TOURISTS' SATISFACTION AND QUALITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM SUPPLY ON THE EASTERN COAST OF ISTRA COUNTY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

The paper aims to investigate various factors influencing tourists' attitudes i.e., satisfaction with both the accommodation units and the catering offer, the professionalism and hospitality of the tourism staff, a sense of security, lack of tourism offer, but also their motives, accommodation and arrival arrangements, their spending budgets etc. An online questionnaire was adopted using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The questionnaire consisted of several parts: sample characteristics regarding age, country of origin, education and other sociodemographic characteristics of the responding population; then parts involving satisfaction and quality attitudes. The research results provide useful indicators of the advantages and disadvantages of the tourism offer in the tourist destination of Eastern coast of the Istria County, as well as an insight into the dominant groups of tourists, which will surely act as a signpost in which direction it will be necessary to develop future tourism offer in the area. The paper highlights that Eastern part of Istria County, despite the fact that it is less visited compared to the western part of the Istria County, is a valuable tourism destination that is being recognized for its specific attributes, and as such should not be striving for mass, but sustainable tourism and improvement of quality of those factors that resulted to be "weak points", as evidenced in this research. The distinctiveness of the Eastern part of the Istria County also lies in the fact that, as shown by this research, visitors have a tendency to return, which indicates satisfaction with previous experiences and which is reflected by a large percentage of independent organization of arrivals, both thanks to the proximity of outbound travel markets, and the high degree of security that visitors have recognized in the destination. Given the fact that previously mentioned area is a less populated and not so touristically prominent part of the largest Croatian peninsula compared to its western part, tourists' attitudes toward the tourism offer have not been an object of many studies.

Keywords: *tourism supply, tourist satisfaction, Istria, EU tourism.*

1. Introduction

One of the main drives of development, especially in rural environments hosting small communities, is tourism activity. If such circumstances exist of course, providing an establishment of such activities.

The Eastern part of the Croatian largest peninsula of Istria, famous and known for its tourism activity, has long been ignored and considered a lesser tourism destination by industry professionals, but also researchers that mainly focused on the more prominent and touristically developed parts of Istria County in the Republic of Croatia. In recent years, business development brought large tourism companies to the Eastern coast of Istria concentrated around the townships of Labin and Rabac areas (jutarnji.hr, 2017), with hotel investments changing the tourism offer significantly. A big part of these cities' economy is naturally, tourism, which supports local businesses and large companies alike, but also provide job and entrepreneurial opportunities to local and national population as well. Investigating the backbone of the local economy, especially focusing on the quality and satisfaction attitudes of incoming tourists, is vital in understanding parameters that define a successful tourism destination for future endeavours and for the all stakeholders involved.

2. Satisfaction and Quality in Tourism

Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 2006) suggests that all tourism destinations have a certain period of discovery, growth, mature and decline, just as commodity goods. Tourism industry professionals are dully aware that a tourism destinations' image has to be refreshed "in a way" every 25 to 30 years. This process has to be in line with the current preferences of tourists, in order to prevent a certain decline or to extend the life cycle of the tourism destination. Butler (2006) stresses out potential problems for tourism destinations that are not professionally managed, do not invest in market research or rebrand their "experience product". To effectively enable the before mentioned, tourism destination stakeholders should be acting on relevant and latest findings in the area of tourist satisfaction with the tourism destination offer as well as their current perceptions regarding various factors that make up the tourism offer or the "experience product". In that regard, tourist satisfaction is an important and encompassing variable in the wider tourism industry. Having a "happy" tourist is the endgoal for many tourism stakeholders, taking accounts from the micro level (service and product companies that operate in the tourism industry) to the mezzo level (tourism destinations) and to the macro levels (national and international tourism industry). Tourist satisfaction is therefore closely related to tourist experiences and is reflecting their needs being fulfilled and their travel/visitation expectations being met, that then impacts their future preferences and decisions (Komilova et al, 2021; Quintal & Polczynski, 2010; Sumaedi et al.,2015). Tourist satisfaction is influenced by many factors. Several of them can be linked to service quality, tourist destination uniqueness, infrastructure, accommodation quality etc. But on the other hand, tourist satisfaction is also connected to tourist behaviour, as Prebensen et al. (2017) state, and by the tourist destination value that is perceived by the tourist while visiting. In that regard, it is important to stay up to date with tourist perceptions of the tourism offer, especially after COVID-19, and to continue monitoring on a consistent term. The important activity in tourism destination management is therefore to fully understand tourist satisfaction and to purposedly continue to measure it in order to tailor the tourism destination offer according to recent and relevant findings. At its core, tourist satisfaction can be defined as a tourist feeling of pleasure or a feeling of disappointment that stems from evaluating performance with reality (Kotler, 2020). Therefore, if the performance is below tourist expectations, the tourist can not be satisfied, at least not in full. On the other hand, if expectations are exceeded by the performance, the tourist can be considered satisfied or "happy" as such. Another important aspect of tourist satisfaction, as evidenced in numerous marketing and tourism studies, is the influence of tourist satisfaction on future activities of tourists like revisiting intentions and further recommendations of tourism destinations (Kim & Choe, 2019). Qaulity is another crucial concept in the tourism industry. When related to the quality of an tourism destination, UNWTO (2024) defines it as: "the result of a process which implies the

