), restaurants, bars
Beach Hotel Laguna Galijot	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Grassy, paved, pebbly and rocky	Loungers (additional charge), umbrellas (free of charge), showers, restaurants bars
Beach Laguna Parentium	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Grassy, paved, pebbly and rocky	Loungers (free of charge for hotel guests), showers, restaurants and bars
Beach Hotel Molindrio	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Pavement, pebbles, grass	Showers, restaurants and bars, loungers, beach volleyball
Beach Hotel Lotosi	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Pavement, bigger rocks, pebbles	Boat trips, pedals, aqua-park-floating island for children, beach volleyball, renting boats, kayaks/canoes, scuba-diving, sailing, tennis
Beach Hotel Delfin	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Grassy, paved, pebbly rocky	Loungers and sunshades (extra charges), showers, restaurants and bars
Beach AC Zelena laguna	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Stone, gravel, concrete	Children's beach, nudist beach, sunshades and loungers, showers
Beach Bijela uvala	Poreč	Natural/ arranged	Concrete, rocks, gravel	Nudist beach, sunshades and loungers (extra charges), showers
Beach Valeta, AC Lanterna	Tar- Vabriga	Arranged	Pavement, gravel	Sports facilities, children's facilities, water sports, playground, water balls, inflatable water park in the sea
Beach Crnika, AC Lanterna	Tar- Vabriga	Natural/ arranged	paved, rocky, pebbly, grassy	Scuba-diving, loungers, children's playground and sandbox, restaurants and bars with a view over the sea
Beach Galeb, AC Solaris	Tar- Vabriga	Natural/ arranged	Rocky, paved, pebbly	Lounger and umbrella for renting, sport facilities, restaurants
Beach Borik, AC Solaris	Poreč	Natural	Concrete plateaus, stones, gravel, sand	Water sports centre (renting), sunbathing lawn, benches, ice cream, fast food, beach bar, coffeehouse, restaurant, beach chair rentals, beach umbrella rentals, showers, changing rooms, public toilets, disabled toilet, lifeguard, paddle boat, inflatable floating island, children's playground, beach volleyball, jet-ski, banana boat, tubing, parasailing, snorkelling, children's amusement theme park, mini-golf, tennis

Name	City	Type	Sort of beach	Contents
Beach Riviera	Poreč	Natural	Pebbles	Loungers with canopies, orbit lounge chairs, beach bar
Beach Brulo	Poreč	Natural	Pebble	Aqua gun, parasailing, iceberg, pedals, bananas, amusement theme park, trampoline, playground, scuba-diving, sunshades and loungers, external showers, changing cabins, toilet, bars and restaurants
Beach AC Istra	Funtana-Fontne	Natural	Pebbly and rocky naturist with rocky sunbathing areas	Beach for children, beach for dogs, canoeing, showers
Beach Vala	Vrsar	Natural	Rocky sunbathing areas, some pebbles	Sun loungers and umbrellas (extra charge), showers, changing cubicles lifeguards, sports centre offering water sports, diving centre and boat rental, massage (extra charge), sandbox for children, showers for pets (the dog beach)
Beach AC Valkanela	Vrsar	Natural/arranged	Stone, pebbly, rocky, concrete, sandy, stone plateaus	Access at the central beach for disabled persons and people with special needs, sun-loungers and parasols rentals, dog friendly beaches, beach showers
Beach Belvedere	Vrsar	Natural/arranged	Paved, pebbly, stoned, paved	Renting sunshades and loungers, showers on the beach
Beach AC Porto Sole	Vrsar	Natural/arranged	Gravelly, rocky, stone plateaus, paved, pebble	Sunbathing, beach for dogs, showers on the beach, renting loungers and sunshades
Beach Koversada Naturist Centre	Vrsar	Natural/arranged	Rocky, pebble, stone, concrete plateaus	Children's beach, sunshades and loungers for renting, showers on the beach, beach for dogs
Beach Sv. Andrija, Crveni otok	Rovinj	Natural	Rocky, gravel, sand	Showers, Sun-loungers and parasols
Beach "Entertainment center" TN Villas Rubin	Rovinj	Natural/arranged	Pebble, rocky, paved, sandy, stone plateaus, concrete plateaus	Loungers for renting, small boat quay, launch ramp, shower on the beach
Beach AC Polari	Vrsar	Natural	rocky, stone-paved, pebbly	Children's beach, dog beach, showers on the beach, renting loungers and sunshades
Beach TN Amarin	Rovinj	Natural/arranged	Gravel, rocks, pavement	Sun-loungers and parasol rentals, showers on the beach
Beach AC Veštar	Vrsar	Natural	Pebbles, rocks	Loungers and sunshades for renting, showers on the beach
Beach Barbariga	Vodnjan	Natural	rocky, pebble	Restaurant and a bar, sunbeds and parasols, lifeguard service, beach volleyball
Beach Peroj	Vodnjan	Natural	Large pebble	No data
Beach Bi-val	Fažana	Natural	Gravel, partially sand	Sports facilities, access for disabled tourists, external showers, changing cabins, toilet, children's playground, riding a "banana", tube, pedals, aqua gun, jet ski, water skiing, small school of sailing and scuba-diving, bike and kayak
Beach Ambrela	Pula	Natural	Rocks, pebble	Outdoor showers, public toilets, changing cabins, restaurant, café, sunshades, loungers, pedal boats and aqua-park.
Beach Brioni	Pula	Natural/arranged	Rocks, partially paved	Jet skiing, banana rides, parasailing, boat rental, underwater park
Beach Histria	Pula	Natural/arranged	Stone, concrete	Restaurant and a bar, sunbeds and parasols for rent, lifeguard service, beach volleyball court, tennis courts, squash courts, pool and aqua-gun, animation
Beach Maslinica	Rabac	Natural/arranged	Stones, gravel	Public parking, ice cream, fast food, beach bar, coffeehouse, restaurant, supermarket, kiosk, shop with beach accessories, beach chair and umbrella rental, showers, changing rooms, public toilets, lifeguard, paddle boat, water slide, inflatable floating island, rent a boat, trampoline, tennis, basketball, soccer
Beach St. Andrea	Rabac	Natural	Rocks, gravel, tiny gravel	Parking, fruit and vegetable shopping, ice-cream, fast food, beach bar, coffee shop, pedals, aqua park-floating park for children, children's playground, renting boats, scuba-diving, entertainment park, mini-golf

