

*Preliminary communication*  
(accepted November 19, 2013)

# THE POSSIBILITIES FOR REPOSITIONING OF THE OPATIJA RIVIERA'S TOURISM OFFER

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## **Abstract:**

The competition on the tourist market is getting more harsh, which imposes the need for continuous co-operation of academic and economic community with the objective to get to know the latest wishes and aspirations of increasingly demanding tourists, and improvement of the tourism offer in accordance with their preferences. Maximum efforts must be invested in achieving recognisability and competitive advantages on the international tourist market. The purpose of the paper was to point out the importance of Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination in function of contributing the development of a Croatian tourist product. The goal of the paper was to give the presentation of the importance of researching the satisfaction with the offer of a tourist destination. It is necessary to reposition the current position of the Opatija Riviera on the tourist market and to, through adequate promotion of the tourist destination, increase the tourist turnover.

*Keywords:* tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera, preferences of tourist service consumers, competitiveness, recognisability, repositioning.

*Jel Classification:* L83

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Republic of Croatia possesses a rich resource base which is a foundation for tourism offer development. It must attempt to create new tourist products based on designing of new, innovative events and attractions on the tourist market in order to attract new tourists and achieve an increase in tourist consumption and competitiveness. It must be designed in compliance with the sustainable development principles. Taking into consideration the fact that new tourist destinations keep

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emerging on the modern tourist market, Croatia must make the best of its resources and invest the greatest efforts in development of quality and diverse tourism offer (adjustment to preferences of modern tourists, adoption of best practice of the leading destinations, and creation of its own unique and top tourism offer) in order to stand out among countless tourist programmes and events offered by the competing destinations, and to achieve competitive advantages on the turbulent and changing tourist market.

The Opatija Riviera is an important factor of development and improvement of the total tourism offer of the County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar and Croatia whose true potentials have not been fulfilled despite real opportunities.

Taking into consideration previously mentioned, the authors have set the following hypothesis: by conducting continuous research and monitoring the level of satisfaction of tourists with the tourist offer of Opatija Riviera, it is possible to improve the quality of tourist offer, achieve recognisability, and thus, achieve competitive advantages on the contemporary tourist market.

The purpose of this paper was to point out the importance of Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination in function of contributing the development of a Croatian tourist product. The goal of the paper was to present an analysis of the state of tourism in the Opatija Riviera and tourists' satisfaction with its tourism offer, its significance in terms of contribution to tourism development in the County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar, and proposal of guidelines for future development of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera.

In this paper, the following scientific methods were used: method of analysis and synthesis, historical method, method of concretization, statistical method based on secondary statistical data used in the paper, method of comparison, classification, description, and others.

## **THE CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM IN THE OPATIJA RIVIERA – ELEMENTS OF THE TOURIST OFFER AND TOURISTS' SATISFACTION**

According to Stipanovic and Alkier Radnic (2007), the globalised environment and determinants of the dynamic European tourist market define the principles of tourism. Activities of the competition and development of demand preferences require constant activities, optimisation and promptness in development. Innovation in the developmental concept provides the possibility of transforming the Croatian tourism offer and redesigning the monotonous, scarce mass tourism offer into an industry of entertainment and active holidays, with the objective to stimulate higher tourist consumption, attract tourists of higher purchasing power and increase the level of tourist satisfaction.

An important precondition in the process of designing tourist events and programmes is caring for the impact of a new tourist product on competitiveness of the destination. The author Tripunic, via Kresic, points out that competitive advantage is the '*punctum saliens*' of strategic activities of all the tourist suppliers in the destination, and its possession the basis for differentiating successful from unsuccessful destinations (adapted according to Kresic, 2007). Therefore, there is the need to create new and innovative contents of tourism offer in tourist destinations, especially in Opatija which has been developing its tourism industry since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Opatija Riviera has an important role in realising more successful and competitive tourism development and recognisability, not only of the County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar, but also Croatia as a tourist destination on the international tourist market. Its rich history, natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, good transport links, the vicinity of tourist-generating markets, etc., are some of the factors for which this destination developed its recognisable image and tourism offer. However, comparing its current state with the other leading Mediterranean destinations, the conclusion is derived that it is insufficiently developed in relation to its real possibilities. Great efforts should be invested in the creation of a single tourist product which will be recognised by tourists as a unique tourist brand.

