

# New security paradigm and valorisation of a tourist

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**NEW SECURITY  
PARADIGM AND  
VALORISATION OF A  
TOURIST DESTINATION**

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**Romina Alkier**  
Editor

**University of Rijeka**  
**Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management**

**Opatija**  
**2023.**

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Scientific Project

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# NEW SECURITY PARADIGM AND VALORISATION OF A TOURIST DESTINATION



Editor-in-Cief

**Romina Alkier, PhD., Full Professor**

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality  
Management

**Opatija, 2023.**

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## EDITORIAL

In the last two decades, safety in tourism has become a key factor that tourists take into account when choosing a holiday destination, and thus has become a prerequisite for the successful development of the destination's tourist offer. Frequent terrorist attacks, local wars, epidemics and pandemics happen every day, and the tourism industry is finding it increasingly difficult to cope with these negative implications and consequences. Consequently, numerous destinations have become vulnerable. In order to ensure the successful development of their tourist offer, and thus their survival on the tourist market, destinations must focus on providing maximum security to tourists, the local population, and tourism employees. The goal of the research project "New security paradigm and tourism destination valorization" is to investigate security paradigms and the tourist destination valorization model from the theoretical and empirical point of view. For the purpose of researching security paradigms including practices in the tourist destination of Opatija Riviera, research is focused on examining the perception of tourists, as well as managers and tourism employees in the entire tourist chain of employees on the importance and level of security and investments in different security components, and the impact on the destination itself.

The main objectives of the project refer to research of security paradigms and the model of valorisation of a tourist destination, and examination of tourist's attitudes about safety in the destination, examination of the perception of decision makers in destinations, managers and tourism employees in the tourism sector and experts in charge of security issues in the tourist destination of Opatija Riviera.

Research related to security paradigms highlights primarily the problem of security assessment, primarily due to its multidimensionality and lack of a generic form. The first step of the research represents the understanding of different components that make security paradigms, in order to more easily define the mechanisms for their impact on the valorisation of a tourist destination, which is even more complex.

In this scientific publication, we present the scientific papers of team members conducted as part of the scientific research project initiative of the University of Rijeka (ZIP UNIRI) under the title "New security paradigm and valorisation of a tourist destination" (project code ZIP-UNIRI\_116-3-21). All research (scientific papers) of the authors on the project have already been published in scientific publications.



We wish to make the research results available to all university members and experts, in order to get some "feedback" in comments and new ideas, which could eventually lead to further research in the future based on our results.

The project was financed by the University of Rijeka. The institution in charge was Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka.

The members of the project team which actively took part were: *Siniša Tatalović*, PhD., Full Professor with Tenure, *Jasmina Okičić*, PhD., Full Professor, *Vladimir Prebilić*, PhD., Associate Professor, *Suzana Bareša*, PhD., Associate Professor, and *Vedran Milojica*, MA., PhD Student. The leader of this project was *Romina Alkier*, PhD., Full Professor.

I would like to thank all fellow team members from Croatia and abroad for their significant contribution to the project and this publication. Many thanks to our reviewers *Daniela Gračan*, PhD., Full Professor with tenure and *Đorđe Mitrović*, PhD., Full Professor.

At last, we would like to thank the Dean of the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, *Sandra Janković*, PhD., Full Professor with tenure for all the support, as well as the University of Rijeka.

Thanks to all those who are not mentioned by name for this list should be very long, who were always willing to help and support all project's activities.

**Romina Alkier, PhD., Full Professor**  
Editor-in-Chief

## RAZVOJ KONCEPTUALNOG MODELA ZA SIGURNOST TURISTIČKE DESTINACIJE NAKON PANDEMIJE COVID-19

**Romina Alkier**  
**Jasmina Okičić**  
**Vedran Milojica**

### **Sažetak**

Pandemija uzrokovana virusom COVID-19 je ostavila značajne implikacije, kako na svjetski turizam, tako i na cjelokupno svjetsko gospodarstvo. Potvrđena osjetljivost turizma na ovakve izvanredne situacije, kao i promjene stavova turista prema poduzimanju turističkih putovanja i boravka u turističkim destinacijama ukazuje na važnu činjenicu kako je nužno i potrebno pratiti kako isti percipiraju sigurnost u destinacijama s obzirom da danas ista predstavlja ključan faktor ostvarenja konkurentskih prednosti destinacije na turističkom tržištu. Autori su u ovom radu koristili epistemološki pristup sa ciljem razvoja konceptualnog modela za sigurnost turističke destinacije u post-kovid periodu. Izradom konceptualnog modela predložen je teorijski razvojni okvir koji potiče promatranje relevantnih konstrukata u sigurnosti turističke destinacije.

**Ključne riječi:** percipirana sigurnost turista u destinaciji, turistička destinacija, COVID -19.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE SAFETY OF A TOURIST DESTINATION AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **Abstract**

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has left significant implications, both on world tourism and on the world economy in total. Confirmed sensitivity of tourism to such emergencies, as well as changes in attitudes of tourists towards undertaking tourist trips and stays in tourist destinations points to the important fact that it is necessary to monitor how they perceive safety in destinations, taking into consideration the fact that today safety is the key factor of achieving competitiveness in the tourism market. In this paper, the authors used an epistemological approach with the aim of developing a conceptual model for the safety of a tourist destination in the post-Covid period. By

developing a conceptual model, a theoretical development framework was proposed that encourages the observation of relevant constructs in the safety of a tourist destination.

**Keywords:** perceived safety of tourists in the destination, tourist destination, COVID -19.

## UVOD

Svjetski turizam je do kraja 2019. godine bilježio snažan rastući trend. Indikatori Svjetske turističke organizacije pokazuju da je na svjetskoj razini zabilježeno visokih 1,460 milijuna međunarodnih turističkih dolazaka, kao i 1.481 milijuna američkih dolara prihoda od turizma, odnosno rast od 3% u odnosu na prethodnu godinu. 2019. godine je registrirana deseta uzastopna godina stopa rasta turističkog prometa. (UNWTO, 2021a.; UNWTO, 2021b.; citirano iz Wilks et al., 2021., 1). Svjetska zdravstvena organizacija (WHO, 2020.) je 31. prosinca 2019. godine objavila da su zabilježeni slučajevi pneumonije u gradu Wuhanu, provincija Hubei u Kini. Uzrok ovih oboljenja u tom trenutku nije bio poznat. U nadolazećem periodu broj oboljelih ljudi je nastavio rasti rapidno, i uskoro se razvila pandemija svjetskih razmjera (obrada autora prema Alkier, 2021). Do ožujka 2020. godine velika većina zemalja u svijetu je bila prisiljena zatvoriti svoje granične prijelaze kako bi se ograničilo širenje virusa COVID-19, što je rezultiralo kolapsom svjetske turističke industrije (UNWTO, 2021b., 1; citirano iz Wilks et al., 2021., 1). Nastanak ove krize predstavlja još jedan od primjera koji je potvrdio izuzetnu osjetljivost turizma na stimulacije iz okoline. Praktična iskustva su pokazala kako formulacija negativnog publiciteta zdravstvene sigurnosti u turističkim destinacijama može rezultirati, i rezultirala je, sa smanjenjem turističkog prometa (turistički dolasci, noćenja i potrošnja). Vrlo često prisutnost i najmanjeg rizika, a pogotovo kada govorimo o sigurnosti ljudi, može biti presudna da turisti odluče ne posjetiti određenu turističku destinaciju, odnosno, da se odluče za alternativnu destinaciju. Ono što je također veoma interesantno za istaknuti je činjenica da su turisti pokazali izuzetno velik interes za ponovno sudjelovanje u turističkim tokovima odmah po popuštanju epidemioloških mjera. Razvoj prethodno spomenute pandemije rezultirao je nastankom promjena u ponašanju ljudi na način da se veća pozornost počela polagati na distancu i smanjenje kontakta među ljudima na najmanju moguću mjeru. Ovakve promjene su značajno utjecale i na promjene turista što pred sve dionike u turističkoj destinaciji stavlja značajne nove izazove (Alkier et al., 2021.). Danas turisti posvećuju značajnu pozornost sigurnosti kao i rizicima na putovanjima. Kada govorimo o percepciji turističkih rizika, pod time podrazumijevamo kvantitativnu procjenu sigurnosti turizma. Sama percepcija rizika od strane turista izravno utječe na njihove kupovne namjere u smislu donošenja odluke da li će odabrati određenu destinaciju za svoj odmor. Asimetrija objektivnog postojanja informacija o sigurnosti turista i subjektivne percepcije turista uvjetuju da su turisti izrazito osjetljivi na rizike putovanja. (Cui et al., 2016.). Prethodno navedeno je ukazalo na važnu činjenicu kako su brojne svjetske destinacije suočene sa značajnim naporima kako unaprijediti vlastitu sigurnost, te osigurati da ih turisti percipiraju kao sigurne, pouzdane i samim time vrijedne posjete. Svrha ovog rada je, uporabom najsvremenije znanstvene i stručne literature ukazati na nužnost planiranja i praćenja kako turisti percipiraju sigurnost turističke destinacije u post-kovid periodu. Rad je strukturiran na slijedeći način: nakon uvodnog dijela, autori će u drugom poglavlju pod nazivom Pregled

literature dati prikaz najrelevantnijih i najnovijih znanstvenih saznanja iz područja sigurnosti u turizmu u post-kovid periodu. Nastavno na isto, u trećem poglavlju pod nazivom Teorijska podloga i razvoj modela autori će uz popratni tekst prikazati prijedlog konceptualnog modela koji sadrži dimenzije koje će se promatrati u istraživanju koje provode autori ovoga rada u sklopu znanstvenoistraživačkog projekta. Na kraju će se, u sklopu zaključka, prikazati cjelokupna sinteza ovoga rada.