Name	City	Type	Sort of beach	Contents
Beach Lanterna	Rabac	Natural	Rocks, gravel	sunbathing lawn, benches, fast food, beach bar, coffeehouse, restaurant, kiosk, shop with beach accessories, beach chair rentals, beach umbrella rental, showers, changing rooms, public toilets, first aid, lifeguard, paddle boat, rent a boat, banana boat, tubing, snorkelling
Beach Girandella	Rabac	Natural	Gravel	Loungers and sunshades, floating water park, water sports, beach bar, towels, changing cabins, showers, lifeguard

Source: Author's interpretation according to Tourist Board of Funtana, Tourist Board of the city of Vodnjan, Official website of a tourist agency Istriasun, Pula Travel Guide PulaCroatia, Official website of Travelana d.o.o. Travel Agency, Official website of Uniline Travel Company, Official Website of Laguna Poreč Hotels Resorts & Camping, Official website of Adriagate Travel Agency, Official Website of Aminess Hotels & Camps, Official Website of Arenaturist Hotels & Resorts, Official Website Best of Croatia company, Official Website of Camping by Valamar, Official Website of Maistra Camping Rovinj Vrsar, Official Website of tourist agency Gradtur d.o.o. and hrvaska.net, Official website of Istraturist Hotel Resorts & Campsites, Official Website of Maistra Hotels & Resorts, Official Website of the Tourist Board of Poreč, Official Website of Valamar Hotels & Resorts (accessed 11th March 2018)

The Table 2 presents all the beaches in the Istrian County that have been awarded with the Blue Flag¹, international ecology programme of marine and coast environment protection, primarily aimed at a sustainable managing of the sea and the coastal line (which ensures a clean sea and a well maintained and organized environment), divided according to the city where they are situated, their type, sort, and attractions and activities they offer.

The data in the Tables 1 and 2 indicate that the majority of beaches in the Istrian County, that are flying the Blue Flag, in a majority represent a combination of natural and arranged beaches, followed by beaches which are entirely natural. The authors have registered only two beaches categorized as entirely arranged. A significant majority of them offers a high number of various facilities for children and adults, which should be able to ensure satisfaction for everyone's taste and preferences. But is that so in this particular case? In order to determine the state of bathing tourist offer in the Istrian County and the tourist's attitudes respectively, the authors will present the results of the empirical research carried out.