satisfaction of all tourism product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the implicit underlying factors such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, communication, infrastructure and public amenities and services. It also involves aspects of ethics, transparency and respect towards the human, natural and cultural environment. Quality, as one of the key drivers of tourism competitiveness, is also a professional tool for organizational, operational and perception purposes for tourism suppliers". As Lopez Cruz et al. (2022) state, perceived quality occurs when a tourist or a consumer judges a product or a service and that judgment then becomes and important indicator of the satisfaction they perceive. Same authors further state that the expectations that the tourists create about the tourism offer are are indispensable when conceptualizing the quality of the service and must be taken into account. Grönroos (2007) defines basic parts of quality. One part is technical quality and the other is functional quality. The first one addresses factors of provided services such as appearance, cleanness of staff clothes, physical states etc, while the other addresses modalities of providing the service like staff behaviour, waiting time, politeness of staff etc. It is important to note that the concept of tourist satisfaction is a more broad concept than service quality (Ryglova & Vajčnerova, 2014) which relies primarily on service dimensions. Ryglova & Vajčnerova (2014) further state, based on Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry research (1985) that "any conceptual model on perceived service quality proposed should consider the two parties in the production of a service: the client and the enterprise, so the proposal takes these elements into account, considering that both have an influence on the provision of a quality service". Wahyudiono & Soerjanto (2022) point out that service quality greatly impacts toiurist revisit intention and stress out "that that perceptions of service quality and satisfaction have proven to be good predictors of future visitor behavior intentions". Tourism satisfaction and quality, including service quality, are therefore vital factors in designing and managing tourism destinations, especially from the standpoint of upcoming generations of "new" tourists. New generations of tourist vary related to consumption ideas, their behaviour and the choices they make. New generations of tourists seek new products and services that are agreeable with their emotions. They value tourism experience way more then previous generations of tourists (Akkhaporn, 2024).

3. Methodology

Aims and research questions, research methodology and sociodemographic profile of the respondents will be presented in this section of the paper.

3.1. Aims and research questions

Objectives of the study are mainly focused on finding the overall satisfaction and quality perceptions of the Tourism supply on the Eastern coast of the Istrian peninsula. While the Tourism supply on the before mentioned area was historically considered lesser in terms of quality and offer, recent tourism developments in the area prompted an investigation in order to determine is it really so at this point in time. The findings of this empirical study, as presented in this paper, could be proven of significant value to local stakeholders in the tourism sector, thus contributing to future positive development of the area. Nevertheless, albeit the research is focused on a narrow local area and providing valuable data for local stakeholders, certain findings could be potentially valuable to to a wider tourism sector stakeholders in The Republic of Croatia and The European union, as well. The paper aims to find out current attitudes and perceptions relating to accommodation units and the catering offer, the professionalism and hospitality of the tourism staff, a perception of security, lack

of tourism offer, together with their relationships addressed to the overall satisfaction of the tourists with the destination that is investigated. The questions that guided the research are as follows:

RQ1: Is there a specific difference in age groups of participating respondents regarding their satisfaction of the tourism offer on the eastern part of Istria County?

RQ2: Is there a specific difference between participating respondents relating to their overall satisfaction based on accommodation arrangements?

RQ3: What factors are more significant or valuable in determining overall satisfaction of the tourists in this particular tourism destination?