## **PREGLED LITERATURE**

Svakodnevne promjene s vremenom nose sa sobom nove i raznorazne sigurnosne izazove i prijetnje kao što su regionalna nestabilnost, globalni terorizam, transnacionalne prijetnje, organizirani kriminal, ilegalne migracije, oružje za masovno uništenje i brojni drugi slični izazovi sa kojima se susreću brojne zemlje u svijetu. Kao primjer se mogu uzeti teroristički napad u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama, ali i napadi u Madridu i Londonu, su kao posljedicu imali manju spremnost ljudi na putovanja, promjenu stavova prema obrambenim i sigurnosnim savezima, te promjenu stavova prema mirovnim operacijama i žrtvama tih operacija. Evidentno je da je sigurnosna djelatnost na današnjem stupnju društvenog razvoja doživjela niz promjena, kao i sigurnosno organiziranje civilnog društva (Matika i Gugić, 2007., 7). U posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća dogodile su se brojne vrste ugroza poput terorističkih napada, lokalnih ratova, prirodnih katastrofa, epidemija i pandemija, itd. što je ostavilo značajne implikacije na svjetski turizam koji je pokazao svoju ranjivu stranu na regionalnoj i globalnoj razini. Posljedično, sigurnost je dobila značajno na važnosti i postala je jedan od nezaobilaznih preduvjeta uspješnog razvoja i ostvarenja uspjeha turističke destinacije na turističkom tržištu (Kövári i Zimányi, 2011.). Alkier et al. (2016.) ističu u svom radu kako sigurnost i sam osjećaj sigurnosti predstavljaju važnu komponentu odabira destinacije za odmor, ali također i kvalitete života domicilnog stanovništva i boravka turista u destinaciji. Sa ciljem daljnjeg rasta i razvoja, potrebno je u suradnji sa svim dionicima turističke destinacije osigurati maksimalnu razinu sigurnosti kako za turiste tako i za domicilno stanovništvo, te kontinuirano poticati zajednički suživot turista i domicilnog stanovništva temeljen na međusobnom poštovanju i uvažavanju, što će u konačnici svakako doprinijeti tome da „vanjski promatrači“ (pri kojima podrazumijevamo potencijalne turiste koji još nisu boravili u destinaciji) da istu percipiraju kao sigurnu i samim time poželjnu za provođenje svog (godišnjeg) odmora.

Sigurnost općenito, a i kao element turističke ponude destinacije je postala predmetom brojnih znanstvenih i stručnih istraživanja te se proučava sa raznih aspekata, a pogotovo u posljednje dvije godine sa početkom pandemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19 značajna pozornost se posvetila proučavanju kako turisti percipiraju sigurnost turističke destinacije. George (2003.) ističe u svom istraživanju kako percepcija sigurnosti turističke destinacije ima izuzetan značaj na to kako turisti percipiraju njezin imidž, kao i na njezin utjecaj na donošenje odluke o putovanju i ponašanju turista u smislu formiranja negativnih dojmova, te mogućnosti da u budućnosti ne budu zainteresirani ponovno posjetiti destinaciju i preporučiti je obitelji, prijateljima i poznicima ukoliko se prilikom boravka ne osjećaju sigurno ili ukoliko se čak osjećaju zbog nekog razloga ugroženi. Ding i Wu (2022.) su u svom istraživanju posvetili pozornost

multidimenzionalnom utjecaju percepcije sigurnosti u turizmu na imidž turističke destinacije. Utvrdili su kako percepcija turističke značajno utječe na kognitivni, afektivni i konativni imidž turističke destinacije. Također su utvrdili da turisti koji imaju visoku percepciju turističke destinacije kao sigurne će pozitivnije ocjenjivati (višom razinom zadovoljstva) i afektivno doživjeti atribute turističke destinacije, te posljedično time će biti skloniji ponovno posjetiti je i preporučiti prijateljima i rodbini. Altınay Özdemir i Yıldız (2020.) su u svojoj studiji analizirali utjecaj izbijanja epidemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19 na namjere turista da odlaze na turistička putovanja. Istraživanje je provedeno u travnju 2020. godine u Turskoj. Nalazi njihovog istraživanja su pokazali negativan ekonomski i psihološki utjecaj pandemije na turiste u smislu da je došlo do promjena u perspektivi turističkih putovanja zbog nastanka značajnog osjećaja straha, brige, opasnosti, nelagode i nesigurnosti, itd. što je jednim dijelom rezultiralo na gubitak povjerenja turista prema pružateljima turističkih usluga. Nalazi su dalje ukazali na perspektivu budućeg rasta interesa turista za turističkom ponudom u prirodi u post-kovid periodu u slučaju daljnjeg razvoja pandemije. Također je utvrđeno da će potencijalni turisti zbog financijskih i vremenskih ograničenja biti skloni otkazati svoje godišnje odmori u 2020. godini. Autori Dramićanin i Perić (2021.) su u svom radu obratili pozornost ka utvrđivanju razlike u percepciji rizika turista u Republici Srbiji u periodu pandemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19 u odnosu na namjeru putovanja i turističku destinaciju. Autori su analizirali razliku među slijedećim rizicima: rizik putovanja, rizik destinacije, zdravstveni rizik i financijski rizik. Testiranje razlika je u odnosu na namjeru poduzimanja putovanja i turističku destinacije tijekom pandemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19 prema percepciji rizika provedeno uporabom jednosmjerne MANOVE pri čemu su bila korištena dva modela. Rezultati za prvi model su pokazali značajan utjecaj namjere putovanja turista na linearnu kombinaciju čimbenika rizika. Uzevši u obzir sva četiri faktora rizika, autori su utvrdili prisutnost značajnih razlika između turista koji namjeravaju putovati tijekom pandemije i onih koji nemaju namjeru putovati. Rezultati za drugi model su ukazali na značajan utjecaj turističke destinacije na linearnu kombinaciju čimbenika rizika, kao i prisutnost značajnih razlika među ispitanicima koji namjeravaju putovati tijekom pandemije COVID-19 u zemlji i ispitanicima koji namjeravaju putovati u inozemstvo prema percepciji zdravstvenog rizika, rizika destinacije i rizika putovanja. Turnšek et al. (2020.) su provedbom svog istraživanja omogućili uvid u percepciju slovenskih turista u ranom periodu izolacije koja je bila povezana nastankom pandemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19. Online anketa je bila provedena u ožujku i travnju 2020. godine, pri čemu je dobiven prvi uvid u percepciju prijetnje od pandemije u dimenzijama ozbiljnost i podložnost, pri čemu je promatrana ovisnost o demografiji i prijašnjim iskustvima sa putovanja, trenutni stavovi kao i stavovi o budućim izbjegavanjima putovanja. Rezultati istraživanja su ukazali na utjecaj dobi na dvije prethodno spomenute mjerne dimenzije percipirane prijetnje kao i buduće izbjegavanje poduzimanja putovanja. Ovo je međutim utvrđeno samo kod ženskih ispitanika. Također je utvrđeno da oni turisti koji su u prošlosti često putovali su pokazali najmanju vjerojatnost da će u budućnosti izbjegavati putovanja zbog nastanka pandemije. Turisti sa višom razinom obrazovanja su se pokazali kao oni koji percipiraju veći rizik, međutim razina obrazovanja se pokazalo da nema nikakvu poveznicu sa njihovim budućim izbjegavanjima odlaska na putovanja. Rezultati jasno ukazuju kako se može očekivati kako će turisti u budućnosti biti osjetljivi na faktore koji imaju utjecaj

na donošenje budućih odluka o odlasku na turistička putovanja poput primjerice zdravstvene sigurnosti prilikom boravka u turističkoj destinaciji.

Prethodno prikazani znanstveni nalazi ukazuju kako je izuzetno važno pratiti stavove turista u kojoj mjeri oni percipiraju turističku destinaciju kao sigurnu, s obzirom da ista ima značajan doprinos u procesu donošenja odluke o poduzimanju turističkih putovanja, odabira destinacije za odmor, te lojalnosti turista destinaciji.

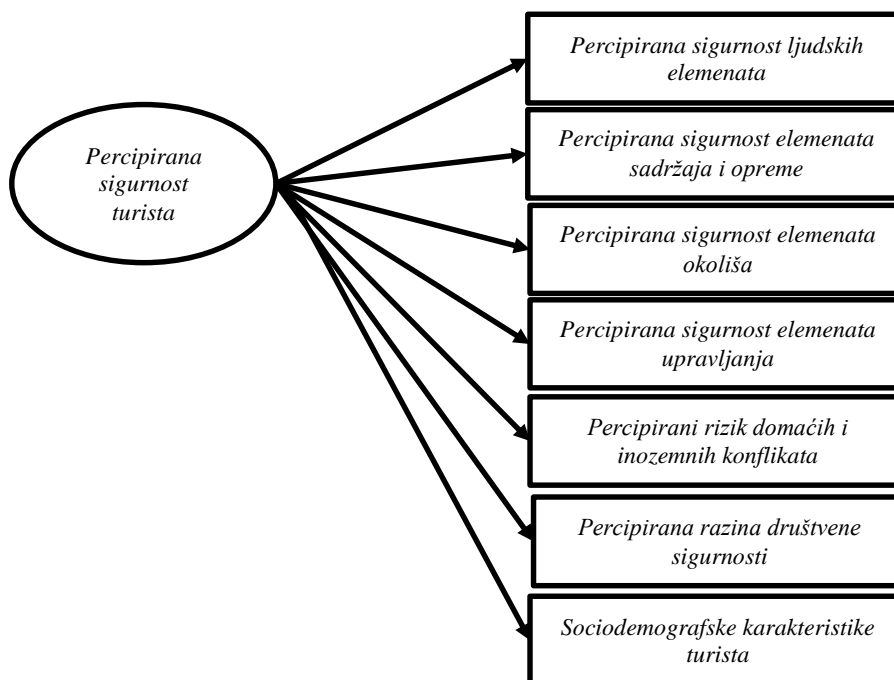
## TEORIJSKA PODLOGA I RAZVOJ MODELA

Xie et al. (2020.) definiraju percipiranu sigurnost turista kao višedimenzionalni konstrukt koji se sastoji od *percipirane sigurnosti ljudskih elemenata* (eng. *perceived safety of human elements-PSH*), a koji se odnosi na procjene sigurnosti i percepcije ponašanja pojedinca u turističkom okruženju; *percipirana sigurnost elemenata sadržaja i opreme* (eng. *perceived safety of facility and equipment elements-PSFE*), koja se odnosi na sigurnosne procjene i percepcije stanja sadržaja i opreme u turističkoj destinaciji; *percipirana sigurnost elemenata okoliša* (eng. *perceived safety of environmental elements-PSE*) koja se odnosi na procjenu sigurnosti i percepcije elemenata okoliša destinacije, i *percipirana sigurnost elemenata upravljanja* (eng. *perceived safety of management elements-PSM*) koja se odnosi na sigurnosne procjene i percepcije politika i aktivnosti upravljanja sigurnošću u turizmu i povezanim aspektima na organizacijske ili menadžerske razine.

