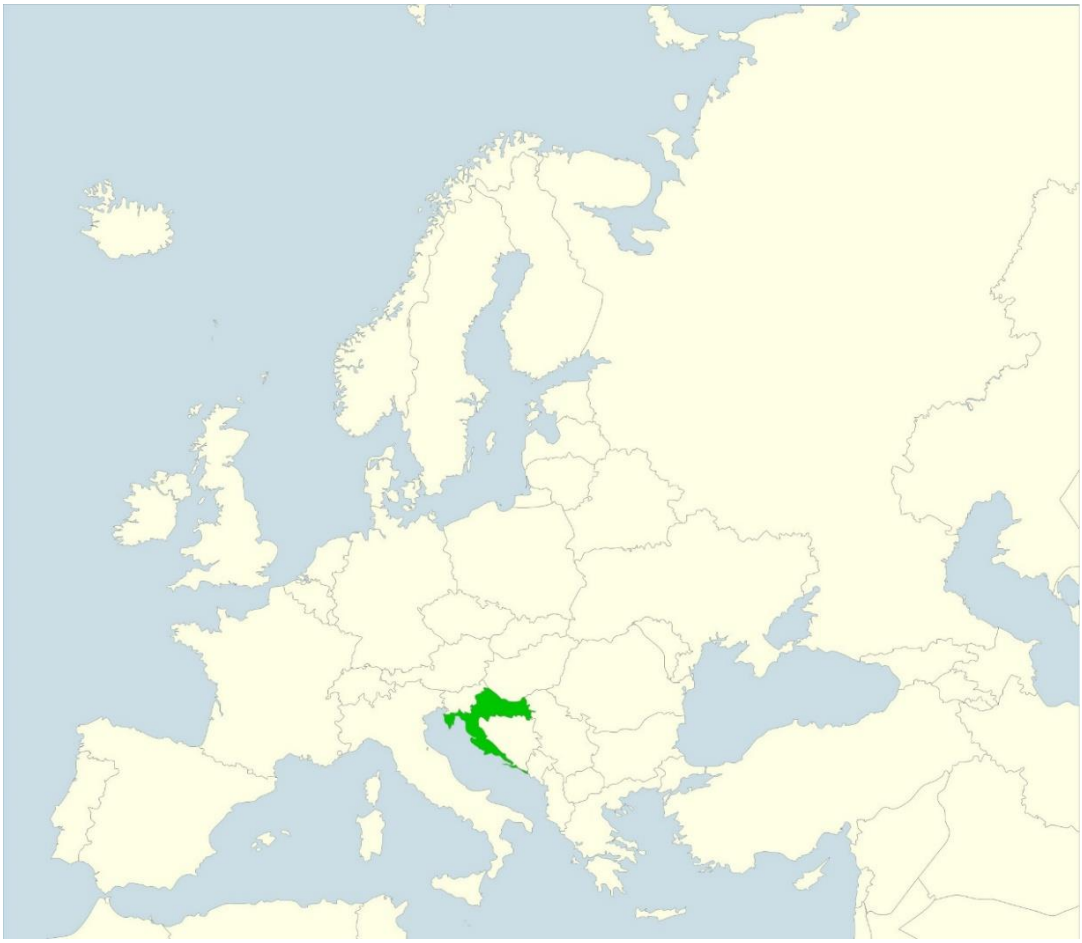
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TOURISM IN A PERIPHERAL SETTING: A CASE STUDY OF FARM TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LIKA, CROATIA



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Abstract: Considering the multi-layered issues of rural peripheries and tourism development, we explore actors' views regarding farm tourism development in the historical/geographical region of Lika. In spite of the fact that important flows of goods and services pass through Lika, it is largely regarded as a peripheral area. Via semi-structured interviews with tourist farm owners and institutional actors involved with farm and rural tourism, we examine how their views relate to characteristics associated with peripherality. In a setting with very few family farms that have developed a farm tourism product, the regional actors see both potential and limitations in characteristics linked to peripherality, general development trends, and local specificities.

Keywords: farm tourism, rural tourism, periphery, Lika, Croatia

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Izvadak: Razmatrajući slojevitost tematike vezane uz ruralne periferije i razvoj turizma, u radu istražujemo gledišta aktera o razvoju turizma na seljačkim gospodarstvima u povijesno-geografskoj regiji Lici. Unatoč tome što važni tokovi dobara i usluga prolaze Likom, ona se pretežno smatra perifernim područjem. Putem polustrukturiranih intervjua s vlasnicima gospodarstava i institucionalnim akterima povezanima s ruralnim i turizmom na seljačkim gospodarstvima, istražujemo njihova gledišta u kontekstu obilježja koja se pridaju perifernosti. U okruženju u kojem je vrlo mali broj obiteljskih gospodarstava uspio razviti svoj turistički proizvod, regionalni akteri vide i potencijale i ograničenja u obilježjima povezanima s perifernošću, u općim razvojnim trendovima te lokalnim specifičnostima.

Ključne riječi: turizam na seljačkim gospodarstvima, ruralni turizam, periferija, Lika, Hrvatska

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Highlights

- We examine views regarding farm tourism development in Lika and how they relate to peripherality via semi-structured interviews with tourist farm owners and institutional actors
- Regional actors see both potential and limitations for farm tourism development in characteristics linked to peripherality (such as natural amenities vs. demographic issues)
- Actors also stress general development trends in tourism, combined with local specificities (such as interest on the part of tourists for local and autochtonous products contrasted with the lack of family farms prepared to engage in farm tourism)

'*A large number of tourists come from the largest cities in the world. Most of them have only seen farm animals, potato flower, and other things in books, if at all. I believe that for them, this would be much more interesting than going to the beach and sunbathing all day. With some kind of activity programme, I'm sure that they would ask for a vacation extension*'.