3.2. Research methodology

An online survey was administered in February of 2023 using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The survey consisted of several parts: sample characteristics regarding age, country of origin, education and other sociodemographic characteristics of the responding population; then parts involving satisfaction and quality attitudes. Simple Multiple-Choice questions and Likert-scale type questions were used. Collected data was analyzed by descriptive statistics in order to efficiently present the results that were obtained during the survey. Median, mode, standard deviation, range, maximum and minimum were used, as well as percentages. Data from different age groups were compared using two-tail t-tests in order to determine if the difference between age groups is statistically significant. Pearson Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between variables. ANOVA analysis was used to determine differences between groups of respondents relating to their accommodation arrangements.

3.3. Respondents' profile

The survey was completed by almost the same number of respondents in terms of gender, that is, the number of female respondents was slightly higher. In total, 54% of female respondents and 48% of male respondents participated in the online survey as evidenced in Table 1.

Only a small proportion of participants under the age of 18 and those over the age of 66 took part in the research. The first group, youth, has a tendency to stay in destinations that carry the reputation of party destinations, or travel in an organized manner via agency arrangements with their education institutions. On such field trips there is always a tendency to visit more developed tourist destinations, and in the case of Istria County, they are located on the western coast of the peninsula. Regarding the elderly population aged 66 and over, the small number of research respondents can certainly be attributed to a potentially lower level of use of social networking sites or other digital media like e-mail, and therefore the percentage of survey respondents is understandable, which does not necessarily reflect the real situation and does not mean that tourists of this age do not make up a larger share of the real number of arrivals and overnight stays in the area of Eastern Istria County, which certainly represent a limitation of the study. Among the respondents, the age group of 36-45 years (25% of respondents) were dominant, followed by 22% of respondents between 26 and 35 years. The same percentage, 20% of respondents, was in the 26-45 and 46-55 age lifespans. In order to use age group as the independent variable in analysis, it was decided to combine respondents' age groups to two main age groups. The first age group, (ranging from 0 to 45 years old) representing 53% of the sample size (n=53). All other age groups from 46 to 66 years and older were combined to represent the second age group (47%, n=47). The rationale behind the divide was that younger and older respondents respond differently because they have different lifecycles, hence, their overall satisfaction could differ related to their habits, priorities and expectations of a tourism destination.

Regarding the country of origin of the participating respondents, those from the countries proposed in the questionnaire dominate. With the exception of Great Britain, domestic tourists and tourists from neighboring countries are dominant. Due to the proximity and favorable transport connections Slovenians occupy (22%) the sample, followed by Germans with 19% (who are also the most represented outbound market in the Croatian tourism sector). They are followed by Austrians with a share of 17%, then domestic tourists with a share of 14% and Italians with a share of 11%, and tourists from Great Britain with 7%. The remaining 10% are made up of tourists from the "other countries" category, and in this case, they are tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Montenegro. The results show that respondents have a higher level of education: 32% of them have completed graduate studies, 31% undergraduate, 25% high school, and only 7% has completed only elementary school. The smallest share has a master's degree or doctorate in science, only five of the respondents. Although it is not always the case, the educational status of the respondent is often reflected in the motive of the trip/vacation. For example, a more educated structure of tourists shows a greater tendency to visit cultural assets and institutions of the tourism destination (Richards, 2021).

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of the respondents

Gender Group	Number	Percentage
Male	46	46%
Female	54	54%
TOTAL	100	100%

Country of Origin	Number	Percentage
Croatia	14	14%
Italy	11	11%
Slovenia	22	22%
Germany	19	19%
Austria	17	17%
Great Britain	7	7%
BiH	4	4%
Luxembourg	1	1%
Belgium	1	1%
France	2	2%
Montenegro	2	2%
TOTAL	100	100%

Age Group I	Number	Percentage
0-18	3	3%
19-25	3	3%
26-35	22	22%
36-45	25	25%
46-55	20	20%
56-65	20	20%
66+	7	7%
TOTAL	100	100%

Age Group II	Number	Percentage
0-45	53	53%
46+	47	47%
TOTAL	100	100%

Education	Number	Percentage
Elementary	7	7%
High School	25	25%
Undergraduate	31	31%
Graduate	32	32%
Msc/Doctorate	5	5%
TOTAL	100	100%

Income	Number	Percentage
0-800 €	8	8%
801-1100 €	8	8%
1101-1400 €	16	16%
1401-1700 €	25	25%
1701-2000 €	20	20%
2000 € +	23	23%
TOTAL	100	100%

Source: research results

The results in this study indicate that the majority of respondents are in the demographic group with higher incomes: 25% of respondents have monthly incomes in the range of €1,401-1,700 per month, which is far above the Croatian monthly average, but compared to the dominant outbound markets, this represents a lower average income. 23% of respondents have monthly incomes above €2,001, followed by 20% of respondents with incomes between €1,701 and 2,000. 16% of them have incomes between €1.101 and €1400, only 8% reported incomes below €800, which justifies the smaller share of respondents, since the budget intended for travel is not part of the essential living expenses that can be afforded by visitors with lower buying power.