What follows is the presentation of tourists' satisfaction with elements of the tourism offer in the Opatija Riviera. Likert's scale was used in the analysis (1–7), i.e. tourists could choose from 1 (complete dissatisfaction with the offer of the tourist destination) to 7 (complete satisfaction with the offer of the tourist destination).

**Table 1.** Elements of the Tourism Offer in the Opatija Riviera in 2011<sup>2</sup>

Elements of the tourism offer in the Opatija Riviera	Sub-region
Inhabitants, employees in tourism	5,59
Space, resources, environment	5,49
Facilities	5,22
Organisation of the destination	5,03
Recognisability, safety, level of information	4,96

The above indicates the fact that tourists are mostly satisfied with kindness of the local population and employees in tourism and the hotel industry (5,59). What follows are the space, resources and the environment (rated 5,49) which indicates quality background for development of sustainable tourism offer. This is especially significant, taking into consideration that today's tourists are more ecologically aware and want to stay in destinations which devote attention to natural resources.

The offer of facilities is rated relatively lower (5,22), which indicates that it must become more developed and complemented taking into consideration that events, cultural and historical heritage, sports events, health- and nautical tourism offer and other elements of tourism offer represent an important element of success of the entire tourist product. Certain elements of the offer on which the Opatija Riviera tries to build its offer differentiation do not have, according to tourists' opinion, satisfactory tourist facilities, which are primarily conferences and congresses (4,15), health tourism facilities (4,47), and nautical tourism offer (4,84) (Adapted according to group of authors, eds. Blazevic and Persic 2012).

Organisation of the destination was rated 5,03, while recognisability, security and information level were rated the lowest (4,96). This is a particular reason to be concerned, considering the fact that recognisability is one of the key niches on which tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera should be based. Also, it is necessary to continuously conduct promotional activities of the tourism offer and use other information mechanisms which will ensure quality and complete information for tourists.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted according to group of authors eds. Blazevic and Persic 2012, 39–40.

Satisfied tourists will be willing to allocate more free resources for a visit to a tourist attraction, which will imply added value of the tourist product. It can be reinvested in the creation of new and innovative tourist events and attractions.

The following table lists 10 elements of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera with which tourists are the most and the least satisfied.

**Table 2.** Tourists' Satisfaction with Elements of the Tourism Offer of the Opatija Riviera in 2011<sup>3</sup>

10 elements of the tourism offer with which tourists are satisfied the most (TOP 10+)			10 elements of the tourism offer with which tourists are satisfied the least (TOP 10-)		
1.	Climate	5,78	1.	Conferences and congresses	4,15
2.	Kindness of employees in tourism	5,68	2.	Parking lots	4,18
3.	Kindness of the population	5,58	3.	Health tourism facilities	4,47
4.	Beauty of the landscape	5,53	4.	Sports events	4,54
5.	Knowledge of foreign languages of the employees in tourism	5,51	5.	Events	4,66
6.	Cleanness of the sea	5,49	6.	Cultural events	4,67
7.	Walkways	5,46	7.	Local traffic	4,68
8.	Arrangement of the destination	5,38	8.	Souvenirs	4,75
9.	Parks and green areas	5,33	9.	Events for children	4,8
10.	Entertaining events	5,25	10.	Shops	4,84

It is evident from the Table 2 that climate was rated 5,78 which is a significant competitive advantage for attraction of tourists of different age groups who will gladly visit the destination for holiday, entertainment, recreation and rehabilitation from illness. Kindness of the employees was rated 5,68 što which indicates the fact that employees in tourism and the hotel industry invest efforts in satisfying the needs of the demanding tourists, which implies higher realisation of value for money. Kindness of the population was rated 5,58, which indicates the ability to attract tourists who feel welcome, „local“, and they will want not only to return, but also to recommend this destination to their friends and acquaintances. What follows are satisfactory ratings of the beauty of the landscape (5,53), employees' knowledge of foreign languages (5,51), cleanness of the sea (5,49), walkways (5,46), while arrangement of the destination (5,38), parks and green areas, (5,33), and entertaining facilities (5,25) were rated relatively lower.