- A municipality representative

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1. Introduction

Although in recent years, peripheral areas have received increasing academic and political attention all over Europe, notions of what peripheries are can be very different. The debate is still far from specifying indicators that would best define peripherality and help reach a shared understanding of the concept (Steinführer et al., 2016; Salvatore et al., 2018; De Toni et al., 2021). The definition of the periphery and peripheralisation (the way peripheries are (re)produced) largely depends on the standpoint from which it is regarded as a social and spatial phenomenon, and the spatial and temporal contexts in which

peripherality is researched or even created (Miggelbrink and Meyer, 2015; Plüschke-Altof, 2016; Nejašmić et al., 2018; Willett and Lang, 2018). As noted by Willett and Lang (2018), two main responses to 'the question of why peripheries become or remain peripheral' (p. 258) are linked to structural approaches drawing on economic and governance themes on one hand, and approaches that draw on critical theories and philosophies emphasising how spaces are discursively produced, on the other.

Nevertheless, the concepts of "periphery" and "core" (or "centre") seem to be strong and persistent in regional studies, in a fashion similar to the rural-urban dichotomy (Steinführer et al., 2016). The core could be observed as a place of a high level of economic vitality and a diverse economic base; metropolitan in character; that receives population through in-migration; and where residents enjoy a good living standard (Botterill et al., 2000). The main features associated with Europe's peripheral locations include being distant from a core area (and/or with difficult and costly access), sparsely populated with small towns or villages in often rural locations which are relatively isolated, characterised by an economic structure largely based on primary and tertiary sectors (with weak secondary production) and limited local economic control (Wanhill, 1997). Peripheries are often marked by migration outflows (which tend to be younger people), which can also lead to loss of intellectual and social capital (Hall and Boyd, 2005). Government may be required to play a greater role in promoting economic development in the periphery than in the core. However, the periphery's remoteness from decision-making (done in the core) leads to a sense of alienation and governance from afar, a feeling of powerlessness to influence political decisions, as well as a lack of control over its own destiny (Botterill et al., 2000; Pociūtė-Sereikienė and Kriaučiūnas, 2018; Willett and Lang, 2018). Furthermore, there is a widespread link between the rural and the peripheral. This link was explored by Plüschke-Altof (2016), who called it *discursive peripheralisation*; she found that rural areas can be seen as not only represented, but also constituted as peripheries within a discourse that ascribes development potential and nonpotential.

Building further on four-dimensional model of understanding periphery as *distance*, *dependence*, *difference,* and *discourse* (Ferrão and Lopes, 2004), Steinführer et al. (2016) added two other features usually ascribed to rural peripheries: *disadvantage* and *(relative) deprivation*. Beyond different mode(l)s of understanding, however, peripherality is also a matter of perception (Botterill et al., 2000; Brown and Hall, 2000). For example, negative images of limited opportunities and constrained access can coincide with more positive viewpoints of the residential environment by local inhabitants (Bernard, 2019). Likewise, although peripheries are time and again stigmatised as areas that lag behind and depopulate, new in-migrants are interested in peripheral regions and new technologies have enabled skilled personnel to work remotely (Sedlacek et al., 2009; Miggelbrink and Meyer, 2015; Pociūtė-Sereikienė and Kriaučiūnas, 2018). Differences in perceptions represent the key to the development of tourism in peripheral areas. Tourism potential is often seen as a solution for economic revival of peripheral areas within the common paradigm of multifunctional rural development (Sikorski et al., 2020). Through this, the attributes of peripherality that were previously viewed as disadvantageous, are now being seen as opportunities (e.g., isolation and remoteness represent peace and diversity; traditional lifestyles represent heritage and history) (Brown and Hall, 2000). The overall environmental and traditional qualities of rural areas (including rural peripheries) are regularly translated, in social narratives and representations, by the expression *rural idyll*. Tourism can significantly contribute to the construction of such narratives and images (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011).

Neither rural tourism nor farm tourism are new phenomena in the countryside. Tourist visitation to rural areas generally has a long history, although popularisation of European rural areas for tourism came especially after the Second World War with development of mass transportation (Butler, 2011). The rise of rural tourism in European rural areas also came with changes in production characteristics. Thereby, diversification on and off the farm has been a common way for farms to respond to the uncertainty brought by changing market conditions and specific policy changes – such as continual reforms of the EU Common Agricultural Policy – that decrease the income gained directly from agriculture (Potočnik Slavič and Schmitz, 2013; Talbot, 2013; Potočnik Slavič, 2014).

The understanding of both rural tourism and farm tourism, as the main object of interest in this paper, varies by country and context (Hall et al., 2003; Cigale et al., 2013; Potočnik Slavič and Schmitz, 2013).

Rural tourism is usually seen as encompassing different types of tourism in a rural area, such as cultural tourism, religious tourism, camping tourism, gastronomic tourism, or farm tourism (Demonja and Ružić, 2010). This differentiation can be observed in the context of general changes of tourism, evolving towards the development of a number of distinct types and subtypes (Boyd and Hall, 2005). Numerous tourism and recreational activities are also found to be associated with farm tourism; and the relations between tourism and agriculture, as well as tourism supply and demand, vary (Cigale et al., 2013; Talbot, 2013). In this study, farm tourism is understood as one of the types within the umbrella of rural tourism. When previous research is referenced, the term *farm tourism* is used interchangeably with the term *agritourism*.