Kako bi razvili sveobuhvatniji model percipirane sigurnosti turista, autori tvrde da pored prethodno identificiranih dimenzija koje su predložili Xie et al. (2020.), također je potrebno uzeti u obzir određene pojedinačne, primjerice sociodemografske karakteristike (npr. dob, spol, obrazovanje itd.). To je nešto što su već prepoznali Liu et al. (2016.). Nadalje, autori tvrde da model treba sadržavati dvije važne dimenzije koje su već uključene u Globalni indeks mira, npr. percipirani rizik od domaćih i međunarodnih sukoba i percipiranu razinu društvene sigurnosti. U kontekstu Globalnog indeksa mira, tekućih domaćih i međunarodnih sukoba, istražuje se u kojoj mjeri su zemlje uključene u unutarnje i vanjske sukobe, kao i njihovu ulogu i trajanje uključenosti u sukobe (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2021., 74). Posljednja predložena dimenzija, društvena sigurnost, koncept je razvijen u Norveškoj i definiran kao sposobnost društva da održava kritične društvene funkcije, štiti život i zdravlje građana i ispunjava osnovne zahtjeve građana u različitim stresnim situacijama (Olsen et al., 2007.). U kontekstu Globalnog indeksa mira, društvena sigurnost predstavlja razinu harmonije ili nesloge unutar nacije; gdje se tvrdi da se niska stopa kriminala, minimalna teroristička aktivnost i nasilne demonstracije, skladni odnosi sa susjednim zemljama, stabilna politička scena i mali dio stanovništva interno raseljenih ili prognanih mogu poistovjetiti s mirom (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2021., 74). Kao što su istaknuli Seabra i sur. (2013.), percipirana sigurnost turista je subjektivni dojam i procjena sigurnosnih informacija i aspekata na temelju prošlih iskustava ljudi. Zato će predloženi model uključivati percipiranu društvenu sigurnost turista i percipirani rizik od domaćih i međunarodnih sukoba. Te se mjere kasnije mogu usporediti s pokazateljima predstavljenim u Globalnom indeksu mira.

Ukratko, autori predlažu slijedeći model percipirane sigurnosti turista prikazan na shemi 1.

Shema 1. Konceptualni model



*Izvor: istraživanje autora*

## ZAKLJUČAK

Autori su u ovom radu uporabom najnovijih teorijskih znanstvenih saznanja predstavili važnost i nužnost mjerenja kako turisti percipiraju sigurnost turističke destinacije u periodu nakon pandemije uzrokovane virusom COVID-19. Brojna znanstvena i stručna istraživanja su potvrdila već poznatu činjenicu kako je svjetski turizam snažno pogođen pojavom krize uzrokovane virusom COVID-19, međutim, brzom i svjesnom reakcijom od strane vodećih svjetskih organizacija turizam je relativno brzo počeo bilježiti pozitivne pomake (vidjeti više u Alkier, 2021.; Alkier et al., 2021.; Alkier et al., 2021.). Usprkos pozitivnim pomacima, brojne destinacije su svjesne činjenice da, kako bi u budućnosti nastavile bilježiti pozitivne pomake, moraju, kako svojim turistima, tako i domicilnom stanovništvu ponuditi maksimalnu razinu sigurnosti koja predstavlja preduvjet razvoja i ponude konkurentne turističke ponude. Prethodno navedeno upravo i predstavlja razlog izrade ovog rada, u sklopu kojeg su autori pripremili i ponudili prethodno prikazani konceptualni model. Ovaj rad predstavlja prve rezultate istraživanja provedenog u sklopu znanstveno-istraživačke projektne inicijative Sveučilišta u Rijeci (ZIP UNIRI) pod nazivom „Nova sigurnosna paradigma i valorizacija turističke

destinacije“ financiranog od strane Sveučilišta u Rijeci. U nadolazećem periodu autori će daljnjom publikacijom znanstvenih i stručnih radova objelodaniti rezultate provedenih empirijskih istraživanja koja će dati jasan uvid u stanje kako turisti percipiraju sigurnost turističke destinacije, te ponuditi jasne razvojne smjernice unaprjeđenja.

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## FACTORS OF TOURISTS' PERCEIVED SAFETY IN THE POST COVID PERIOD: THE CASE OF OPATIJA RIVIERA

**Romina Alkier**  
**Jasmina Okičić**  
**Vedran Milojica**

### **Abstract**

*Purpose* – The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus left a significant negative mark on the world economy, and tourism industry. It has also significantly affected the perception and behavior of tourists when it comes to the safety of a tourist destination. To continue to record a positive recovery trend, destinations must undertake scientific and professional research, and based on the results consider and develop new development strategies for the development of tourism in the post-pandemic period. The perception of risk in tourists is changing, which ultimately has an impact on their future behavior when choosing a holiday destination. Opatija Riviera is a destination with a rich and long tourist tradition, which until before the pandemic was perceived as safe, as evidenced by the continuous growth of tourist turnover. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of monitoring whether and to what extent tourists perceive Opatija Riviera as a safe tourist destination and based on the findings to offer developmental guidelines for the post-pandemic period.

*Methodology* – Data collection was conducted during June and July 2022, using an online survey questionnaire. 152 respondents agreed to participate in research. The basic measurement instrument was based on the Tourists' Perceived Safety at Destinations (TPSD) scale developed by Xie et al. (2020b), i.e. initial items (25) proposed by these authors. To extract the dimensions of perceived tourist safety, the authors primarily used exploratory factor analysis.

*Findings* – by using the exploratory factor analysis the following factors were identified: perception of safety of human elements (PSH), safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE), safety of natural environments (PSNE), perceived safety of social environments (PSSE) and safety of management elements (PSM). The results for PSH, PSFE, PSNE and PSSE have proven to be satisfactory in terms of how tourists perceive them as safe and reliable, which is not the case with the PSM. The findings for PSM indicate the need for additional investments aimed towards improvement of protection of tourist's safety (safety of the construction, safety of information and visibility of warning sign about security in Opatija Riviera).

*Originality of the research* – this research contributes to the theory by presenting relevant literature content in safety perception in tourism. The empirical contribution derives from

the fact that no similar research was conducted on Opatija Riviera until now. Its findings set the basis for future empirical research that will be conducted in the post-COVID period in Opatija Riviera, based on which it will be possible to plan further developmental activities aimed towards improving tourist's safety during their stay.

**Key words:** perceived safety, post COVID-19 period, factor analysis, Opatija Riviera.

## INTRODUCTION

A significant attention has been paid to the safety in tourism in the last couple of decades, due to the nature of its services, respectively their intangibility and provision of experiences (Wang, 2014). Safety and security of a destination are the factors of extreme relevance which tourists take into consideration within their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination, and especially when thinking of visiting a destination that is somewhat or completely unknown to them. Tourism safety research is interconnected with the literature which investigates risks in tourism (Zou & Yu, 2022). Risks in tourism became particularly interesting for tourism researchers after the occurrence of the attack that occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> November of 2001 in the United States of America, outbreak of SARS, the bomb attack in Bali, Asian tsunami incidents, etc. Crises like these left a tremendous impact on tourism industry, which resulted in the increasing necessity of reviewing the back in the day existing literature which covered risks in tourism (Yang & Nair, 2014). This is confirmed by the most recent pandemic caused by COVID-19 virus which left tremendous mark on world economy, and tourism industry due to the lockdown. The impact reflected not just on business, but also on tourist's safety perceptions of destinations and traveling in general. Once again tourism showed extremely strong level of sensitivity in stimulations from its surroundings (Alkier, 2021; Çınar & Şener, 2021; Perić et al., 2021). After ending the lockdown and reopening the state borders, tourists continued to show significant interest in traveling. Despite their interest, they are still facing various dangers and risks during their travel to and staying in destinations, which is influencing their perception about destination's safety (Perić et al., 2021). As a tourist destination with a long and rich tourist tradition, Opatija Riviera (Cerović et al., 2014; Alkier et al. 2020; Alkier et al., 2019) was considered as safe in the pre-pandemic period, which is witnessed with a constant interest of tourists who choose to spend their holiday there. Tourists are constantly changing their attitudes about their risk perception in a destination, which is why it is necessary to monitor these changes through undertaking appropriate scientific and professional research. Based on these findings, tourism stakeholders will be able to detect in which direction to go, what to improve, and how to change disadvantages to advantages in terms of safety. In this paper the focus is placed on Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination, considering that the research results represent the results of a scientific project which investigates safety in tourism of Opatija Riviera. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of monitoring whether and to what extent tourists perceive the Opatija Riviera as a safe tourist destination and based on the findings to offer developmental guidelines for the post-pandemic period. Accordingly, the research questions are defined as follows: Do visitors perceive Opatija Riviera as a safe destination? What are the factors of tourists' perceived safety in the post COVID-19 period in case of Opatija Riviera?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTION DEVELOPMENT**