4. Research results and discussion

The results of the survey will be presented and discussed in the three sections below: motives and modes of arrival to the tourism destination, satisfaction and quality attitudes and return intention and recommendation attitudes.

4.1. Motives and modes of arrival to the tourism destination

Research respondents were asked to identify their main motive for arrival to the tourism destination of Eastern coast of the Istria County (The destination of Labin, Raša, Rabac area). The results show that "Sun & Sea" motive is the most dominant one with 15% of overall respondents, followed by 12% of overall respondents answering "Walks & Sightseeing". "Historical & Cultural Sites", "Sports" and "Passive Vacation" followed with equal share of 11% as evidenced in Table 2.

Table 2: Motives and modes of arrival to the tourism destination

Motives	Number	percentage
Sun & Sea	15	15%
Good Food	5	5%
Comfortable Accommodation	5	5%
Nature Beauty	10	10%
Exploring new places	5	5%
Good road connection	5	5%
Walks & Sightseeing	12	12%
Good service in stores	1	1%
Fun & Dancing	0	0%
Peace, Quiet & absence of crowds	7	7%
Choice of Short Fieldtrips	2	2%
Passive Vacation	11	11%
Sports	11	11%
Historical & Cultural Sites	11	11%
TOTAL	100	100%

Incentives	Number	Percentage
Reccomendation	26	26%
Previous Visits	27	27%
Affordable Offer	22	22%
Internet promotion	18	18%
Brochure	5	5%
Family Decision	2	2%
TOTAL	100	100%

Arrangements	Number	Percentage
Independent	68	68%
Tourist agency	32	32%
TOTAL	100	100%

Source: research results

Although "Sun & Sea" motive is the single most prevalent one, other motives like "nature beauty", "walks & sightseeing", "sports" and "historical & cultural sites" have a significant place in the overall motives structure, clearly showcasing that the modern tourist has different motives, and that this tourism destination has been recognized as not just a "Sun & Sea" destination. Incentives that influenced selection of this tourism destination were recommendations (26%), previous visits (27%), affordable offer (22%), internet promotion (18%), brochure (5%), family decision (2%). Most of the respondents chose to arrive to the tourism destination on their own arrangements. Only 32% percent of the overall respondents chose to arrive by a tourist agency.

Table 3: Spending budgets and accommodation structure

Daily Spending Budget	Number	Percentage		Accommodation	Number	Percentage
0-20€	2	2%		Private	27	27%
21-30€	9	9%		Hotel	25	25%
31-50€	25	25%		Camping	31	31%
51-70€	42	42%		Hotel Apartment	9	9%
71-90€	16	16%		Family & Friends	8	8%
91-110€	6	6%		TOTAL	100	100%
111€ +	0	0%				
TOTAL	100	100%				

Source: research results

Most of the respondents had a daily spending budget between €51 and €71, followed by 16% of respondents who spent on average between €71 and €90 on a daily basis and those that spent between €31 and €50 (25%). As evidenced in Table 3., most of the respondents stayed in a camp (31%), then private accommodation (27%), hotels (25%), hotel apartments (9%) or with family and friends (8%).

4.2. Satisfaction and quality attitudes

Table 4. shows descriptive statistics for satisfaction and quality attitudes given by the respondents of the survey. Variable S.SUM stands for the overall satisfaction which is given a solid mean of 3,36 out of the range from minimum 1 (not satisfied at all) to maximum 5 (fully satisfied) (Median=3, Mode=4). Satisfaction with the accommodation quality (S.ACCOM) resulted in a mean of 3,52 (Median=4, Mode=4); satisfaction with the cleanliness of the destination has been valued at the mean of 3,53 (Median=4, Mode=4). Respondents were the least satisfied with the tourism destination staff and the qualities they presented (Mean=3,47; Median=4; Mode=4), while showed the highest satisfaction attitude toward the tourism destination safety (Mean=4,06, Median=4, Mode=4).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for satisfaction and quality attitudes