Prior to the 1990s, farm tourism was present only in parts of littoral and eastern Croatia. Reasons for its weak development lie in small farm size, fragmented and dispersed farmland, and in the focus on mass seaside tourism (Lukić, 2002). Transition to a different political and economic system brought a new development phase for rural and farm tourism, starting with initiatives in the early 1990s that aimed to raise awareness regarding the unused potential of Croatian rural areas, burdened by numerous developmental problems (Lukić, 2002; Kušen, 2003; Brščić et al., 2010; Demonja, 2014). From the 32 tourist farms that were registered in Croatia in 1998, the number grew to 151 in 2000, 352 in 2007, and 447 in 2012. Lika-Senj (*Ličko-senjska županija*) was one of six counties that had no registered tourist farms in 2007, while four such farms were registered in 2012 (Demonja, 2014; Institut za turizam, 2015). However, as noted by Lukić (2013), due to the complexity of defining farm diversification into tourism and local specificities, a number of farms that had diversified into some form of tourism, accommodation, or other leisure activities, was not encompassed by the aforementioned data. It was certainly larger especially in littoral counties, reflecting the importance of seaside tourism for the development of farm tourism.

This research focuses on farm tourism in Lika, a historical/geographical region in the area of Mountainous Croatia. Lika has largely been considered a part of the Croatian (rural) periphery, due to its geographic position at a relative distance from and between Croatia's important urban centres (Zagreb, Rijeka, and Zadar), a lack of its own regional centre, socio-economic underdevelopment, depopulation and unfavourable population composition, and prevailing rural characteristics (Pejnović, 2004; Nejašmić et al., 2018). Lika-Senj County is the contemporary namesake, which chiefly corresponds to historical Lika. The county is referred to in this paper especially with regard to statistical data. It is both the largest and the most sparsely-settled Croatian county, with a total of 50,927 inhabitants to 5,353 km^2, i.e., a population density of 9.51 inhabitants/km^2 according to 2011 census (CBS, 2013). In 2019, the total population of the county was estimated to be 44,346 (CBS, n.d.a). Considering the multi-layered issues of rural peripheries and tourism development, the main research objective is to explore actors' views regarding farm tourism development, its advantages and limiting factors, as well as future prospects. By examining how their views relate to characteristics associated with peripherality, we want to identify common traits and raise issues relevant for other peripheral areas.

In the following sections, we explore potential of rural and farm tourism development with regard to peripheries. An overview of the characteristics of the research area and a description of research methods are followed by a presentation of the research results. The final section discusses the findings of the paper.

2. Potential of rural and farm tourism development

The discussion on the potential of rural and farm tourism development involves a number of ideas related to how we perceive the rural and what functions we attribute to it in different contexts. 'The idea of the rural as a space of production . . . has always had a mirror in the similarly powerful idea of the rural as a place of consumption' (Woods, 2011, 92), where it can be argued that the loss of productive character of many parts of rural Europe over several decades has contributed to an increase in consumption activities. That is, a continuing loss of economic and social relevance of agricultural activities contributed to the perspective of the rural as a multifunctional space, with new roles and functions often oriented towards leisure and tourism (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011). As a tool in rural development, tourism aims at creating local income, employment and growth, contributing to the provision of economic and social infrastructure, encouraging the development of other economic sectors, or contributing to

the conservation of environmental and cultural resources (Hall and Jenkins, 1998). The European Union, with regard to promoting economic and social cohesion, acknowledged the role of tourism in actions aiming to reduce regional disparities in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty (Wanhill, 1997). Tourism is especially perceived as being of considerable economic and social benefit to peripheral areas (Hall et al., 2003; Kubeš and Chvojková, 2020; Sikorski et al., 2020).

When it comes to establishing farm tourism specifically, most frequent motive is the desire to generate stable income on the farm and prudent use of existing farm capital stocks and potential. Farm tourism can be a way to generate supplementary income and retain family farmland (Sharpley and Vass, 2005; Potočnik Slavič, 2014; Streifeneder, 2016). Talbot (2013) identified the main resources used by farmers to create their farm tourism products, which were: location; working farm; farm land and buildings; farm produce; farm family; business ethos; and business reputation. Moreover, farm tourism products varied in the extent to which they featured agriculture. Still, Streifeneder (2016) argued that agritourism as *authentic agritourism* principally represents (or should represent) an agricultural phenomenon with the on-farm organisation of an authentic touristic offer as a subsidiary activity.

Previous research indicated that farm tourism is a two-way system – some farms are entering and some are leaving the business (Potočnik Slavič, 2014) and that there are different farm tourism operators: full-time operators; part-time farmers; retirement farmers; and lifestyle farmers. Difficulties in balancing the main income activity (agriculture or other off-farm diversification) with agritourism have also been reported. Uniqueness, authenticity, attractiveness, and personal contact have often been reported as the major advantages of farm tourism in comparison to other forms of tourism, as well as intimate links with nature (Potočnik Slavič and Schmitz, 2013).

Total spending by visitors to the countryside in some cases, as noted by Woods (2011) in the example of rural England, amounted to over double compared to the income generated by agriculture. Farm tourism is recognised as a market niche, however, it includes risks related to seasonality, dependence on the farm's human capital, accessibility, market trends, regulation changes, etc., that need to be taken into consideration (Potočnik Slavič, 2014). Evidence from nine European countries signaled that the role of farm tourism itself, in terms of total income, the number of farm tourism properties and accommodation capacities, as well as the number of tourists and overnight stays, was rather modest (Cigale et al., 2013; Potočnik Slavič and Schmitz, 2013). Nonetheless, in countries and regions where agritourism developed very successfully, as noted by Streifeneder (2016) in case of Austria, Bavaria, South Tyrol, or Tuscany, indicators of agritourism development could reach a significant share. Moreover, the impact of small rural tourism businesses in general goes beyond economic figures; in spite of limited economic impact with regard to job and income generation, their contributions to local economic and social dynamics are important (Cunha et al., 2020).