Analysis of the elements of the tourism offer which satisfies the tourists the least indicated a worrying fact that organisation of conferences and congresses took the first place on the list (4,15), taking into consideration that the Opatija Riviera used to be famous for its congress tourism. Insufficient number of parking places and their inadequacy was also rated very low (4,18). It is important to point out dissatisfaction with health tourism offer (4,47), which is also worrying considering that the Opatija Riviera for the most part based its tourism offer on health tourism throughout history. It is very important to improve this segment of the tourism offer and to comply with the trends on the European and world level. Sports events were rated with low 4,54, which is unsatisfactory because they also represent an important element of the tourism offer, especially because they can be adapted to all age groups. Events (4,66) and cultural events (4,67) were rated extremely low, which is a weakness in the development of a competitive tourism offer. Organisation of events and cultural events are an important factor of development of the (urban) tourism offer. Great attention needs to be devoted to

<sup>3</sup> Adapted according to group of author eds. Blazevic and Persic 2012, 66.

them in the process of development of a contemporary tourism offer considering that through it, the destination can be profiled and promoted as a unique tourist brand. Special attention should therefore be devoted to the creation of tourist events which will enable greater tourists' satisfaction with the above-mentioned facilities which currently represent a weakness of the offer in the Opatija Riviera. Their integration in the other segments of the offer will result in greater quality of the total offer and tourists' satisfaction, which will stimulate general repositioning of the destination as a destination of high quality offer. Also, tourists rated low their satisfaction with the local traffic (4,68) which indicates the need for a better and more quality traffic organisation and infrastructure. Lack of the offer of souvenirs should be especially pointed out (4,75), with emphasis on local souvenirs, followed by events for children (4,8) and insufficient range of shops (4,84). These elements also represent an important element of tourism offer which contributes to its quality and image of tourist destinations.

In order to conduct an adequate evaluation of the state of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera, and to present its significance and contribution to development of the tourism offer in the County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar, it is necessary to continuously analyse quantitative and qualitative indicators which point to the current state of the tourism offer of the destination.

The following table presents the realised tourist arrivals and tourist overnights in the Opatija Riviera in the period between 2004 and 2012 as a response to tourists' satisfaction with the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera.

**Table 3.** The realised tourist arrivals and tourist overnights in the Opatija Riviera for the period between 2004 and 2012

Year	Tourist arrivals total	Tourist overnights total
2004	333.722	1.263.107
2005	371.220	1.391.530
2006	403.815	1.428.199
2007	419.484	1.460.527
2008	424.597	1.475.076
2009	410.194	1.381.190
2010	435.576	1.495.490
2011	451.053	1.554.470
2012	463.968	1.604.970

The data (authors' analysis according to data collected by a survey conducted in June of 2013; the questionnaire was sent to the representatives of tourist boards of towns of Lovran, Opatija, Icici, Matulji, and Moscenicka Draga) presented in the above table indicate moderate growth of the number of tourist arrivals and tourist overnights by 2009 as well as after 2010, which leads to the conclusion that tourists' satisfaction with elements of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera increased. In 2009, a decline was recorded in both tourist arrivals and overnights, which can surely be interpreted as the impact of the economic crisis on tourism sector and economy in general. Although the period between 2004 and 2012 was marked by moderate growth of the realised tourist arrivals and overnights, it is unsatisfactory taking into consideration the possibilities and resources.

In order to design a successful, high-quality and recognisable tourist product which will enable development of year-long business activities, it is necessary to continuously monitor tourists' opinions on elements of the tourism offer in the destination, to manage

offer development in line with the trends along with adequate valorisation of tourist resources. Modern tourists keep looking for new and unique events. Experience is a foundation for design of the tourist offer and it is therefore necessary to design new attractions—experiences which will make the Opatija Riviera recognisable on the global tourist market.

### SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTIVE FORMS OF TOURISM OFFER IN THE OPATIJA RIVIERA

Repositioning of the former strategic orientation of the Opatija Riviera, expressed in the form of the so-called „mass tourism“, consists of clear orientation towards qualitative development of the tourism offer, development of selective forms of tourism, etc. which will also increase profitability and general economic significance of tourism in the Opatija Riviera (adapted according to: Uravic, Toncetti Hrvatin, 2007). Selective forms of tourism represent an important factor of the tourism offer considering that their diversity can fulfil the needs of tourists of all sociodemographic profiles and age group, enable realisation of value for money and experience for money, result in an increase in the number of tourist arrivals, overnights and tourist consumption.

In the research conducted in 2011, there was a survey on the opinion of tourist managers on the possibilities for development of selective forms of tourism offer in the Opatija Riviera. The current selective forms of the tourism offer were rated differently. The business tourism offer was rated 4,25, health tourism 4,35, sports and recreational tourism 4,63, holiday tourism 4,75, event tourism 4,92, while the rest of the selective offer was rated higher –5,75 (adapted according to group of authors, editors: Blazevic and Persic, 2012.)

Ratings by tourism management pointed to the worrying state of certain selective forms of tourism, especially business and health tourism, which is an additional reason for concern since the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera was formerly mostly based on them.

In order to eliminate the above-mentioned weaknesses, new tourist events and attractions should be designed, and this will be enabled if all the strengths and weaknesses of the Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination are taken into consideration. In this regard, the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the Opatija Riviera is presented through the SWOT analysis (Table 4 – Authors' analysis) below in order to assist in overcoming the weaknesses.

**Table 4.** The SWOT Analysis of the Tourism Offer of the Opatija Riviera

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Rich and preserved resource base	Insufficiently profiled offer
Pleasant climate, clean sea, clean air	Lack of innovation
Tourist tradition	Lack of organisation
Recognisability on traditional tourist generating markets (Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Germany, etc.)	Insufficient value for money
Good traffic connections and easy access	Insufficient recognisability on the new market niches (China, Russia, India, etc.)
Kindness of the population and employees in tourism	

**Table 4.** (continued)

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Development of selective forms of tourism offer	Pollution of the environment
Creating a brand of congress, health, and nautical tourism	Uncoordinated development
Investment in knowledge	Excessive building of secondary residences
Development of new experiences	Rapid growth of new markets
Sustainable tourism development	Creation of competitive destinations and products
Raising of general quality of the facilities	
Creation of synergy between culture and tourism	
Building of a tourism museum	
New possibilities for project funding (Cohesion Funds of the EU, public-private partnership, development incentives by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia)	

The SWOT analysis presented in the above table shows that tourism development management in the Opatija Riviera is highly complex and that it requires implementation of contemporary knowledge and skills. Destination management organisations (DMO) have the most important role in using strengths and eliminating weaknesses as well as realising opportunities and minimising threats.

Except for directors of the tourist board of the destination and catering firms, the participants in the destination management are also, in a broader sense, all the relevant experts in the tourism industry and complementary industries, tourist suppliers, but also the entire interested public which actively participates in the creation of attractiveness of the entire tourism offer of the destination. Mountinho points out that for successful planning, management, and research in tourism, it is necessary for tourist experts to be like the Renaissance people. The most important characteristics which a contemporary destination management organisation must implement in the planning of highly valuable tourist products are deliberation, perception, assessment, and continuous improvement of tourist products with the objective to strengthen the competitive advantages of the destination Opatija Riviera on the market (adapted according to Mountinho, 2005.)

The greatest strength of the Opatija Riviera is its recognisability on traditional tourist generating markets, the vicinity and easy access to the destination as well as rich tradition of tourism development which is, unfortunately, still insufficiently used in the creation of new tourist experiences. It takes a quick action of destination management organisations to gain comparative advantage on the tourist market.