4 Attitudes Towards Beach Tourist Offer of the Istrian County

The authors will present the results of an empirical research, which covers determining the attitudes of the key stakeholders through inquiring tourist's satisfaction with the beach offer. A comparative analysis of the author's research has been carried out with the secondary data gained from the results of the research entitled "Beaches Product of a Tourist Destination" carried on by the Institute of Agriculture and Tourism in Poreč, in 2014, and published in 2016.

The research was carried from 1st to 15th May 2018 on the sample of 173 correctly filled in questionnaires.

By monitoring the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, it is visible that 66% of the question-

naire was filled by women, and 34% by men. According to the results of the secondary data of the research from 2014 (2016, pp. 56-61), in terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female (57.0%), while 43.0% were male respondents.

By analysing the age structure of the respondents, in the majority prevail respondents in the age group from 25 to 34 (41.4%), followed by 18-24 (23.6%), 35-49 (18.7%), and 50-64 (10.3%), and in the 65+ group there were only 6% of the respondents, while according to the 2014 results 33.8% of them belonged to the age group 35-49, followed by the age group 50-64 (27.4%), 25-34 (19.2%), 18-24 (12.6%), while only 6.9% belonged to the age group 65+.

All the research participants in the 2018 plan to spend their holiday at a destination, and in comparison with the 2014 results, 72.8% of the respondents have pleaded that they will spend a holiday at a destination.

In terms of the chosen accommodation during their stay, the majority chose Private accommodation (83%) and only 17% a hotel. In 2014, research participants chose for their holiday private accommodation in the majority (29.9%), a camp (29.0%), followed by hotel accommodation (23.5%).

Table 3 Accommodation during the Stay at a Destination (%)

Accommodation	2014	2018
Private accommodation	29.9	83.0
Camp	29.0	0.0
Hotel	23.5	17.0

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 56)

Analysing their way of reaching the beach, in both researches, the respondents stated that they preferred walking (54.8% in 2014 and 62.9% in 2018.), by a car (31.1% in 2014 and 34.3% in 2018), while a small amount preferred to use a bicycle, motorcycle and a boat (14.1% in 2014 and 2.9% in 2018).

¹ For more information please see <https://www.adriagate.com/Croatia-en/Blue-flag-beaches-Croatia> and <http://www.blueflag.global/beaches2/>

Table 4 Reaching the Beach (%)

Way of arrival	2014	2018
Walking	54.8	62.9
By car	31.1	34.3
By bicycle, motorcycle and boat	14.1	2.9

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 58)

In terms of duration of their stay on the beach, the majority preferred to stay longer; respectively, 41% of the respondents stated, in 2014, that they preferred to spend 3-5 hours on the beach, while, in 2018, that percentage achieved a growth of 18%. 23% of the respondents stated in 2014 that they preferred to stay longer than 5 hours, while, in 2018, an increase of 12% was registered. There was a significant decrease of the results for staying less than 3 hours in 2018 in relation to 2014 (-30%). These indicators presented the average length of the tourists' stay on beaches, and the time during which they could use potential beach facilities, but also the possibility that, by using interesting beach activities they eventually prolong their stay on the beach.

Table 5 Duration of the Stay on the Beach (%)

Duration	2014	2018
3-5 hours	41	59
Longer than 5 hours	23	35
Less than 3 hours	36	6

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 59)

The data in the following table indicated that, according to the age structure from 2014, the majority of respondents (42%) most frequently spent their time on the beach with their family, and partners (40%), while in 2018, according to the age structure, prevailed tourists of a younger age group, which is understandable, considering that they spent the time with their friends on the beach (46%).

Table 6 Company on the Beach (%)

Company	2014	2018
Family	42	23
Partner	40	31
Friends	15	46
Alone	3	0

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 60)

When gathering information on the beach and its facilities, the tourists marked that the previous positive experience had a significant impact, followed by a kind word and information provided in a hotel/camp or a private accommodation. Other sources were marked with a significantly smaller share.