Potential problems in pursuing rural economic development via tourism stem from the diversity of resources and stakeholders involved (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008), along with issues connected to incorporating tourism within the larger development context, at different levels of governance and in relation to other economic activities (Hall and Boyd, 2005). Furthermore, according to Woods (2011, 93), 'the practice of rural tourism implicitly involves the commodification of rural landscapes, cultures and experiences.' Ciervo (2013) goes a step further in arguing that, if rural traditions and cultural heritage are used mainly as an attractive factor to compete in the market, agritourism can produce a high territorial impact and gradually affect the *soul of place* (Ciervo, 2013, 334). Tourism has an important role in the promotion of an image of rurality through the use of specific symbols and signs, contributing to reinvention of rural contexts, which can affect 'local contexts and identities, transforming the physiognomy of places, apparently more in accordance with urban constructs and ideals than with local values and needs.' (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011, 3).

Tourism inevitably brings change and transformation (Boyd and Hall, 2005), and the fact that recreation and tourism activities undertaken in rural areas are increasing and diversifying, and significantly affecting environmental, economic and social change, raises the question of regulation, adequate planning, and management at different levels (Hall et al., 2003; Cawley and Gillmor, 2008), especially for peripheral areas. Copus (2001) argued that peripherality is increasingly becoming an aspatial issue, where structural

and technological changes mean that the economic potential of all regions is becoming less related to location and increasingly influenced by aspatial characteristics, such as quality of the local IT infrastructure, human capital, or local institutional structures/networks. Thereby, the concepts and practice of participatory, locally-led governance (See: Gstach, 2014; Strzelecka, 2015), integrated rural tourism aiming to promote environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability and to empower local people (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008), or tourism transition, related to the shift from traditional economy and/or from mass tourism to new forms of locally-based tourism (Salvatore et al., 2018), come to the fore. As observed by Salvatore et al. (2018), in spite of possible problems related to stakeholders' cultural capital, knowledge, experience, and trust, an approach centred on agency offers the ability to overcome the determinism suggested by the concept of dependency, because it acknowledges that local actors possess the ability to influence their own circumstances. Discursive production of peripheries is also relevant here. The way that a place is talked about can present it as worthy of investment, generate emotions, which can challenge dominant (often stigmatising) narratives, and motivate individuals and groups to action (Willett and Lang, 2018).

3. The research area

Lika is part of the Dinaric Mountains, encompassing karst poljes and highlands. Velebit Mountain blocks the interior of the region from easily accessing the Adriatic coastline. Despite the fact that important flows of goods and services pass through Lika, its transitory position remains barely utilised (Figure 1). Lika has vast forest and fresh water resources and a large number of protected areas/localities.



Fig 1. Geographical position and administrative division of Lika-Senj County. Sources: ArcMap 10.3.1. Basemaps; SGA, 2013

The population of the region has been falling for decades, due to natural decrease and outmigration (Figure 2). The greatest drop in population after 1961 came in the 1991–2001 intercensal period, largely as a consequence of the Croatian War of Independence (the Homeland War), in which the area sustained heavy losses in terms of population and economy. It is not surprising that a number of research papers over the last few decades have concentrated on Lika's demographic issues and changes in the settlement

structure (e.g., Pejnović, 1979/1980; Pejnović, 2004; Živić and Turk, 2009). The demographic resources of most local government units in Lika have been characterised as very weak or extremely weak, which is seen as a significant limiting factor for economic development (LAG LIKA, 2018). In 2011 census, 11.3% of the employed population worked in primary sector, 21.8% in the secondary sector, while 66.9% worked in the service sector.

According to the Farmers Register, there were 4,930 family farms registered in Lika-Senj County at the end of 2019 (PAAFRD, 2020). Most of the registered farm holders were men. More than half (2,712) had no members other than the registered holder, 1,469 had one other active member, 537 had two, 176 had three, and only 36 farms had 4 or more active members other than the registered holder. Furthermore, 359 holders did not have a primary school-level education, and more than half had either primary school-level (23%) or high school-level (36%) education. Only 7% of registered holders had a tertiary-level education. No data were available for registered holders of 1,337 farms. More than 2,000 of registered holders (42%) were older than 65 years of age, while the share decreased toward lower age groups. Farms were predominantly small: roughly, half of family farms had 3–20 ha farmland, around 40% less than 3 ha, and less than 10% had more than 20 ha. Animal husbandry (sheep, cattle, goats) was the dominant activity. The most common vegetable crop was the Lika potato and the most commonly grown fruit was the plum.

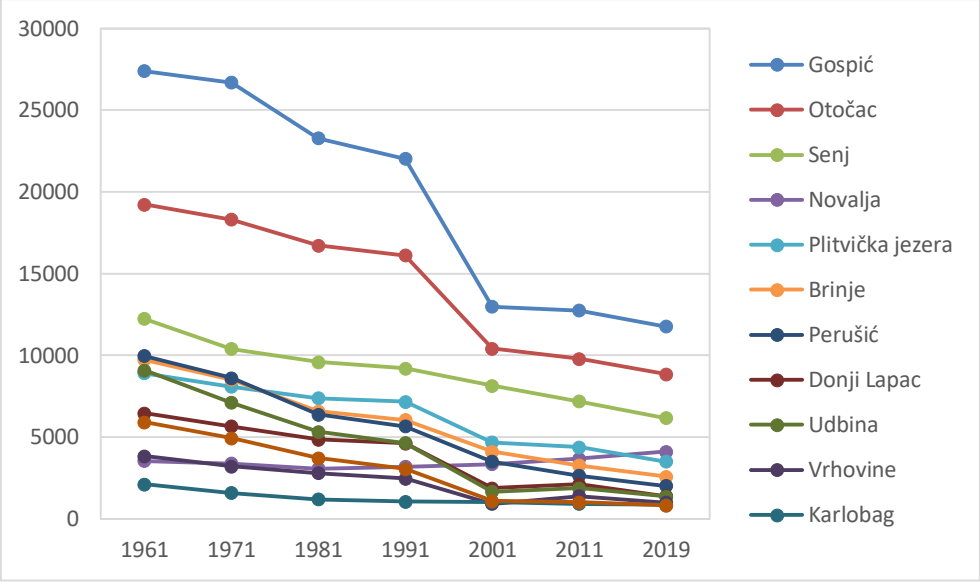


*Fig 2. Population change in local government units in Lika-Senj County between 1961 and 2019 (*2019 relates to the CBS estimate). Sources: CBS, n.d.a; n.d.b; 2013*