### **Safety and security in tourism destinations**

Security represents a concept which is connected not just with tourism, but with the functioning of the entire world. This does not only represent the result of the multiple safety incidents that occurred over the last few decades, but also the changes in world countries foreign policies, and wars that also resulted from it. Safety problems like these did not only affect the tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination, but also the socio-political confidence which further on influenced the wider environment in which tourism operates and is being developed, and in which tourist destinations are being perceived. Tourism is unavoidably connected with the safety concept because tourist's behaviour and tourist destinations are deeply affected by how safety is perceived, and how safety, security and risk are managed (Hall et al., 2004). In order to be able to deal with tourism safety problems appropriately, it is necessary to be able to adjust timely to various factors from the environment (i.e. terrorist attacks, crime, political instability, pandemics, etc.) to preserve the highest possible level of safety of a tourist destination and decrease the negative implications on tourists as much as possible (Pyo, 2003). Today safety and security represent a vital component which not only influences tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination; it also improves the life quality of domestic population and tourist's stay in a destination. To achieve success, destination stakeholders need to make efforts in enabling safe and appropriate surroundings for its visitors and stimulate the coexistence with the domestic population. Efforts of tourist officials need to be coordinated with the government officials, the media, non-governmental organizations, as well as with the interested groups of citizens (Alkier et al., 2016; UNWTO, 1996). All the undertaken efforts need to be accompanied by appropriate marketing activities, especially promotion, considering that this has a significant influence on a tourist's decision-making process. Also, it is necessary to monitor if tourists perceive their holiday destination as safe. The following sub-chapter will present in more details the relevance of measuring tourist's safety perception during their stay in a destination.

### **Perception of safety in tourist destinations**

Tourism safety perception includes all the subjective feelings and perceptions that tourists feel about the safety of a tourist destination, while being influenced by various external information as well as their own personal factors (Wang, 2012). Tourists can perceive destinations in a positive or a negative way (He et al., 2019). When measuring safety perception of tourist destinations, researchers tend to focus both on social environment of destinations, and on tourism elements and types of safety problems that tourists experience during their stay in a destination. Currently, focus is mostly placed on: 1) how tourists perceive overall safety of a destination, respectively they are asked to precisely state do they consider a particular destination to be safe or unsafe, or to state if the destination analysed is safer in relation to another destination, and 2) asking the respondents how they perceive destination safety when discussing particular hazards like terrorism,

natural disasters, problems concerning public health, provision of tourism services, etc. (Li et al., 2019; George, 2010; Yang and Xie, 2019; Chen et al., 2009; Wang and Zheng, 2015; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Xie et al., 2020b; Zou, 2015; Ding & Wu, 2022; Ma et al., 2020; Scholarly Community Encyclopedia, n.d.). Due to the sensitivity of tourism industry, safety in tourism, and especially safety perception became the focus of numerous researches, considering that every safety incident that occurs in a tourist destination result in changes how tourists perceive the safety of a destination, which ultimately influences their travel decisions (choosing a certain holiday destination, or revisiting it in the future). If sensing a feeling of unsafety, tourists may end up cancelling a booked trip, avoid affected destinations completely, or if they are already staying in the affected destination, they may decide to move to a safer place or completely evacuate and return home (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Mair et al. 2016). Determining tourism safety perception became a necessity of a tourist destination success; to achieve and maintain a competitive position on the tourist market, a continuous quantitative assessment of safety of a destination must be conducted, and improvements introduced in accordance with the findings (Cui et al., 2016). Safety perception in a destination was observed from various angles prior the pandemic development, i.e. perception of destination safety (Xie et al., 2020b; Chan, 2021), observing the influence of risk perception on tourist's buying behaviour with a particular attention on decision when choosing a holiday destination (Karl & Schmude, 2017; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Henthorne et al., 2013), future revisiting intention (Hasan et al., 2017), the influence of perceived tourism safety on formation of a destination image (Fang et al., 2020; Ding & Wu, 2022; Perpiña et al., 2017). After the WHO (2020) declared a pandemic on world level, researchers focused their research on topics connected with COVID-19.

When observing how health risk perception influences avoiding travelling internationally during the pandemic, Chua et al. (2021) examined how negative affect, health risk perception, perception of uncertainty and mental wellbeing influence formation of travel attitudes as well as time behaviour avoidance of travelling to global destinations that were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. A negative effect was determined due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19 which influenced health risk perception which consequently caused mental wellbeing and perception of uncertainty. Furthermore, mental wellbeing foresaw the tourist's attitudes towards travelling internationally and behaviour of temporary avoidance, while perception of uncertainty influenced short-term avoiding of travelling. These results managed to provide an insight into the mechanism of thinking and perception of tourists who tend to avoid travelling in the period of global health crises as well as its implications on destinations that rely on tourism to develop strategies aimed towards tourism recovery and how to cope better and more successfully with the effects of pandemic.

Focus was also placed on travel risk perception and travel behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. Neuburger & Egger's research (2020) observed the connections of how tourists perceive COVID-19, travel risks as well as travel behaviour on the example of tourists who visited the DACH region which consists of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Their results have shown a significant increase in tourist's risk perception, risk perception of COVID-19 and their travel behaviour in a very short period. The study managed to provide relevant information, respectively insight into tourist attitudes which

are of significant relevance for the destinations and tourist organisations, which is important for formation of adequate communication strategies which will contribute to the tourism industry's business success in post-COVID period. Also, the results indicated that a stronger focus should be on revitalization and support of domestic tourism with a goal of recovering first from COVID-19. Perić et al. (2021) observed how risk perception of tourists influences their intention of travelling during the pandemic period caused by COVID-19. Particular attention was placed on respondent's socio-demographic characteristics, and with the principal component analysis the authors determined five categories of perceived risk that have a significant influence on tourist's travelling intention in the pandemic period: the health risk, the psychological risk, the financial risk, the destination risk, and the travel risk. The results of their research have shown that health risks, psychological risks, financial risks, and destination risks have a negative effect on tourist's travel intentions in the pandemic period. Also, results have shown from destination perspective that travel risk has a negative effect on traveling abroad, and health risk (although with a borderline significance) was the predictor of traveling abroad in the pandemic period. When observing socio-demographic variables, only monthly income has proven to be a significant predictor of traveling abroad. Alkier et al. (2022) focused in their research on examining how tourists perceive risk in two different periods of pandemic crisis. Focus was placed on travel, destination, health, and psychological and finally financial risks. Their results indicated risk perception being higher in the first period, except for health and psychological risk which were higher in the second period. Also, the control variables that were observed were gender, age, monthly income, level of education, travel intention and crisis period. Results also determined that tourist's perception of travel risk and health and psychological risk were severely influenced by tourist's level of education and travel intention. Destination risk perception was influenced by intention to travel. This research has managed to contribute tremendously by enabling a better understanding how tourists perceive travel in pandemic crisis period. These findings can be significant and help for destination management when rethinking how to decrease risk perception and develop future developmental strategies for post pandemic period. Zhan et al. (2022) focused their research on travel risk perception among domestic tourists travelling to a destination affected by COVID-19 (Wuhan). They formed a risk perception scale based on dimensions of health, financial, and social performance. The results indicated significant influence of occupation and place of residence on all the observed items, while gender, age, education, and income had independently influenced on some of the items observed. Also, it has been determined that the respondents showed a significant interest for prevention and control of the illness, losses occurred in the pandemic period as well as the previous experiences when visiting Wuhan. Dramićanin & Perić (2021) further on focused on determining how tourists perceive risks during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to travel intention, and the host destination. The risks that they observed were travel risk, destination risk, health risk, financial risk. Two models were applied when observing the differences among the previously stated risks and travel intention and destination host. The result for the second model has shown a strong influence of travel destination on the linear combination of risk factors, as well as strong differences among the respondents with the tendency of travelling abroad and the perceived health, destination, and travel risk. Konak (2022) focused in her study on examining the effects of how tourist's perception of hygiene-safety and travel concerns influence Turkish residents' intention to travel during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Her findings managed to determine that tourist's perception of safety connected to hygiene increases their travel anxiety which is related to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. She also determined that the travel anxiety of the respondents about the pandemic had a negative effect on their intention to travel. Xie et al. (2020b) emphasized in their research that not a lot of attention was given to conceptualization and development of a scale intended for measuring how tourists perceive safety in tourist destinations. The focus of their research was to determine the dimensions for tourist perceived safety and develop a scale based on the safety system theory. The authors conducted research in three stages. In the first stage they aimed towards identifying the dimensions and initial items after a thorough literature and blog content analysis. In the second stage they conducted an explanatory analysis to determine and validate the preliminary items. And finally, in the third stage they empirically managed to confirm a five-dimension scale (human elements, facilities and equipment, natural environment, social environment and management elements) for tourist perceived safety which contains a total of 20 items.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data source and sample

Using the purposive sampling technique, data collection was carried out from June to July 2022, yielding a sample of 152 valid respondents. Table 1 provides a short overview of the sample's basic features.