Table 7 Reason for Choosing a Beach (%)

	2014	2018
Sea cleanliness	51.9	91.4
Vicinity of accommodation	49.3	76.5
Beauty of the landscape	42.6	82.4
Beach access	39.2	73.5
Cleanliness of the beach	37.9	76.5
Availability of children facilities	11.0	14.7
Ability of using props (sunshades, loungers)	10.9	47.1
Ensured parking lot	9.7	55.9
Availability of sports facilities	8.7	23.5
Availability of entertainment facilities	6.8	38.2
Gastronomic offer	6.4	64.7
Ability of bringing dogs	4.7	44.1
Ability of boat access	2.6	23.5
Ability of access for disabled persons in wheelchairs, etc.	0.7	14.7

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 64)

When analysing the reasons why the respondents chose particular beaches, the authors have obtained some very interesting results. When choosing a beach, in 2014, the respondents gave advantage to the sea cleanliness (51.9%), followed by the vicinity of the accommodation (49.3%), beauty of the landscape (82.4%), beach access (39.2%) and beach cleanliness (37.9%). A smaller share marked the importance of children's facilities (11.0%), the use of beach props (sunshades and loungers) (10.9%), parking spaces (9.7%), sports facilities (8.7%), entertainment facilities (6.8%). The lowest importance was given to the ability of access for disabled persons in wheelchairs, etc. (0.7%). In 2018, the results were a bit different. It is interesting that, besides sea cleanliness (91.4%) and beauty of the landscape (76.5%), the respondents emphasized the rich gastronomic offer (64.7%), sufficient number of parking spaces (55.9%), but also the ability of bringing dogs to the beach (44.1%).

These results showed how much habits of potential tourists change, and the significance of individual facilities on the beach, so that beaches are no longer the place of passive rest. The variety of beach facilities would significantly influence the prolonged tourists' stay on beaches.

Table 8 Use of Facilities while Staying on a Beach (%)

Facilities	2014	2018
Only owned props	67.1	52.9
Props available at a beach (sunshades, loungers)	24.1	61.8
Restaurant facilities	17.6	76.5
Other sport's facilities (volleyball, mini-golf, etc).	10.0	38.2
Children's facilities	9.1	11.8
Music and dancing	5.8	67.6
Scuba-diving facilities	3.4	29.4
Massages on the beach	3.1	38.2
Adrenaline facilities (ski lift, bungee jumping, etc)	2.7	44.1
Surfer facilities	0.9	29.4

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 66)

The data obtained in the previous table have shown that respondents in 2014 preferred the use of their own props only (67.1%), followed by props available at the beach (24.1%), restaurant facilities (17.6%), other sport's facilities (10.0%), children's facilities (9.1%). The lowest interest was shown in surfing facilities (0.9%). However, a change was registered in the tourists' habits in 2018, respectively, when a greater significance was given to the restaurant facilities (76.5%), music and dancing (67.6%), available props at a beach (sunshades, loungers) (61.8%),

proper props (52.9%), and to the adrenaline facilities (ski lift, bungee jumping, etc.) (44.1%).

The Table 9 presents the grade of the respondent's satisfaction with the individual beach characteristics.

As far as the level of satisfaction with the beaches, the respondents emphasized that, in the majority of cases, the preserved natural resources are important for them, respectively, beauty of the landscape (4.4), sea cleanliness (4.3), beach cleanliness (4.2), vicinity of the accommodation (4.1), beach access (4.0) and bathing space and comfort (3.8). However, what is worrying is the lower grade of some elements which can have a significant reflection on possible future decision-making when choosing a holiday destination, such as parking facilities (3.6), comfort on the beach (3.8) and the relation between the quality and price (3.7) of the offer. They were graded with a lower grade, followed by the ability of using props (3.6), availability of sports facilities (3.4), bringing dogs to the beach (3.3), quality of beach facilities (3.6) and boat access (3.4). The lowest grade was given for the ability of access for disabled persons, wheelchairs, etc. (2.7).

When asked whether, in their opinion, beaches should be themed, most of the respondents replied negatively (more than 66%). However, when asked if they would have to choose a certain beach theme, the replies proved to have the biggest deviations considering the two periods of research. In 2014, the majority of the respondents chose the theme traditional beach for families with children (30.8%), followed by beaches with a romantic theme (16.9%), beaches with sport facilities (16.0%), party beaches (14.3%), eco beaches (12.4%), etc. A lower interest was

Table 9 Satisfaction with the Beach (grade 1-5)