With regard to tourism development, there is a clear polarisation between individual areas within Lika-Senj County. Most tourist traffic goes to the island Pag (specifically to Novalja, which is also the only local government unit in the county that has enjoyed population increase; See: Figure 2), the coast, and Plitvice Lakes National Park (with its wider surroundings). Apart from the afore-mentioned locations, which are characterised predominantly by mass tourism in hotels and private lodgings, numerous selective types of tourism have been moderately developed (e.g., hunting, fishing, religious tourism, and recreational tourism).

Between 2014 and 2018, the number of tourist arrivals in Lika-Senj County increased by 55.4% and the number of overnight stays by 62.7% (*Turizam u brojkama 2015.*; *Turizam LSŽ u brojkama, Turistička sezona 2018.*). In 2018, the Town of Novalja had the largest share of tourist traffic and an average of 7.3 overnight stays, followed by the seaside Town of Senj (5.6 overnight stays on average), and the Municipality of Plitvička Jezera, where tourists – visitors to the national park – stayed only 1.4 days on average (Table 1). Most local government units documented positive trends in comparison to 2017.

Tab 1. Tourist arrivals and overnight stays per tourist board area in Lika-Senj County. Source: Turizam LSŽ u brojkama, Turistička sezona 2018.

Local government unit/tourist board area	Tourist arrivals in 2018	Share in total	Change in tourist arrivals 2018/2017	Overnight stays in 2018	Share in total	Change in overnight stays 2018/2017
Novalja	251,760	31.0	104.1	1,839,061	55.6	102.4
Senj	93,691	11.5	104.8	523,575	15.8	101.8
Plitvička Jezera	337,714	41.6	109.5	472,022	14.3	109.1
Karlobag	38,941	4.8	102.7	226,955	6.9	99.8
Stara Novalja	14,652	1.8	102.3	130,516	3.9	105.9
Otočac	44,020	5.4	106.7	54,926	1.7	109.7
Gospić	20,478	2.5	127.7	35,111	1.1	124.6
Vrhovine	4,163	0.5	137.2	7,048	0.2	134.9
Perušić	2,216	0.3	154.9	7,044	0.2	142.2
Brinje	2,869	0.4	154.9	3,066	0.1	151.0
Lika-Senj County Tourist Board*	2,086	0.3	83.8	6,103	0.2	89.1
TOTAL Lika-Senj County	812,590	100.0	107.2	3,305,427	100.0	103.6

*encompasses data for local government units without their own tourist boards (Donji Lapac, Lovinac, and Udbina).

4. Research methods

In order to explore the views of key actors, two phases of in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Purposive sampling (Milas, 2005) was used to represent the range of interests and responsibilities in farm tourism development in Lika and illustrate different perspectives.

The interviews were semi-structured and based on a prepared set of questions of both open and closed type. The first round of interviews was undertaken in the summer of 2016 with six owners of family farms, who were engaged in various types of agriculture and tourism. The actual number of tourist farms in Lika is difficult to determine, due to conflicting institutional data. According to LAG Lika data, there were six registered tourist farms in the area in 2016. However, agriculture and tourism are often registered as separate activities, even when they are being practiced simultaneously by a single farm, which is why the actual number of tourist farms is greater. Interviewees were contacted on the basis of LAG recommendation and through personal contacts. Out of registered tourist farms, three agreed to participate in the research. Additionally, three "informal" tourist farms were included, also aiming at a more balanced geographic distribution of interviewees in the region. Finally, two interviewees were from the Municipality of Plitvička Jezera; one from the Town of Otočac; two from the Town of Gospić; and one from the Municipality of Lovinac. The interviews encompassed four groups of questions regarding the owners themselves, their farm, performance and profitability of their business, cooperation with other stakeholders, and plans for the future.

The second round of interviews was undertaken in the summer of 2017 with representatives of various administrative bodies in the region. The interviews were also divided into four parts, containing questions regarding the potential future of economic development in Lika, the state of tourism and its potential, the state of agriculture and its potential, and a series of questions regarding farm tourism. There was a total of eight interviews, encompassing representatives of two local government units, regional self-government, a local tourist board, three protected areas, and a local action group (LAG). All interviews were recorded and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

In interview data analysis, key concepts concerning the topic of study were discerned and an iterative search through the data set conducted to check, recheck, and revise preliminary ideas about the topic (Roulston, 2014). Results were presented based on thematic categories and patterns in interviewees'

responses. In the case of tourist farms, interview results were also organised in a tabular form to allow for easier comparison.

Apart from interview data, relevant statistical sources were analysed in the course of the research in order to provide an overview of demographic trends, the number and structure of family farms, and tourism development generally.

5. Results

5.1 Characteristics of tourist farms in a peripheral setting

In terms of the general characteristics of the researched tourist farms, five out of six farm owners indicated that their family consisted of 2–4 members, of which more or less all were active. One farm had six members who were all active. According to the age structure, there was a clear dominance of active members 40–60 years old. Due to their workload, two farms also employed workers in addition to active family members. Only two farms had been involved in tourism-related activities for longer than ten years, and one of the farms had plans to become involved in tourism in the near future. Regarding their motivation for becoming involved in tourism, the owners mentioned a desire to put inherited land to good use, financial reasons (unemployment), values such as living in contact with nature, and favourable time in life (opportunity provided by early retirement). One of the farms indicated locational reasons, where the proximity of Plitvice Lakes National Park played into their decision to become involved in tourism (Table 2).