The weaknesses which should be taken into consideration are insufficiently profiled tourism offer, insufficient introduction of innovation in tourism offer, poor organisation, and insufficient recognisability on the new market niches, which indicates the necessity for strengthening marketing activities and improving profiling of the tourism offer and its promotion.

Opportunities for successful and sustainable development of the Opatija Riviera and strengthening of competitive advantages are some of the factors among which the most important is development of selective forms of the tourism offer based on compliance with modern trends on the tourist market (creation of new experiences), and ecological principles (sustainable development). Application of knowledge and skills, innovation and creation of recognisable brands of the offer will surely bring new developmental boost to the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera which will increase its competitiveness

on the market. This will be stimulated by implementation (for the Opatija Riviera) of new possibilities for project financing through Cohesion Funds of the European Union, public private partnerships and through more active use of developmental incentives by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia.

The threats which the tourist destination faces on daily basis are environmental pollution (which additionally indicates the importance of upholding sustainable development principles), uncoordinated development of the tourism offer, used-up spatial resources by building of many secondary residences, which leads to disruption of the tourism resource base as foundation for offer development. A significant threat to competitive position on the tourist market is fast growth of new markets and creation of more competitive destinations and products. The tourist destination may be too slow in its adaptation to tourists' preferences.

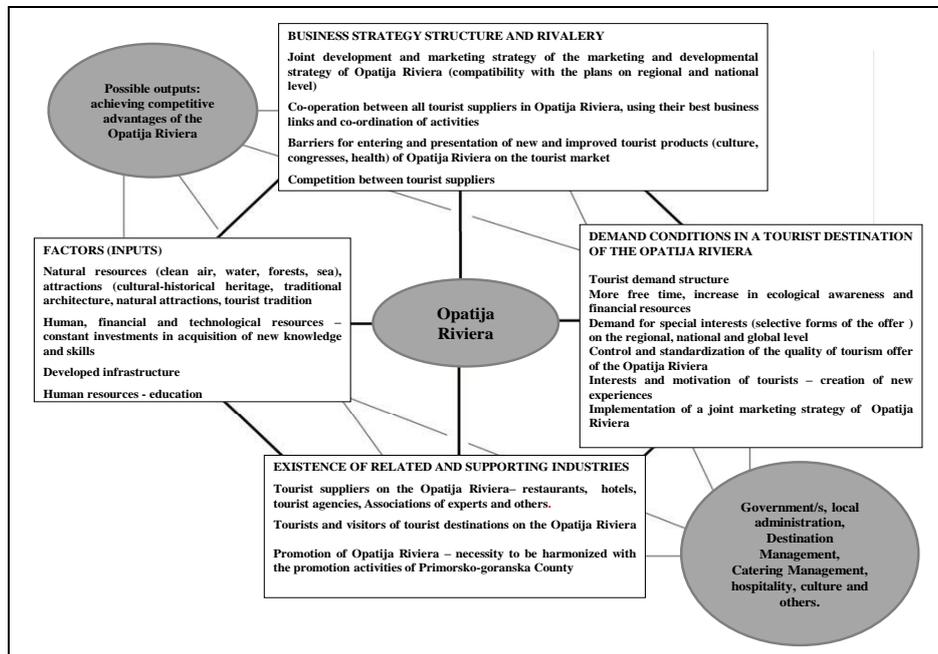
In terms of management of selective forms of tourism, below are listed the most significant ones for the development of tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera. Special attention should be devoted to development of congress tourism (strengthening of the offer quality), since the Opatija Riviera has developed infrastructure and tradition of congress tourism.

Health and nautical tourism offer is also of great importance. Health tourism was a significant factor of the tourism offer in the past on which the Opatija Riviera based its entire tourism offer. Therefore, it must be improved in accordance with the predominant European and world trends. According to Lackovic, Milojica and Zrnic (2011), health tourism in numerous (primarily European) countries represents an increasingly significant segment of the contemporary tourist offer. Tourist demand has become more demanding and more strict on daily basis in terms of realising value for money. This indicates the significance of revitalisation of this segment of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera, and considering that it represents a combination of active and passive vacation, it can be adapted to tourists of all age groups.