Measure / Variable	S.SUM	S. ACCOM	S. CLEAN	S. STAFF	S. BARS	S. SAFE
Mean	3,36	3,52	3,53	3,47	3,52	4,06
Standard Error	0,07590531	0,07450849	0,082210619	0,1048857	0,071745904	0,072223
Median	3	4	4	4	4	4
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4
Standard Deviation	0,759053105	0,745084905	0,822106189	1,048857002	0,71745904	0,72223
Sample Variance	0,576161616	0,555151515	0,675858586	1,10010101	0,514747475	0,5216162
Kurtosis	0,534055566	-0,218746476	0,116363719	-0,583572457	-0,194119164	1,0659003
Skewness	-0,854782127	-0,44350896	-0,264800575	-0,347893291	-0,155130499	-0,7473809
Range	4	3	4	4	3	3
Minimum	1	2	1	1	2	2
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	336	352	353	347	352	406
Count	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: research results

Accommodation quality variable has a positive correlation with the overall satisfaction (0.094302). The correlation coefficient is relatively low, suggesting a weak positive relationship between these two variables. Cleanliness of the tourism destination has a positive correlation with both Accommodation quality attitudes (0.1721597) and tourism destination staff quality (0.2236282). The correlation coefficients are moderate, indicating a moderate positive relationship between these variables. Tourism destination staff quality has a moderate positive correlation with the overall satisfaction with the tourism destination of Eastern Istria coast (0.2928277) and a weak positive correlation with cleanliness of the destination (0.2236282). It also has a weak positive correlation with hospitality offer (restaurants, bars, clubs, etc.) (0.1551705). The correlation coefficient with accommodation quality is very low (0.0330889), suggesting a weak positive relationship. Hospitality offer (restaurants, bars, clubs, etc.) has a weak positive correlation with cleanliness of the tourism destination (0.2301649) and tourism staff quality (0.1551705). The correlation coefficient with accommodation quality is relatively higher (0.1126181), although indicating a weak positive relationship. Tourism destination safety variable has a weak positive correlation with the overall satisfaction with the tourist destination of Eastern Istria coast (0.1997314) and a weak negative correlation with hospitality offer (-0.06082). The correlation coefficients with accommodation quality attitudes, cleanliness, and staff attitudes are all relatively low, suggesting weak positive relationships. These results only show the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the variables and do not provide information about the underlying causes or other potential relationships that may exist. It is evident from the research results (Table 5.) that a moderate positive relationship between the overall satisfaction and tourism staff quality attitudes is the strongest of the variables researched, followed by tourism destination safety perceptions. It can be concluded from the research findings that quality of Eastern coast of Istria hospitality staff and the perceived safety of the tourism destination play an important role in the overall satisfaction. Furthermore, the research results show a weak negative relationship between hospitality offer of restaurants, bars, clubs etc. that could be linked with the Eastern coast of Istria perception of a family holiday destination and not the party destination. However, it's important to note that correlation does not imply causation, and there may be other factors or underlined relationships that are not captured by these correlation coefficients and the variables investigated in the research.

Table 5: Correlation coefficients related to Overall satisfaction

	S.SUM	S. ACCOM	S. CLEAN	S. STAFF	S. BARS	S. SAFE
S.SUM	1					
S. ACCOM	0,094302	1				
S. CLEAN	0,0796397	0,1721597	1			
S. STAFF	0,2928277	0,0330889	0,2236282	1		
S. BARS	-0,0133545	0,1126181	0,2301649	0,1551705	1	
S. SAFE	0,1997314	0,0916017	0,0649867	0,1090753	-0,06082	1

Source: research results

Table 6. represents a statistics summary and ANOVA (analysis of variance) analysis for respondents' attitudes toward the overall satisfaction when categorized into three main and most dominant groups of accommodation arrangements: Hotel, Camp, and Private. The summary part of the Table 6. provides information on the count, sum, average (mean), and variance for each group.