Tab 2. Comparison of researched tourist farms.

Farm	Stated reasons for becoming involved in tourism	Type of tourism and/or hospitality supply	What is Lika's potential for farm tourism development?	What are the limitations and problems for farm tourism development in Lika?
1	Finances, unemployment	Rooms and an apartment	A high level of interest on the part of tourists	Lack of workers, large volume of work, bureaucracy
2	Neglected inherited land	Eco camp (bungalows and camping pitches), adrenaline park, rural house	Not dependent on the classic summer tourism season, gastronomy, winter tourism, mountains and sea	High taxes, lack of interest among youth, old population
3	Life in contact with nature, authentic way of life	Rural houses, apartments, restaurant, riding (one-day and multiple-day tours)	Development of rural tourism, connection between the continent and the sea, ideal surroundings	Unfavourable population structure, inactivity of youth, lack of creativity
4	Post-War unpromising atmosphere, early retirement	Rooms, restaurant	Favourable geographical position, motorway, preserved nature, year-round tourism supply	Lack of workers, depopulation, strict regulations, transport links and signs
5	Making the best use of a large amount of land that was inherited	Two vacation houses with a pool*	National parks, favourable climate, year-round potential	Lack of additional events/activities
6	Close proximity to Plitvice Lakes National Park, unemployment	Bed and breakfast	Recognisability of the region, a high level of interest on the part of tourists	Lack of funds for improvement, lack of events/activities, weak institutional involvement

*This answer relates to future plans

There were significant differences in farm size. Two farms could be characterised as small (2 ha and 5 ha), two were somewhat larger (roughly 10 ha), and the remaining two were much larger (~25 and 30 ha). Potatoes, grains (barley, oats), garden vegetables and fruits were the dominant crops, and in terms of livestock, there were sheep, cows, horses, pigs, chickens, and bees, pointing to the relatively high level of diverse agricultural production on these farms. None of the farms used an intermediary or similar service to bring their products to the market, rather they sold their products directly to visitors or interested customers.

Regarding the type of tourism or hospitality services offered among the farms, accommodation services dominated, and there were also hospitality services (in the form of restaurants offering homemade, autochthonous products from the farm itself or other nearby farms). All interviewees emphasised the importance of the Internet as the most effective means of marketing and promoting their farms; word of mouth was also mentioned as an important factor in attracting new visitors. Printed materials (brochures, flyers, etc.) were regarded as the least effective means of promotion.

The third group of questions was related to the perceived successfullness and the issue of 'is it worth it?' All farm owners stated that engaging in farm tourism was worth undertaking in the area of Lika, and further confirmed that they found it rewarding on a personal level. All interviewees felt that potential for farm tourism in Lika was far greater than the currently-available tourism supply, citing region's favourable geographical position, where the existing motorway continues to improve the connections of Lika with the rest of Croatia and Europe. Furthermore, they listed natural amenities, "ideal surroundings", and year-round tourism supply. Some of the farm owners mentioned that rural tourism in general has experienced double-digit growth in recent years, and people who live in urban areas are showing increasing interest in visiting this type of farm. Income and lack of competition in the region were mentioned as basic advantages of engaging in tourist activities.

The main disadvantages and limitations for farm tourism development in Lika listed by the farm owners were demographic characteristics (depopulation, the prevalence of older population), shortage of workers, and a lack of interest on the part of local youth. Lack of diversity in the tourism supply and creative forms of tourism that would keep tourists in the area longer were found to be limiting factors as well. Poor transport links to the motorway and poor signs (which makes it harder for tourists to navigate the region) were also listed, as was the insufficiently developed infrastructure. Among the largest obstacles and problems encountered by farm owners were those related to disorganised bureaucracy and prescribed norms that are difficult to fulfil. Moreover, they mentioned high taxes, but also lack of funding to improve their properties. However, despite the aforementioned problems, all interviewees agreed that farm owners themselves should be more proactive in developing this sort of tourism in Lika, while tourist boards should engage in promotion and support.

The last group of questions was related to cooperation and plans for the future. The answers varied. Majority of farm owners stated that they cooperated with other, similar farms and emphasised how this is essential for success and the creation of a positive work environment. This cooperation most often took the form of exchanges of information or surplus products, and cooperative labour. Regarding whether they cooperated with organisations or institutions that encourage development of this sort of tourism, and whether they were active members of any association of farms owners, four out of six interviewees responded in the negative. The specified reasons for this were that either there were no such organisations in the area, or the existing ones were not seen as effective. Two interviewees were members of one or more organisations, where one of these interviewees emphasised the importance of horizontal and vertical integration on the regional (and national) level in order to achieve better cooperation and information flow. Regarding the use of available funding, four of six interviewees stated that they had received funding from national sources, EU funds, or a bank loan with 2% incentive. Said funding was often essential to developing certain type of activities in a given timeframe, or served as an incentive to also invest their own funds into starting their businesses.

Only one farm owner did not plan to expand their offer nor implement new projects in the near future, while other interviewees stated that they had such plans and intended to obtain financial incentives. They

indicated that institutions should offer more help to those trying to realise ideas and find project financing, explaining that the average farmer lacks the time and qualifications to do this on their own.

5.2 The views of institutional actors regarding farm tourism development

The views of representatives of the administrative bodies in Lika were explored in relation to several aspects: overall future economic development of the region, development of tourism and agriculture, and specifically farm tourism. The interviewees' answers regarding their vision of future economic development were similar, emphasising the importance of holding to the principles of sustainable development. The economic activities, which they selected as fundamental for further development were: organic agriculture; sustainable tourism; and industrial production associated with processing of agricultural products such as meat, dairy, and fruit. This sort of economic development was, according to the interviewees, in keeping with existing strategies, however, those strategies were perceived as largely written pro forma and barely implemented. Thereby, very few stated goals have been realised because they were not well elaborated, and plans for the future are often not realistically achievable in their given timeframes.