Attributes	2014	2018	Average
Beauty of the landscape	4.4	4.4	4.4
Sea cleanliness	4.3	4.3	4.3
Cleanliness of the beach	4.2	4.2	4.2
Vicinity of accommodation	4.2	4.0	4.1
Beach access	4.1	4.0	4.0
Bather's space on a beach, comfort	4.0	3.7	3.8
Parking lot	3.8	3.4	3.6
Comfort on a beach	3.8	3.9	3.8
Relation of quality and price of the offer	3.8	3.6	3.7
Ability of using props	3.6	3.7	3.6
Availability of sports facilities	3.5	3.3	3.4
Ability of bringing dog	3.5	3.1	3.3
Quality of beach facilities	3.5	3.8	3.6
Ability of boat access	3.5	3.3	3.4
Availability of entertainment facilities	3.4	3.7	3.5
Availability of facilities suitable for children	3.4	3.6	3.5
Gastronomic offer	3.4	4.2	3.8
Ability of access for disabled persons, wheelchairs, etc.	3.0	2.5	2.7

Source: Author's research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 72)

Table 10 Tendency of the Respondents towards Beach Themes (%)

Theme	2014	2018
Beach for families with children	30.8	68.6
Romantic beach	16.9	37.1
Beach with sports and recreational facilities	16.0	51.4
Party beach	14.3	77.1
Eco Beach	12.4	17.1
Nudist Beach	11.3	11.4
Beach with entertainment facilities for young people	10.9	48.6
Resort (hotel) beach	6.5	40.0
Dog beach	6.1	31.4
Beach with health advantages	6.0	14.3
Adrenaline beach	5.9	25.7
Diving beach	5.3	17.1
Urban beach	4.5	22.9
Beach of culture	4.1	8.6
Beach for surfers	3.5	22.9
Beach for same-sex couples	1.6	11.4

Source: Author’s research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 76)

shown for themes such as adrenaline beach (5.9%), diving (5.3%), etc. The lowest grade was given to the beaches for same-sex couples (1.6%). The results of the research carried on in 2018 have registered changes. The respondents singled out the themes party beach (77.1%), followed by beach for families with children (68.6%), beach with sports and recreational facilities (51.4%), while the least interest was shown for themes such as beach of culture (8.6%), beach for same-sex couples and nudist beach (11.4%).

5 The Results of the Empirical Research

Bearing in mind all the previously mentioned facts, the authors have determined the following symptomatic results:

- By monitoring socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, it can be concluded that in the first monitored period the majority of respondents belonged to the generation group 35-49 of age (33.8%), while, in 2018, the respondents were mostly younger people belonging to the age group 25-34 (41.4%), and age group 18-24 (23.6%). According to their age structure, deviations are present in the beach facilities to which they give greater significance.
- In both periods of the research, the majority of the respondents have stated that they will use private accommodation during their stay in the destination.
- They arrive at the beach mostly on foot, then in a smaller ratio they use a car as a means of transport. The previously stated facts have indicated that it would be advisable to have a suitable number of parking places in the vicinity of the beach.
- In both monitored time periods, visitors most frequently stay on a beach from 3 to 5 hours (41% in 2014, and 59% in 2018). This has indicated the possibility of a prolonged stay on the beach by offering additional facilities and spaces.
- The results indicated that, in 2014, the participants primarily went to the beach in the company of their families (42%), while, considering that in 2018 the questionnaire was filled in most frequently by a younger population, the respondents stay on the beach in the company of their friends (46%) and with their partner (31%).
- The respondents have also stated their priorities when choosing a specific beach. In both the monitored periods, the most important criteria have been sea cleanliness (51.9% in 2014, which significantly grew up to 91.4% in