**Table 1.** Sample description

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	35	23.0
Female	117	77.0
Total	152	100.0
Age category		
18-24	7	4.6
25-34	36	23.7
35-44	63	41.4
45-64	46	30.3
Total	152	100.00
Marital status		
Unmarried/single	33	21.7
Married	34	22.4
Separated/Divorced	8	5.3
Domestic partnership	77	50.7
Total	152	100.0



Education		
High School Degree or less	2	1.3
Undergraduate	16	10.5
Graduate and above	134	88.2
Total	152	100.0
Household income (in Euros)		
up 500.00	7	4.6
501.00 to 1,000	40	26.3
1,001 to 1,500	43	28.3
1,501 to 2,000	46	30.3
2,001 to 2,500	12	7.9
2,501 to 3,000	4	2.6
Total	152	100.0
Employment status		
Employed full time	124	81.6
Employed part time	26	17.1
Student	2	1.3
Total	152	100

*Source: Author's research*

Within the sample and according to the country of origin, respondents were mainly from Serbia (40.8%), followed by Slovenia (32.2%), Croatia (11.80), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.20%), Germany (2.6%), North Macedonia (2.0%), Austria (1.30%), Italy (0.7%), Spain (0.7%), Portugal (0.7%). The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire with closed questions, divided into several sections. The first section addressed the tourists' perceived safety at destination. The second section considers specific socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

### **Variables and methods**

The basic measurement instrument was based on the Tourists' Perceived Safety at Destinations (TPSD) scale developed by Xie et al. (2020b), i.e., initial item pool with content validity which contains 25 items, where each item was anchored on a Likert five-point scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) based on travel experiences. In order to extract factors of tourists' perceived safety at Opatija Riviera we use exploratory factor analysis.

### **RESULTS**

The results from the Table 2 present the mean and standard deviation for the variables used in this research.



**Table 2.** Scales used, variables, respondent means, and standard deviations

Item	Label	Mean	SD
Tour guides can take care of my safety at Opatija Riviera	PSH1	2.86	1.09
Tourism practitioners from Opatija Riviera have a professional safety ability	PSH2	4.06	0.61
Tourism practitioners from Opatija Riviera can provide service safely	PSH3	4.11	0.59
Local people are friendly	PSH4	4.35	0.52
The people I met during the tour in Opatija Riviera show friendliness to me	PSH5	4.30	0.52
Opatija Riviera's facility is reliable in performance	PSFE1	4.18	0.48
Opatija Riviera's facility looks safe and secure	PSFE2	4.39	0.49
Opatija Riviera's facility feels convenient to use	PSFE3	4.16	0.46
Opatija Riviera's facility is used without failure	PSFE4	3.87	0.68
I didn't encounter any danger when using the Opatija Riviera's facilities	PSFE5	4.37	0.54
The quality of the natural environment of Opatija Riviera is favoured by tourists.	PSNE1	4.82	0.39
The Opatija Riviera's natural environment is clean and tidy	PSNE2	4.58	0.65
There are no safety hazards in the natural environment of the Opatija Riviera	PSNE3	4.75	0.54
The Opatija Riviera is less prone to natural disasters	PSNE4	4.77	0.48
There is no need to worry about extreme natural conditions at the Opatija Riviera, such as weather.	PSNE5	4.77	0.47
I rarely encounter overcrowded and messy conditions at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE1	3.74	0.99
I rarely encounter forced consumption at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE2	4.68	0.78
I rarely encounter fraud and theft at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE3	4.71	0.76
I rarely encounter violence at the Opatija Riviera, such as fighting	PSSE4	4.76	0.73
I rarely encounter public security problems at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE5	4.76	0.73
I can see warning sign about security at the Opatija Riviera	PSM1	2.38	1.18
I can receive the safety information provided by the Opatija Riviera.	PSM2	3.74	0.72
The security work of the Opatija Riviera is very effective.	PSM3	3.99	0.44
The safety construction of the Opatija Riviera is good	PSM4	3.84	0.54
Amounts of resources are invested by the Opatija Riviera to protect tourists' safety	PSM5	3.97	0.44

Source: Authors' research based on Xie et al. (2020b)

When observing the factors for *perceived safety of human elements (PSH)*, the highest level of satisfaction was shown for friendliness of local people ( $\bar{x}$ =4.35 and SD=0.52), followed by friendliness of the people that the respondents have met during their tour in

Opatija Riviera ( $\bar{x}=4.30$  and  $SD=0.52$ ), tourism practitioners having the ability to provide their services safely ( $\bar{x}=4.11$  and  $SD=0.59$ ) and them having the professional safety abilities ( $\bar{x}=4.06$  and  $SD=0.61$ ). The lowest result was registered for the statement that tour guides can take care of tourist's safety during their stay in Opatija Riviera ( $\bar{x}=2.86$  and  $SD=1.09$ ). The results for *perceived safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE)* indicate that tourists consider facilities used for provision of tourist services to look safe and secure ( $\bar{x}=4.39$  and  $SD=0.49$ ), and they didn't encounter any danger when using these facilities ( $\bar{x}=4.37$  and  $SD=0.54$ ), which is why these two elements were marked with the highest mark. A bit lower mark was given to the reliability in performance of the facilities ( $\bar{x}=4.18$  and  $SD=0.48$ ) and feeling of conveniency to use them ( $\bar{x}=4.16$  and  $SD=0.46$ ), while the lowest, average mark was given to the ability to use the facilities without a failure ( $\bar{x}=3.87$  and  $SD=0.68$ ). In terms of *perception of safety of natural environment (PSNE)*, the results can be considered satisfactory considering that all the elements were marked above 4,5. The respondents graded the statement that the quality of the natural environment is being favoured by tourists ( $\bar{x}=4.82$  and  $SD=0.39$ ) with the highest mark, after which follows Opatija Riviera being less prone to natural disasters ( $\bar{x}=4.77$  and  $SD=0.48$ ), there is no need to worry about extreme natural conditions at the Opatija Riviera, such as weather ( $\bar{x}=4.77$  and  $SD=0.47$ ), there are no safety hazards in the natural environment of the Opatija Riviera ( $\bar{x}=4.75$  and  $SD=0.54$ ), and the Opatija Riviera's natural environment is clean and tidy ( $\bar{x}=4.58$  and  $SD=0.65$ ). Results for perceived safety of social environments (PSSE) could also be considered as satisfactory. The statements about tourists rarely encountering violence in Opatija Riviera and security problems were marked the highest ( $\bar{x}=4.76$  and  $SD=0.73$ ), followed by tourists rarely encountering fraud and theft ( $\bar{x}=4.71$  and  $SD=0.76$ ), and forced consumption ( $\bar{x}=4.68$  and  $SD=0.78$ ). The lowest mark was registered for rare encountering overcrowded and messy conditions at the Opatija Riviera ( $\bar{x}=3.74$  and  $SD=0.99$ ).

The results for perceived safety of management elements (PSM) could be considered unsatisfactory, when taking into consideration their average grade. The highest mark was for the statement of security work of the Opatija Riviera being very effective ( $\bar{x}=3.99$  and  $SD=0.44$ ), followed by amounts of resources invested by the Opatija Riviera to protect tourists' safety ( $\bar{x}=3.97$  and  $SD=0.44$ ), safety construction of Opatija Riviera being good ( $\bar{x}=3.84$  and  $SD=0.54$ ), ability of tourists receiving safety information provided by Opatija Riviera ( $\bar{x}=3.74$  and  $SD=0.72$ ). The ability of tourists to see warning sign about security at the Opatija Riviera was marked the lowest ( $\bar{x}=2.38$  and  $SD=1.18$ ).

In the next step, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to explore factors of tourists' perceived safety. Initially, the factorability of the 25 items, presented in Table 3, was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above the commonly recommended value of .6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2=3109.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results show five factors accounting for 64.36% of the variance. Table 3 shows the rotated component matrix.

**Table 3.** Rotated Component Matrix

	Factor				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
PSSE5	.978				
PSSE3	.975				
PSSE4	.974				
PSSE2	.953				
PSNE3		.899			
PSNE4		.894			
PSNE5		.862			
PSNE1		.731			
PSNE2		.586			
PSM3			.843		
PSM4			.800		
PSM5			.795		
PSM2			.760		
PSM1			.453		
PSSE1					
PSFE1				.744	
PSFE3				.736	
PSFE5				.698	
PSFE2				.679	
PSFE4				.644	
PSH1				.460	
PSH2					.795
PSH3					.780
PSH5					.754
PSH4					.710

Source: Authors' research

Based on the items presented in Table 3, extracted factors, as already suggested by Xie et al. (2020b), associated with tourists' perceived safety at, in this case, Opatija Riviera, can be interpreted as follows: perceived safety of social environments (F1), perceived safety of natural environments (F2), perceived safety of management elements (F3), perceived safety of facility and equipment elements (F4), perceived safety of human elements (F5). Next, we tested internal consistency of the identified factors (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Scale statistics

Factor	Number of items	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived safety of social environments	4	18.908	2.933	.984
Perceived safety of natural environments	5	23.789	1.948	.753
Perceived safety of management elements	5	17.928	2.439	.707
Perceived safety of facility and equipment elements	6	23.816	2.480	.688
Perceived safety of human elements	4	16.822	1.753	.787