In listing main advantages for the development of tourism in Lika, the interviewees principally focused on region's (natural-)geographic features (natural beauty, geographical diversity, the large number of protected areas, the existence of continental and seaside part whose supply could be well combined); the favourable position in terms of transport connections; cultural-historical heritage; and characteristics stemming from underdevelopment (lack of pollution). The interviewees saw potential for the development of a large number of selective types of tourism (e.g., rural, adventure, active, winter, hunting, and fishing). In contrast, among the main circumstances limiting the development of tourism in Lika, the interviewees stated those related to general development issues and marginality, such as the poor demographic situation, depopulation, the lack of workers, and the small number of economic subjects. The infrastructure was emphasised as inadequate throughout the region and of unsatisfactory quality for tourism activities, including poorly regulated wastewater treatment and insufficient supply of electrical energy. Another problem as perceived by the interviewees was the local mentality, mainly among older residents who were often not aware of the opportunities offered by tourism development. The interviewees also referred to frequent changes in laws as a limiting factor stemming from the state level.

The interviewees agreed that, with the exception of Plitvice Lakes, the potential for tourism development in Lika is widely underused. They thought that tourism in the area of Plitvice Lakes could spur stronger development of tourism in the entire region, but pointed to its overly mass character, which, in their opinion, is not good for Lika. According to a municipality representative, 'the current state of tourism in Lika is pretty bad. Over a million tourists pass through the area each year, but we are still the least developed region in [Croatia]. The reason for this is apartmentisation without complementary activities. More apartments, rooms, and hotels are appearing, but without additional activities and supply. What's more is that this sort of tourism is developing most in the riskiest areas.' Representatives from a protected area stated the lack of regular local bus lines and local tourist agencies as an important problem that prevented tourists without their own means of transport from easily visiting other parts of the region. The problem of insufficient cooperation (most often both inconsistent and unequally dispersed) was indicated by interviewees in relation to tourism in general. The interviewees called for diversification of the tourism supply and extending the season throughout the year, as well as a coordinated marketing strategy at the county level.

The state of agriculture was largely described as unfavourable, characterised by production for the needs of the farm, with a predominance of older farmers who were not in a position to follow the contemporary trends and demands of the market. Furthermore, it was stated that a large part of the population, especially youth, was not interested in practicing agriculture. Conversely, the interviewees still felt there was an increasing number of people in Lika who were (again) starting to see agriculture as an opportunity for building a life (as a primary or secondary activity), although there are the glaring problems of getting goods to the market, low prices, and the lack of available workforce. The interviewees saw the most

potential in animal husbandry, followed by beekeeping, cultivation of fruit and vegetables (e.g., potatoes, plums, cabbage), and fish farming in rivers (trout). Possible contributing factors to development of agriculture were found in the start of a cooperative, plans to open an agricultural incubator for production and processing of fruit and honey, and a number of seminars and workshops available for farmers. The interviewees also had high hopes for the process of regional branding, which was brought to fruition at the time of writing.

The fourth group of questions concerned farm tourism specifically. All of the interviewees also stressed that Lika had great potential for the development of this sort of tourism and that the combination of tourism and agriculture should become a key development factor. Moreover, the interviewees felt that tourists arriving in Lika were increasingly interested in farm tourism, in keeping with the generally growing demand for local/authentic and autochthonous products in tourism. The general opinion was that introducing supplementary tourism and/or hospitality- related economic activities in farms would help strengthen them and revive agriculture by widening the market, but without giving everything over to renting out weekend houses. 'We definitely would not want Lika to be reduced to weekend tourism, because that means that there is no life in this rural area. Our goal is to retain families.' said the LAG representative. Farm tourism could, according to the interviewees, help reduce depopulation and keep youth in the area. A regional self-government representative emphasised that the problem of depopulation is too serious for the County to solve on its own and, as it is a problem throughout the country, continual measures should be enacted on the state level. The convoluted bureaucracy that demands the collection of a great deal of documentation and the satisfaction of numerous regulations, rules, and laws was, according to the interviewees, an important obstacle in developing farm tourism product. This was made more difficult by the age and educational composition of the population. Overall, it was stated that more institutional support for farm owners would result in them feeling more secure and becoming involved in certain projects more easily. The representatives of administrative bodies were also of the opinion that the farms owners should be better networked and cooperate amongst themselves, even coordinate in terms of agricultural production.

6. Discussion and conclusion

It is clear that farm tourism in Lika is still developed at a low level. Family farms are generally characterised by small numbers of active members, high average age and fairly low education level among registered holders, and relatively small farm size. Thereby, as stated by Cigale et al. (2013) for the case of Slovenia, the specific agrarian structure plays an important role in the development, distribution, and orientation of farm tourism. Although the actual number of tourist farms is larger than the official count of six, it is still miniscule in relation to the total number of family farms in the area. The type of tourism supply regularly goes beyond that which would be linked just to farming practices or the lifestyle of the farm (See: Streifeneder, 2016), e.g., adrenaline parks and houses with pools.

Regarding the reason why the interviewed farms became involved in tourism, apart from personal reasons, the owners mentioned a desire to use land that had been neglected, financial reasons, values like living in contact with nature, and locational reasons. The aforementioned reasons were similar to those reported in previous research, such as the possibility to attain a higher income (which is of particular importance for peripheral areas), the usage of available agricultural products, redundant buildings, challenges and innovation brought by farm tourism, the desire to work from home, or the farm's location in a touristic destination (Sharpley and Vass, 2005; Potočnik Slavič, 2014; Streifeneder, 2016).