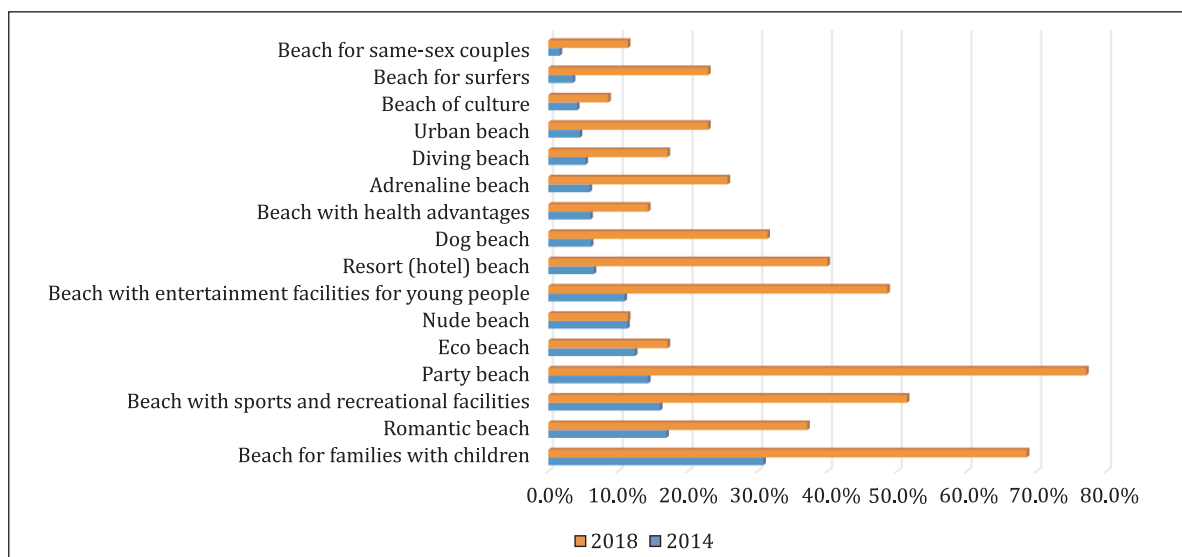


Chart 1 Tendency of the Respondents towards Beach Themes (%)

Source: Author’s research; Institute for Agriculture and Tourism (2016, p. 78)

2018). Furthermore, in 2014, they stated the importance of the vicinity of their accommodation, while in 2018 the emphasis was given to the beauty of the landscape and the possibility of additional services on the beaches. A symptomatic datum is that they have paid a great attention to the gastronomic offer (64.7%) which was not the case in the previous period of research (6.4%). During their stay on the beach, in the first monitored period, they were mostly interested in the facilities such as renting loungers and sunshades, while in the second period the advantage has been given to the gastronomy and entertainment facilities (music and dancing). That what has been previously mentioned, can be the reflection of the various age groups that participated in the research.

- When analysing the satisfaction of the participants with individual elements of the beach offer and additional facilities, in both periods the respondents marked beauty of the landscape (average 4.4), and sea cleanliness (average 4.3). The lowest grade was given to the facilities for disabled persons (average 2.7) and facilities on beaches for dogs (average 3.3).
- The tendency of the respondents towards certain beach themes has also been analysed. Beaches for families with children (30.8%) and romantic beaches (16.9%) were the most recognized ones in 2014, while, in 2018, the greatest attention has been given to party beaches (77.1%) and beaches with sports and recreational facilities (51.4%).

In the globalized world, beaches have been recognized as a factor in achieving competitiveness of a tourist product, considering that they represent the main centre of tourism; they have become the icons of contemporary tourism, and they have been considered as the main factors on the tourist market. Bearing this in mind, beaches are becoming significant spaces for social recreation and holiday. They are more and more considered as a highly valuable, not just socio-economic but also ecologic and national resource, which demands effective managing.

6 Conclusion

In this paper the authors have carried on the analysis of the existing state of sea beaches in the Istrian County, thus emphasizing, in particular, sea beaches as a resource basis considering the significance of beaches, length of the coastline, beach division, and beach facilities. Furthermore, legal basis has been analysed basically, respectively, the limitations and recommendations for the improvement of the beach managing system. According to the vision of the destination, and with a goal of an optimal distribution of bathers (tourists and domicile population), and with the purpose of providing optimal answers to the tourist preferences, the results of the primary research of the visitor's satisfaction with the beach facilities have been presented in this paper. As an answer to the changing trends in the habits of the potential beach visitors, a comparative analysis of the results of the secondary research carried on in 2014 was presented, as well as the research

of the authors carried on in 2018 on the sample of 173 respondents. In other words, within the frame of the existing beach theming, according to the National Program of Sea Beach Managing, it is necessary to determine the adequate facilities and services for beach spaces which, according to the preferences of the visitors, represent the attraction resource of the tourist product of Sun, Sand and Sea. Today, various topics are known which in fact suit the target groups on the market: beaches with sports and recreational facilities, urban beaches, beaches with entertainment facilities for young people, romantic beaches, beaches for surfers, diving beaches, adrenalin beaches, nudist beaches, beaches for families with children, party beaches, beaches with health benefits, beaches of culture, eco beaches, resort beaches, beaches for pets, mixed beaches with various zones, and similar ones. But preferences of visitors have changed significantly in the monitored four year interval (how long has passed between two researches carried on). In the monitored periods, the respondents have given the greatest significance to the natural beauties. The conclusion has imposed that the beach visitors in the first period gave an advantage to the beaches the topics being related to facilities for families with children while in the second monitored period a much greater emphasis has been given to beaches with entertainment facilities and party beaches as well.

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