Source: Authors' research

Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability that ranges from 0 to 1, with values of 0.60 to 0.70 deemed the lower limit of acceptability (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Having that in mind it may be concluded that all scales had an acceptable level of reliability.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the relevance of monitoring how tourists perceive safety in a tourist destination on the example of Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination. The results of our research determined the same number of factors as in the study by Xie *et al.* (2020b) whose questionnaire was used for the purpose of this research. Based on the middle values, the results of this research can be compared with the results of Xie *et al.* (2020b). All our results have proven to be higher in relation to theirs results which were average (all marks were below 4). When observing the *perception of safety of human elements (PSH)*, it has been determined that tourists consider tourism practitioners having professional safety ability and that they can provide their services in a safe way (Xie *et al.*, 2020b). Also, Opatija Riviera tourists perceive their fellow travellers as well as the domestic population friendly which is relevant for their total experience during their stay, considering that positive experiences can most definitely contribute towards tourists' revisit intention in the future. A significantly lower result was registered for only one element, and that is tourist guides being capable of taking care of tourist's safety during their stay in Opatija Riviera. Facilities and equipment represent a relevant pre-condition for provision of a high quality and competitive tourist product and service, so their safety is significant. The results for *perceived safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE)* indicate that tourists perceive Opatija Riviera tourist facilities to be reliable in performance, safe and secure, convenient to use, and safe in the sense that the respondents didn't experience any danger while using them. However, improvements could be made, considering that it has been registered that the respondents did experience some failure when using them. *Safety assessment of environmental elements* is also of significant importance. In this case we observe the physical elements like climate, water resources, flora and fauna, etc. which are unique and as such represent an integral part of a tourist product in the majority of world tourist destinations considering that in certain

cases they could be considered as attractions which contribute to attracting tourists from all over the world, and socio-cultural ones which are results of diverse activities undertaken by the people (wars, politics, etc.). As such they need to be valorised appropriately in terms of safety risks (Xie et al., 2020b). The results for *perceived safety of natural environments (PSNE)* indicate that tourists favouring Opatija Riviera's natural environment as well as perceiving it as clean and tidy, and what is most important, safe considering that tourists are aware of the absence of safety hazards in the natural environment, lower possibility of occurrence of natural disasters, as well as the fact that they don't have to worry about the extreme weather conditions. The results for *perceived safety of social environments (PSSE)* are also satisfactory, respectively, the respondents have stated that they have rarely encountered violence, public safety problems, fraud and theft, and forced consumption. The only statement that received an average mark was rare encounter with overcrowding and messy conditions which is classical when large amounts of tourists are present in a destination at the same time (Xie et al., 2020b).

Management elements includes all the policies and activities, in this case those connected with safety, that are undertaken on a destination level, and which contribute towards normal functioning of tourist activities (Xie et al., 2020a). Within this research the results for *perceived safety of management elements (PSM)* registered the lowest result, mostly the average mark below 4. It is the opinion of the respondents that security work of the Opatija Riviera is very effective, however additional resources should be invested to improve the protection of tourist's safety even higher. Also, the safety construction should be improved, as well as provision of safety information and visibility of warning sign about security in Opatija Riviera. These results are also the only ones that are in accordance with the findings of Xie et al. (2020b). The results of this research confirmed that measuring tourist's safety perception is significant for rethinking further improvements of tourist's safety during their stay in a destination. This is also confirmed by the research of Zaman et al. (2022), Zhan et al. (2022), Hasan et al. (2017), Orden-Meja et al. (2022), etc. The results indicate that Opatija Riviera is currently doing a good job in the post-COVID period, however, it is necessary to continuously be focused on improvements which will contribute for tourists to perceive a destination as safer. In this case, the authors advise that further activities could be focused on tour guides that work in the destination and their education in safety of tourists. This way they will be able to provide their services in a safer manner, and they will be perceived as more reliable as tourist service providers. Tourist facilities and equipment need to be improved in the best possible way to ensure top quality and safe experience for tourists. And finally, overcrowding, and messy conditions are something that needs to be considered as an important pre-condition of tourist's safety in the post pandemic period. Measuring tourist's safety perception represents an initial step towards rethinking where to focus in terms of tourist's improvement of safety, as well as developing awareness about the importance of safety in tourism. This is something that destination management and marketing should consider as a valuable strategy for achieving competitiveness on the tourist market. This paper has some theoretical and practical implications. In terms of the theoretical ones, the authors provided a theoretical review showing the close connection between tourism and safety, respectively tourism and tourist's safety perception during their stay in a destination. In terms of practical implications, research results like this can be significant for destination management on where to focus,

respectively to determine what are the destination's strengths and opportunities that need to be upgraded, as well as the weaknesses and threats that need to be reduced to the minimum or removed entirely, and for marketing the need to promote all the improvements. Achieving this will result in tourists recognizing and perceiving Opatija Riviera as even safer, which will result in increasing tourist arrivals and overnights, and loyalty of tourists and recommendation of Opatija Riviera as a safe holiday destination. In terms of research limitations, the authors emphasize the size of the population that participated in the survey. In the future this research will be conducted on a larger sample to increase the possibility of generalizing the results.

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## PERCEIVED SAFETY AND SOME OTHER FACTORS IN TOURIST'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: FINDINGS FROM OPATIJA RIVIERA

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### Abstract

Safety and security became a crucial component of an integral tourist product. Ability to offer tourists a safe stay during their holiday contributes to the attractiveness of a destination and its tourist product. Safety and security represent a pre-condition and a motive which many tourists consider crucial when choosing their destination for a holiday. Due to this, tourist destinations need to focus on improving the level of safety and security which will contribute to the satisfaction of tourists, and they will be more interested in visiting and revisiting a destination. Aim of this paper is to determine whether tourists consider safety and riskiness, as well as destination image as relevant factors in their decision-making process when choosing Opatija Riviera for their holiday. An analysis of the relevant scientific literature, and empirical research were conducted to determine if how tourists perceive safety and riskiness as well as the destination image when choosing to visit Opatija Riviera for a holiday. Based on the findings a discussion was developed to provide future activities of safety and security improvement.

**Key words:** safety, security, tourist destinations, Opatija Riviera, decision-making process.

### INTRODUCTION

Security and sense of safety belong among the most basic needs of every human being in the world. This need became significantly important throughout decades, and especially in tourism [19, 31]. Security and safety are a crucial component of a tourist product, as well as the factor that tourists consider when deciding where to go on a holiday. To achieve success on the tourist market, destinations need to focus on achieving maximum level of safety for not only for their guests, but also the domestic population. Provision of protection and safety in a destination must be observed from all aspects, i.e., political, public, health, personal data protection, legal protection, protection of consumer's rights, etc. [4]. Republic of Croatia is a tourist destination with a long tourist tradition. In the

period 1991-1995 this country was severely affected by the Homeland war and the occupation of a part of its territory, which resulted in extremely low level of safety, decrease and finally stagnation of all the tourist activities that occurred until then. After ending the war operations, the level of safety started to increase again [46].

In the upcoming years Croatia and its destinations started recuperating. One of the most famous Croatian destinations with the longest tradition of tourism development that helped this recuperation is Opatija Riviera. This destination represents an important part of a Croatian tourist product on the international tourist market primarily due to its rich tourist resource base like natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, excellent traffic connection with the neighbouring countries, significantly developed specific forms of tourism, and the provision of a high level of safety for not only tourists, but also the domestic population. All this contributed to the formation of an image very much recognized on the world tourist market [1, 7] which was confirmed by the increase of tourist arrivals and overnights, which occurred up until the outbreak of the most recent pandemic when a decrease was registered. In the upcoming period, after the stabilization of the situation, tourist turnover again started to register growth [see more 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14].

Safety crises like the Homeland war and the pandemic influenced significantly the tourist's attitudes in terms of risk perception [23], which reflects not only on their process of choosing a holiday destination, but also their intention of its future recommendation to friends and family [26].

In the future, like many other destinations, Opatija Riviera will have to focus on providing maximum level of safety for its visitors and the domestic population, if it wishes to continue registering growth in tourist turnover and maintain its competitive position on the tourist market. One of the activities will have to be monitoring their level of satisfaction with the safety elements for certain, but also their tendency for recommendation (positive word of mouth). The purpose of this paper is to determine does safety as an element of a tourist product influence the tourist's intention of choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination. The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, a theoretical background will be presented, after which follow the methodology, results of the empirical research, discussion, and conclusion.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Today's tourism is very easily susceptible to the influences of many risk factors, which is witnessed by numerous examples such as political instabilities in countries, health threats caused by various viruses, terrorist events, natural disasters, etc. [30, 34]. This is in accordance with the research of Spencer & Tarlow who state that third decade of the twentieth century was marked severely with multiple security challenges, like the hostile situation among United States of America and Iran [44], natural disasters like tsunami etc. [40, 41, 43], health hazards like pandemic caused by COVID-19 virus [2, 3, 5, 29, 37, 39], various forms of crimes like murders, robberies, etc. [27, 32, 33, 35, 44]. All this significantly resulted not only in changing the way how tourists perceive risks of

traveling and staying in a destination [6, 16, 25, 38, 42, 50, 51], but also on their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination [17].

For destinations to be able to provide maximum satisfaction for their tourists in all segments, and safety belongs to the primary ones today, it is necessary to monitor how tourists perceive safety of a destination not just during their stay, but also before, respectively how much is safety relevant to them when choosing a holiday destination. Garg's research [18] determined that the way how tourists perceive risks was having a significant influence on their decision-making process when choosing their holiday destination. Hsu, Lin & Lee [20] observed the influence of travel safety and security through formed image of a destination on a tourist's decision-making process when deciding whether to visit a particular destination. Travel safety and security, as well as the destinations' image of being safe have proven to have a direct and positive effect on their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. Karl [22] determined that, when it comes to choosing a holiday destination, tourists who have a tendency towards risk aversion will rather be considering and visiting tourist destinations that are famous, highly developed with a strong tourist turnover, which finally results in them perceiving a destination as a familiar one, which reduces their level of uncertainty. Karl, Muskat, & Ritchie [21] have focused on determining which risk factors do tourists consider relevant when choosing a holiday destination. The paper analyses whether travel risks that are related to natural, health, terrorism, criminal acts, and political instabilities are far more important than for choosing a holiday destination, and how does risk perception influence tourists in the key phases of decision-making process.