Table 6. Statistics summary and ANOVA single factor analysis results

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Hotel	25	89	3,56	0,423333333
Camp	31	104	3,35483871	0,503225806
Private	27	86	3,185185185	0,925925926

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	1,825778238	2	0,912889119	1,480435308	0,233704696	3,110766166
Within Groups	49,33084827	80	0,616635603			
Total	51,15662651	82				

Source: research results

The ANOVA results indicate that there is no significant difference between the group means because the p-value (0.233704696) is greater than the chosen significance level (e.g., α = 0.05). Therefore, based on this analysis, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the mean ratings of the three groups (Hotel, Camp, and Private accommodation arrangements) are significantly different. However, the findings of the study still provide interesting insights into tourist satisfaction related to their accommodation arrangements. Given the results, it is evident that the respondents that stayed at hotels (including hotel apartments) were overall the most satisfied group (3,56), as opposed to those that stayed in camps (3,35) and private accommodation (3,18).

The difference between the overall satisfaction of both observed age groups (0-45 yrs. and 46+ yrs.) did not prove to be statistically significant (p=0,98) and the results also showcase the average rating of both groups is very similar, 3,35849 was given by the first younger group and 3,36170 by the latter older group. Based on study findings, it can be stated that there is no specific difference in age groups of participating respondents regarding their satisfaction with the tourism offer on the eastern part of Istria County.

4.3. Return intention and recommendation attitudes

Based on research results given in Table 7., it appears that the majority of respondents in both categories selected "Probably" as their intent, with "Neither Probably nor unprobable" being the second most common choice. The least popular choices were "Very Probably" and "Very Unprobable" in both tables. Given that 26% of respondents came to the Eastern coast of Istria due to a recommendation, it was interesting to investigate their recommendation intent based on their experience.

Table 7: Return and recommendation intent attitudes

Return Intent	Number	Percentage	Recommendation Intent	Number	Percentage
Very Probably	4	4%	Very Probably	21	21%
Probably	35	35%	Probably	41	41%
Neither Probably or Unprobable	40	40%	Neither probably or unprobable	25	25%
unprobable	20	20%	unprobable	10	10%
Very unprobable	1	1%	Very unprobable	3	3%
TOTAL	100	100%	TOTAL	100	100%

Source: research results

Based on the results provided in Table 8., it can be said that there is a moderate positive relationship (0.227565197) between the overall satisfaction with the tourism destination and the return intention of the respondents. Also, there is a moderate positive relationship (0.365316151) between the overall satisfaction and the recommendation intent of the respondents. The findings of the study are in line with findings of a similar research done by Wahyudiono & Soerjanto (2022) that state that overall tourist satisfaction directly effects their return intention to the visited tourism destination and partly in line with the research conducted by Tri Nguyen Huu et al. (2024).

Table 8. Correlation coefficients for return and recommendation intent related to Overall satisfaction

Variable	S.SUM	RETURN	RECOMM
S.SUM	1		
RETURN	0,227565197	1	
RECCOM	0,365316151	0,458541529	1

Source: research results

As evidenced in Table 8., there is a moderate positive relationship (0.458541529) between the return intention of the respondents and the recommendation intention expressed by the respondents of the survey. These correlation values indicate that there are positive associations between the variables in the table, but further information should be sought after and provided in order to fully understand the specific nature and direction of return and recommendation intentions for this specific tourism destination in the Republic of Croatia.

5. Conclusions

Taking into account the results of the conducted empirical research, overall satisfaction can be determined as well as other satisfaction and quality attitudes related to the tourism destination of Eastern coast of Istria county, specifically the areas of the city of Labin, Raša and Rabac. The respondents expressed an average to high level of satisfaction related to the before mentioned tourism destination. The respondents rated the overall satisfaction of the tourism destination with 3,36 (Likert scale from 1 to 5), that can be considered an average rating with standard deviation of 0,75. Accordingly, it can be stated that the surveyed participants of the study are satisfied with the offer that the tourism destination of Eastern coast of Istria provides them, however, there is still room for significant improvement. The respondents rated several variables beside the overall satisfaction; accommodation quality (3,52), cleanliness of the tourism destination (3,53), hospitality staff quality (3,47), restaurant, bars and clubs offer (3,52) and safety of the tourism destination. The safety

variable got the highest rating of 4,06 with the standard deviation of 0,72. In modern times, it can be assumed that safety is an important, even crucial, factor when determining their vacation or visit destination and the correlation coefficient also corresponds with this assumption, meaning that safety is a vital factor in the overall satisfaction rating in this research. Given the third research question: What factors are more significant or valuable in determining overall satisfaction of the tourists; the results clearly indicate, beside the before mentioned safety factor, that quality of the hospitality staff plays an important role in determining the overall satisfaction with the correlation coefficient of a moderate positive correlation of the overall satisfaction related to the tourism destination of Eastern Istria coast (0.2928277). Research results clearly indicate that staff quality and destination safety are the main strengths of the Eastern coast of Istria tourism destination, with accommodation quality and cleanness following.