Nautical tourism is also an important aspect of improvement of the tourism offer of the Opatija Riviera taking into consideration that it most frequently attracts tourists of high purchasing power and development of this form of the tourist offer will significantly contribute to increase in tourist consumption. Gračan and Perišić point out that it is necessary to formulate strategic development of nautical tourism, striving to ensure a sustainable, well-designed, competitive, sound, manageable and economically effective system capable of securing the high efficiency, and continuous and sustained development of nautical tourism, in alignment with the guidelines of tourism development in the Opatija Riviera (adapted according to Gračan, Perisic, 2006).

Tourism offer based on congress, cultural, traditional, nautical, and health facilities will enable prolongation of the tourist season, which will lead to economic effects on the tourism offer performance in terms of income growth, employment growth, higher level of satisfaction of tourists, but also of the local community whose economic interest lies in tourism development.

Higher level of satisfaction of the visitors of the Opatija Riviera will also be achieved by synergy of all the stakeholders in the destination and compliance of developmental local strategies with those of higher order (regional and national). Porter's diamond of comparative advantages graphically indicates interrelations among all the stakeholders in the destination, but also impacts caused by the environment.



**Figure 1.** Porter's Diamond of Comparative Advantages of the Opatija Riviera, adapted according to: Porter, M. E., 1998.

Porter's diamond of comparative advantages represents a tool which provides guidelines to destination management organisations for future tourism development oriented towards growth in recognisability and competitiveness of the destination on the tourist market. This developmental model is based on compliance with the inputs and outputs realised by the innovative tourism offer taking into consideration the factors of external and internal impacts on the destination, and pointing out the significance of coordination of all administration levels in the achievement of competitive advantages of the destination Opatija Riviera.

## THE PROPOSAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDELINES OF THE OPATIJA RIVIERA

Based on the previously conducted S.W.O.T. analysis and the diamond of competitive advantages, the conclusion is derived that future tourism development in the Opatija Riviera must be based on knowledge and implementation of contemporary technologies as well as application of experience from the best world tourism practice (Nice, Paris, Venice, etc.). Destination management organisations are responsible for the future development of the Opatija Riviera which must include the interested experts and the local public in its activities. Development of the Opatija Riviera must be designed in accordance with the sustainable development principles, creation of new tourist experiences (especially from the segment of the cultural offer), and creation of a brand of congress, health, and nautical tourism of the Opatija Riviera, which will minimise

negative impacts on total satisfaction of tourists with specific segments of the offer in the Opatija Riviera. The Opatija Riviera must use the Town Administration of Opatija as a moving developmental force, as the leading destination brand. Other destinations of the Riviera are included in the tourist product by the elements of additional tourism offer (for example, Moscenicka Draga – Moscenice town of culture; Lovran – *Marunada*; Ika – holiday and knowledge; Icici – tourism and tradition; Matulji – Adriatic Gate).

## CONCLUSION

The Opatija Riviera will achieve multiple benefits by creation of new tourist products which will be based on new experiences representing a foundation for the creation of motivation for tourist travels. After successful conceptualisation, development, promotion and sales on the tourist market, new tourist products will result in an increase in tourist consumption, growth of tourists' satisfaction and increase in the general quality of the offer. All of the above will also result in the increase of economic benefits for the destination. In the future developmental guidelines and scientific research, great attention must be devoted to investments into knowledge and development, total quality management, and implementation of the most recent marketing tools in development and promotion of the tourism offer in the Opatija Riviera. Based on its own developmental experiences and in line with implementation of best world practice, it is necessary to improve the tourism offer which will be achieved through application of contemporary developmental models of tourist destinations based on the creation of recognisable brands as an upgrade of current tourist products (culture, congresses, health, navigation, history, etc.). The hypothesis set in this paper has been successfully proven by using secondary data sources and recent scientific literature. Also, through application of used scientific methods in the research, the importance of measuring and improving the satisfaction of tourists has been pointed out, which contributes directly to the total tourist success of the whole Opatija Riviera and the Republic of Croatia.

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