In spite of the fact that there are very few farms in Lika with the characteristics that correspond to this concept (so much so that apart from income, the lack of competition in the region was stressed by the farm owners as one of the basic advantages of engaging in tourist activities), the interviewed actors saw great potential for the development of farm tourism in the region and held hopes that the combination of tourism and agriculture could become a key development factor. With the perceived rising interest in rural and farm tourism and in local/authentic and autochthonous products, the interviewees were of the opinion that introducing supplementary tourism/hospitality-related economic activities in farms would help strengthen them and revive agriculture by widening the market.

The list of features thought to be the main strengths for the development of tourism in Lika starts with natural amenities. In a similar line, Bušljeta Tonković (2015) argued that the modernisation processes, which bypassed Lika rather than changed it, left the environment and natural resources preserved. As a result, some of the factors attached to peripheries became positive contributors to their emergence as tourist destinations (Botterill et al., 2000). Nonetheless, interviewees regarded general development issues, depopulation, and the associated unfavourable demographic structure, i.e., underdevelopment often deemed inherent to peripherality (Wanhill, 1997; Hall and Boyd, 2005; Kubeš and Chvojková, 2020), as probably the greatest disadvantage and limiting factor. An interviewee stating that Lika is 'the least developed region' in Croatia indicates an individual perception of living in a region that is disadvantaged in comparison to other regions (See: Steinführer et al., 2016). With regard to location and (geometric or temporal) remoteness as features of peripherality (Kubeš and Chvojková, 2020), Lika's geographical position and important routes that pass through it were seen as strong points in terms of tourism development. Transport connections *within* the region itself were seen as lacking, as was the general level of infrastructure development.

The structural disadvantages of rural peripheries are also seen as intertwined with political and financial dependency on decisions in the urban centres of power (Steinführer et al., 2016). The interviewees called for several concerns to be tackled primarily on the state level, going from demographic policies to numerous rules and regulations for engaging in farm tourism in need of restructuring. Generally, more institutional support was seen as necessary for farm owners to develop their tourism products (See: Sharpley and Vass, 2005). Nevertheless, the importance of farm owners' own engagement was stressed as well (See: Talbot, 2013; Košak and Lugomer, 2015). Furthermore, the same concerns were raised elsewhere in Croatia. In the course of their research of Littoral Croatia, Košak and Lugomer (2015) found that a higher level of engagement of administrative bodies and legislation improvement was called for in order to increase the positive effects of agritourism development, along with reducing paperwork that 'hampers entrepreneurship' (p. 159).

Cooperation among stakeholders in Lika was raised as a far-reaching issue in (farm) tourism development, similar with the overall trends towards more participatory and community-led initiatives in rural development (Stoddart et al., 2018) and calls for cooperation among institutions, tourist farms, and other entrepreneurs in rural tourism – i.e., networking of stakeholders on various levels (Potočnik Slavič and Schmitz, 2013; Demonja, 2014; Marušić, 2017). A need to create and implement a cohesive marketing strategy at the regional level was linked to this (Sharpley and Vass, 2005).

An interesting example of a development project based on cooperation among stakeholders is "INTEGRA LIKA 2020", being undertaken by LAG LIKA with the goal of accelerating the economic development and making the area more internationally recognisable (LAG LIKA, 2018). Subprojects included "Stay 3 days in Lika" and "Stay 7 days in Lika", aimed to motivate tourists to extend their stay in the region via variations of multiple-day outings and activities. A regional quality system for food, drinks and souvenirs was developed under the name "Lika Quality", led by Cluster Lika Destination (Lika destination, n.d.). These projects could be observed considering the discursive production of peripheries, as outlined earlier. The way that a place is discussed can affect its presentation as a place worthy of investment, thereby motivating people to action (Willett and Lang, 2018).

In terms of the tourism sector, possible effects of regional branding and more integrated development could involve "channeling" tourists towards tourist attractions in the region other than Plitvice Lakes and the coast, encouraging farm tourism development in Lika's interior. The institutional actors also agreed that the development of farm tourism could motivate tourists to remain in the area longer if tourism products were diversified (See: Košak and Lugomer, 2015). The aforementioned views match previous research in stressing the relevance of integrated tourism supply encompassing different types of tourism for the economic sustainability of tourism (Bartoluci et al., 2015) and of complementary development of local/regional/national tourist infrastructure, supply and promotion (Potočnik-Slavič and Schmitz, 2013). The interviewed actors, however, also warned about the overly mass character of tourism in the Plitvice Lakes area. Likewise, Bušljeta Tonković (2019) raised the question of whether overtourism of certain rural

areas actually can be used as a background for sustainable and alternative tourism development in other (rural) destinations.

The general expectations from farm and rural tourism development contributing to overall regional development in a peripheral setting can be very high (See: Potočnik Slavič, 2014), and if not met can lead 'not only to disappointment but to disillusionment' (Hall et al., 2003, 5) accelerating economic decline and out-migration. Thereby, Salvatore et al. (2018) found effectiveness of different policies to be contingent upon peripheries' ability to pose themselves as agents of their own change, i.e., seizing development opportunities presented by tourist flows more independently and favouring the re-activation of local resources in innovative ways.

Our research shows that, in a setting with very few family farms that have developed a farm tourism product, regional actors in Lika see both potential and limitations for farm tourism development in characteristics linked to peripherality (such as natural amenities vs. demographic issues) and general development trends, combined with local specificities (such as interest on the part of tourists for local and autochtonous products contrasted with the lack of family farms prepared to engage in farm tourism). Regional actors call for institutional support on different levels, and stress the importance of local initiative, cooperation, and regional branding. Limitations of the study stem from a small sample size of tourist farms, and further research could encompass a larger sample of family farms that are engaged in different types of activities in tourism. Further research should also address long-term effectiveness of regional branding. Additionally, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic should be examined, not only on tourism development trends but the changes in the discourse on Lika as a periphery.

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