The results show that tourist's previous travel experiences are connected to formation of risk perception, and that they do have an influence on a decision-making process. Also, it has been determined that natural hazards were not an obstacle in a decision-making process. In Vučenočić's research [46] the respondents stated that the following risk factors influence their decision of choosing Croatia as a holiday destination: climate conditions, risks of being attacked as well as the budget that they are intended to spend. Research was conducted in 2015 and 2016 with a goal of conducting a comparative analysis. Obtained results have shown differences in the results. Climate conditions were the most important risk factor for the respondents in 2015 (85,2%), and in the following year the relevance of this factor registered an increase (94,6%). Bearing in mind that the majority of tourist turnover occurs in summer months, this is significantly relevant, because in case of inadequate climate conditions an increase of cancellations of holidays can be expected. Risk from being potentially attacked was the second most important risk factor in 2015 for 75,7% of the respondents, and in the following year its relevance increased (78,8%). Third most important factor was the budget of the respondents that they intended to spend for the purpose of their holiday (27% in 2015, and 30,4% in 2016). The factors that had the lowest impact on the respondent's decision-making when choosing Croatia as a holiday destination were risks from social disturbances and quality of tourist infrastructure.

Previously presented research results imply that safety and security represent a vital and crucial pre-condition of providing a high-quality tourist product to the demanding tourist [48]. Those destinations that are not able to meet such an important demand will not be

considered as attractive for a holiday, and as such will not be able to survive on the tourist market [15]. This is in accordance with the research of Kordić et al. [24] who clearly emphasize in their paper that there is a significantly greater possibility of tourists of holding back from travelling to dangerous destinations, because such destinations are less attractive and consequently less competitive or non-competitive at all on the tourist market.

Destinations that are perceived as vulnerable ones need to undertake appropriate actions. Focus needs to be placed on undertaking preventive safety measures on all levels, rethink ways of strategic managing of safety measures, and finally form image of a safe destination [46]. It can be justified to say that if tourists consider a destination safe, they will show greater interest in visiting it. Based on the previously presented theoretical background, the authors propose the following research hypothesis:

*H1: Perceived safety and riskiness of a tourist destination, as well as its image may be considered as antecedents of tendency toward choosing it as a destination.*

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Results and analysis**

#### *Data source and sample*

With the use of purposive sampling technique, the authors collected the data in the period June-July 2022. A total of 152 valid responses was collected. The following Table 1 presents the description of a sample.

**Table 1.** Sample description

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	35	23.0
Female	117	77.0
Total	152	100.0
<b>Age category</b>		
18-34	43	28.3
35-44	63	41.4
45-65	46	30.3
Total	152	100.00
<b>Travel frequency</b>		
Sometimes	99	66.4
Often	50	33.6
Total	149	100.0

<b>Education</b>		
High School Degree or less	2	1.3
Undergraduate	16	10.5
Graduate and above	134	88.2
Total	152	100.0
<b>Household income (in Euros)</b>		
up 500.00	7	4.6
501.00 to 1,000	40	26.3
1,001 to 1,500	43	28.3
1,501 to 2,000	46	30.3
2,001 to 2,500	12	7.9
2,501 to 3,000	4	2.6
Total	152	100.0
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed full time	124	81.6
Employed part time	26	17.1
Student	2	1.3
Total	152	100

*Source: Author's research*

A structured questionnaire with closed questions, divided into several sections was used for gathering the data. The first section addressed the tourists' perceived safety at destinations; perceived severity, perceived susceptibility, individual behaviours, industry-level domain, destination image, perceived risks, behavioural intention, and destination choice. The second part contains the specific socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

#### *Research variables*

In this research, besides sociodemographic, following constructs were used: destination choice [45], perceived safety of facility and equipment elements, perceived safety of social environments, perceived safety of management elements [49], personal protection, the industry-level domain [28, 47], destination image, perceived risks [36]. Each of the items was evaluated with the use of a 5-point Likert scale (1-I strongly disagree to 5-I strongly agree). The score for each construct was calculated as total score for the items representing each dimension. However, prior to that, we assessed whether the subscales had a satisfactory reliability (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Scale statistics

Measure	N	Number of items	Mean	Mdn	Standard deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived safety of facility and equipment elements	152	5	20.961	20	1.936	.774
Perceived safety of social environments	152	5	22.651	23	3.138	.840
Perceived safety of management elements	152	5	17.928	17	2.439	.707
Personal protection	152	5	14.289	14	3.778	.715
Perceived safety at the industry-level domain	152	6	14.243	13	4.825	.856
Destination image	152	10	43.105	42	4.496	.889
Perceived risks	152	8	10.336	9	3.870	.905
Destination Choice	152	24	96.368	94	10.283	.933

Source: Authors' research

Previous table presents Cronbach's Alpha. According to the indicators it is possible to conclude that all scales had an acceptable level of reliability. Based on median value of each score, we created variables, presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Variables

Variables	Type	Description	Categories
Tendency toward choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination	Categorical variable	This variable was based on the median value of the destination choice score. In case the destination choice score was above median ( <i>Mdn</i> > 94), dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise.	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average positive attitude towards choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination, 0 otherwise
Perceived safety	Perceived safety of facility and equipment elements	Categorical variable	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average positive perceived safety of facility and equipment elements, 0 otherwise
	Perceived safety of social environments	Categorical variable	D = 1 if the respondent has perceived safety of social environments elements score, 0 otherwise

	Perceived safety of management elements	Categorical variable	Based on the median value of Perceived safety of management elements score. In case this score was above median ( $Mdn > 17$ ), the value of dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise.	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average perceived safety of management elements, 0 otherwise
	Personal protection	Categorical variable	Based on the median value of individual behaviours score. In case this score was above median ( $Mdn > 14$ ), the value of dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average individual behaviours score, 0 otherwise
	Perceived safety at the industry-level domain	Categorical variable	Based on the median value of industry-level domain score. In case this score was above median ( $Mdn > 13$ ), the value of dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise.	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average industry-level domain score, 0 otherwise
Destination image		Categorical variable	Based on the median value of destination image score. In case this score was above median ( $Mdn > 42$ ), the value of dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise.	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average destination image score, 0 otherwise
Perceived risks		Categorical variable	Based on the median value of perceived risks score. In case this score was above median ( $Mdn > 9$ ), the value of dummy variable was 1, 0 otherwise.	D = 1 if the respondent has above-average perceived risk score, 0 otherwise
Age		Categorical variable	Derived from the question in the survey related to age.	
Gender		Categorical variable	Derived from the question in the survey related to gender.	D = 1 if the respondent is male, 0 otherwise
Travel frequency		Categorical variable	Derived from the question in the survey related to travel frequency.	D = 1 if the respondent travels sometimes. D = 0 if the respondent travels often

Source: Authors' research



### *Model*

Bearing in mind previously presented, and to get a clearer understanding of the factors that may influence tourists choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination, a probit model as a primarily methodological approach was used. The binary probit model is:

$$e = \alpha + \beta_{1,2,3,4,5} \text{Perceived safety} + \beta_6 \text{Destination image} + \beta_7 \text{Perceived risk} \\ + \beta_8 \text{Age} + \beta_9 \text{Gender} + \beta_{10} \text{Travel frequency}$$

where  $e$  presents the logit (ln of the odds) of tendency toward choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination. The estimation of a model was conducted with the use of STATA version 14.

### **Empirical analysis**

Following, the results of the empirical research will be presented. In the first phase of the data analysis, the authors examined the connections among the selected scores. With the use of Pearson Correlation, the authors managed to determine a significantly positive connection among the score of choice of destination and perceived safety of facility and equipment elements ( $r = .297, p = 0.000$ ); perceived safety of management elements ( $r = .439, p = 0.000$ ); personal protection ( $r = .299, p = 0.005$ ).

Following, the authors conducted a Chi-Square test of independence to test the difference among the tendency towards choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination and variables presented in Table 2 (perceived safety of facility and equipment elements, perceived safety of social environments, perceived safety of management elements, personal protection, the industry-level domain, destination image, perceived risks, age, gender, and travel frequency).

A statistically significant difference was determined between the tendency toward choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination and: perceived risk,  $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 12.702, p < 0.01$ ; destination image,  $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 12.827, p < 0.01$ ; perceived safety of management elements,  $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 8.427, p < 0.01$ .

Following, the authors used a probit model to estimate the impact of the selected independent variables on tendency towards choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination (Table 2). The goodness-of-fit was evaluated using the following measures: Pearson chi-square statistics, Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test, classification tables and pseudo R<sup>2</sup>. The entire model matches significantly better than the model without predictors, which was confirmed by the Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test ( $p = 0.9828$ ). According to the data presented in the classification tables, the model correctly classifies 74.50 of cases. Table 4 presents the results of the estimated model with odds ratio.

**Table 4.** The estimated model

Independent Variables	B	S.E.	p	Odds ratio	S.E.	p
Perceived safety of facility and equipment elements	0.1163	0.2424	0.631	1.2131	0.4893	0.6320
Perceived safety of social environments	-0.3306	0.2535	0.192	0.5952	0.2530	0.2220
Perceived safety of management elements	0.5109	0.2390	0.033	2.3978	0.9646	0.0300
Personal protection	0.3420	0.2557	0.181	1.8132	0.7787	0.1660
Safety at the industry-level domain	-0.0878	0.2406	0.715	0.9176	0.3744	0.8330
Destination image	0.8386	0.2497	0.001	4.1773	1.7817	0.0010
Perceived risks	-0.9933	0.2608	0.000	0.1877	0.0853	0.0000
<b>Age</b>						
35-44	-0.3567	0.2986	0.2320	0.5400	0.2695	0.2170
45-65	-0.7332	0.3276	0.0250	0.2706	0.1554	0.0230
Gender	0.4850	0.2910	0.096	2.1787	1.0481	0.1060
Travel frequency	0.0467	0.2655	0.8600	1.0363	0.4598	0.9360
_cons	-0.3668	0.3812	0.3360	0.5429	0.3402	0.3300

Source: Authors' research

As visible from table 4, the variables destination image ( $p < 0.05$ ), perceived safety of management elements ( $p < 0.01$ ), and perceived risk ( $p < 0.01$ ) have proven to have a statistical significance.