Age and lifecycle of the tourists plays a significant role in decision making related to the choice of the vacation destination, but also their satisfaction and return intention. This paper tried to determine is there a specific difference in age groups of participating respondents regarding their satisfaction of the tourism offer on the eastern part of Istria County that can be used in recommendations for the local stakeholders regarding tourism destination improvement. The research provided results that show an almost identical rating for both age groups (0-45 yrs. and 46+ yrs.). Respondents in the "up to 45 years" age group rated their overall satisfaction with a grade of 3,35849 and the second age group (45+ years) gave an 3,36170 rating. The difference is minor and is not statistically significant ($t(98)=-0,0211$, $p=0.98$). Furthermore, the paper tried to answer the second research question: Is there a specific difference between participating respondents relating to their overall satisfaction based on accommodation arrangements, assuming their experience can be largely different in those instances. ANOVA analysis was used to produce results between groups and the results showed that there is no statistical significance between groups regarding their accommodation arrangements influencing their overall satisfaction ($p=0.233704696$). However, the results still provide interesting findings that can be potentially interesting for local stakeholders. Respondents that stayed at hotels in the tourism destination rated their overall satisfaction higher (3,56) than others staying in camps (3,35) and private accommodation (3,18). Private accommodation, often as part of households, is widespread in the Republic of Croatia and is the prevalent form of accommodation capacities available in the country; and the results potentially demonstrate lesser quality than other modes of accommodation present at the time. Recommendations regarding the improvement of private accommodation quality in the tourism destination of Eastern coast of Istria could be an inevitable predicament for the future development of the destination. Furthermore, future developments of hotel capacities, especially those with higher standards, is crucial in increasing the quality of the tourism destination. As Weiermar (2000) argues that "today international tourism and international tourists call for a well designed combination of global, national and local cultures, of globally and locally valid service qualities. This blending would create tourism and destination specific cultures, thus leading to unique and differentiated tourism experiences in destinations", could it be that now, when the investigated area of Eastern Coast of Istrian peninsula has "global products" like new and luxurious hotels that the overall satisfaction is higher?

Among the respondents, the most commonly selected return intent was "Probably" with 35%, followed by "Neither Probably nor Unprobeable" with 40%. The least selected options were "Very Probably" with 4% and "Very Unprobeable" with 1%. This indicates that a significant portion of respondents expressed a likelihood of returning, while a small percentage indicated a high or very low probability of returning. In terms of the recommendation intent, "Probably" was the most common choice with 41%, followed by "Neither Probably nor Unprobable" with 25%. The least chosen options were "Very Probably" with 21% and "Very Unprobable" with 3%. This suggests that a substantial number

of respondents were inclined to recommend, while fewer expressed extreme opinions regarding recommendation. The correlation table indicates that there is a moderate positive relationship between the overall satisfaction and the return intent (0.227565197), the overall satisfaction and the recommendation intent (0.365316151), as well as the return intent and the recommendation intent (0.458541529). These findings suggest that there are connections between the variables, but further analysis is required to determine the nature and significance of these relationships. In summary, the majority of respondents expressed a probability of returning and a willingness to recommend, with "Probably" being the most commonly selected option in both categories. Additionally, the correlation analysis suggests some interdependence between the variables. These insights can be vital in decision-making processes related to customer return and recommendation behavior which can be beneficial in development of tourism destinations like the Eastern coast of Istria county. However, it is important to conduct further research and analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors influencing the results of the study.

Limitations of the survey are clearly linked with the small sample size of only 100 respondents and the fact that the sample is thus not being representative of the tourism destination visitor total population. Another limitation can be attributed to the questionnaire distribution method, as the survey was conducted online using e-mails and social media that poses certain difficulties in assessing respondents' credibility, as is the case with other online surveys.

Recommendations for further research should be directed to investigating visitors' attitudes in depth and continually, especially regarding their satisfaction and multiple variables that influence their satisfaction in order to provide data that could be proven useful to create successful development strategies and plans that will benefit local stakeholders and local companies alike. Tourism is an important part of the overall economy in the Republic of Croatia and thus any research in this field is vital and ensures the right direction of Croatian tourism sector future developments.

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