When it comes to destination image, tourists who have above-average positive perception of Opatija Riviera image, would have approximately 4.18 times higher probability of choosing this destination in comparison to those who have lower level of destination image perception. The expected change is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 5 represents items of destination image score (each item was evaluated with the use of a 5-point Likert scale (1-I strongly disagree to 5-I strongly agree)).

**Table 5.** Destination image

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Opatija Riviera has a quality tourism infrastructure.	4.33	0.54
Opatija Riviera has a good climate.	4.73	0.49
Opatija Riviera is safe and stable.	4.66	0.49
Opatija Riviera has a good quality of life.	4.33	0.65
Opatija Riviera has appealing local cuisine.	3.88	0.86
Opatija Riviera has a variety of unique attractions.	4.34	0.62
Opatija Riviera is rich in cultural heritage.	4.40	0.61
Opatija Riviera is a good place for shopping.	3.74	0.92
Opatija Riviera people are interesting and friendly.	4.34	0.50
Opatija Riviera is a pleasant place to visit.	4.37	0.51

Source: Authors' research

The results presented in the previous table can be considered as somewhat satisfactory considering that most of the elements that relate to the image of Opatija Riviera are above 4. The highest results were registered for Opatija Riviera having good climate ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), being safe and stable ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), rich in cultural heritage ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ), a pleasant place to visit ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ), having a variety of unique attractions ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ), people in the destination being interesting and friendly ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ), Opatija Riviera having a good quality of life ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ), a quality tourism infrastructure ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ). Only two elements were evaluated with a lower mark below 4 (appealing cuisine in a destination  $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ , and Opatija Riviera being a good place for shopping  $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ).

Odds ratio indicates that tourists who perceive facility and equipment elements of Opatija Riviera to be very safe, would have about 2.40 times higher likelihood of choosing this destination comparing to those who have lower level of safety perception. The expected change is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The following Table 6 represents items of perceived safety of management elements score (each item was evaluated with the use of a 5-point Likert scale (1-I strongly disagree to 5-I strongly agree)).

**Table 6.** Perceived safety of management elements

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
I rarely encounter overcrowded and messy conditions at the Opatija Riviera.	2.38	1.18
I rarely encounter forced consumption at the Opatija Riviera.	3.74	0.72
I rarely encounter fraud and theft at the Opatija Riviera.	3.99	0.44
I rarely encounter violence at the Opatija Riviera, such as fighting.	3.84	0.54
I rarely encounter public security problems at the Opatija Riviera.	3.97	0.44

Source: Authors' research

The results for the perceived safety of management elements can be considered relatively satisfactory considering that out of five items three were slightly below 4. Tourists rarely encounter themselves being frauded or robbed ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ), they rarely encounter public security problems during their stay in a destination ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ), acts of violence such as fighting ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ), or attempts of forced consumption ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ). The lowest result was registered for Opatija Riviera being overcrowded and messy ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ).

Odds ratio for perceived risk is negative, which means that a tourist who perceives Opatija Riviera as high-risk experiences a reduction of **81.23%** ( $(1-0.1877) \times 100$ ) in the odds of choosing Opatija Riviera as a destination compared to a tourist who does not perceive this destination as high-risk. The expected change is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The following Table 7 represents items of perceived risks score (each item was evaluated with the use of a 5-point Likert scale (1-I strongly disagree to 5-I strongly agree)).

**Table 7.** Perceived risks

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
You feel overall the experience of a holiday in the Opatija Riviera will not be a good value of money	1.53	0.70
You feel the threat of becoming sick while traveling to or being at the Opatija Riviera	1.24	0.58
You feel psychological trauma because of others' negative comments about the Opatija Riviera	1.17	0.49
You feel there is a chance of physical danger to your health while being on holiday in the Opatija Riviera	1.18	0.49
You feel that you might get caught up in political turmoil while being on holiday in the Opatija Riviera	1.18	0.49
You perceive language barriers while being on holiday in the Opatija Riviera	1.63	0.98
You perceive the risk of a terrorist attack while being on holiday in the Opatija Riviera	1.17	0.49
You feel that you will not receive enough personal satisfaction from the holiday in the Opatija Riviera	1.24	0.63

Source: Authors' research

The results for tourist's risk perception can be considered as extremely satisfactory. The lowest results were registered for tourists feeling psychological trauma because of others' negative comments about the Opatija Riviera, and for perception of the risk of a terrorist attack while being on holiday in the Opatija Riviera ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), followed by the possibility of experiencing physical danger to their health, and the possibility of getting caught up in political turmoil while staying in the Opatija Riviera

( $M = 1.18$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), not receiving enough personal satisfaction from their holiday ( $M = 1.24$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), as well as sensing threat of becoming sick while traveling to or during their stay in Opatija Riviera ( $M = 1.24$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). The highest, but still extremely low results were registered for tourist's perception of language barriers during their stay ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ), and the sense of overall experience of vacation not being a good value of money for them ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ).

Based on the presented findings we have confirmed that the perceived safety and riskiness of a tourist destination, as well as its image may be considered as antecedents of tendency toward choosing it as a destination.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper the authors have conducted an empirical analysis with the aim of determining whether tourist's perception of safety and riskiness, as well as destination's image are antecedents of tendency of choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination. The results of the empirical research indicate that the set hypothesis has been confirmed, respectively, the way how tourists perceive safety and riskiness (safety of facility and equipment elements, management elements, and personal protection), and image of a tourist destination influence their tendency to choose Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination.

We have determined that those tourists who have a more than average positive perceptions of Opatija Riviera's image will show greater interest of choosing it as a holiday destination. Lowest mark for image was given to the gastronomic offer and shopping offer of a destination which indicates that improvements need to be made, and especially since tourists who are motivated by gastronomic offer and shopping are big consumers who are interested in spending high amounts of money to achieve experience and value for money. Furthermore, it has been determined that tourists who perceive facility and equipment elements as safe (i.e. systems that prevent fire outbreak, doors with electronic locks in hotel rooms, food safety, etc.) will be more prone towards choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination.

In terms of safety of management elements, the lowest mark was given to the overcrowding and messy conditions. Overtourism has been creating problems for a significant amount of time due to its negative influences on both the environment and the society. As negative impacts on the environment we consider air pollution, larger consumption of water, inadequate waste management, etc. By negative social impacts we consider anything that reflects negatively not just on tourists, but also the domestic population (decrease of their quality of life due to the noise, too many people at the beach, large crowds of people on the streets, miscommunication due to the language barrier, etc.). Also, it has been determined that tourists who perceive Opatija Riviera as a destination of high risk will not be prone towards choosing it for a holiday.

The results show that tourists perceive Opatija Riviera as a low-risk tourist destination, which indicates that Opatija Riviera has managed to profile itself as a safe destination for

tourists which is in accordance with the growing tourist turnover achieved so far (with an exception of the period inflicted by the pandemic caused by COVID-19). Safety and security have been recognized globally as one of the most important factors for tourists when choosing a holiday destination. Tourists want to feel relaxed during their stay in a destination, and don't want to worry about their safety in any way whatsoever, which is why it is relevant to monitor their perceptions, and act accordingly to be able to satisfy their expectations and needs to the fullest extent possible, and in that way stimulate them to visit Opatija Riviera.

This paper has a theoretical contribution (the analysis of the most relevant scientific literature was conducted), and a practical contribution (the findings can serve as a starting point for the Opatija Riviera's destination management when rethinking how to improve safety and security of tourists in a destination, which will contribute towards tourists being more prone towards choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination. This will also contribute towards profiling Opatija Riviera as a safe maritime tourist destination. In terms of research limitations, it is necessary to mention the sample size. The authors plan to repeat this research on a larger number of respondents in the future.

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON REDEFINING THE ROLE OF HEALTH SECURITY IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF THE CROATIAN OPATIJA RIVIERA

**Romina Alkier**  
**Vedran Milojica**  
**Vasja Roblek**

### **Abstract**

Within the framework of tourist safety and assessment of the tourism destination, it is necessary to include health and hygiene in the research as a newer safety paradigm. The number and type of outbreaks of infectious diseases have increased over the last 30 years, and as global trade and travel increase, international disease spread is expected to grow. All stakeholders in a tourist destination must continuously work together to improve decision-making, coordination, and communication within and between the public and private sectors in terms of risk, travel advice and border measures.

The study's main objectives are to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on the changes in business models in the tourism industry of the Opatija Riviera and to create health safety paradigms that will play an influential role in protecting tourists and residents on the Opatija Riviera also in the post-Covid-19 period. Up until the development of COVID-19 pandemic Opatija Riviera was registering growing tourism turnover, mostly achieved by foreign tourists. Due to the current pandemic, it is necessary to rethink for the future in which direction to go, and how to adapt in order to attract tourists, and profile Opatija Riviera as a safe and healthy destination. As part of the case study, semi-structured interviews will be prepared with managers of tourist firms and public officers in Opatija riviera destination. Managers and officers will be questioned about the impact of Covid-19 on changes in health security strategies and their new role in business models (of touristic firms and riviera as an administrative region), implementations of solutions for protection and security, organisational changes, as well as future approaches to providing health care to tourists and hosts in the post-Covid 19 periods, when new outbreaks of previously unknown viruses or bacteria may occur.

The study aimed to critically examine the Covid-19 phenomenon and its impact on health security and the changes in business models, security strategies and development policies of both tourism concepts and the destination itself, also due to possible new pandemics in the future.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, case study, healthcare, Opatija Riviera, tourists, healthcare strategy.

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**Extended abstract**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Within the framework of tourist safety and assessment of the tourism destination, it is necessary to include health and hygiene in the research as a newer safety paradigm. The number and type of outbreaks of infectious diseases (influenza, MERS-Cov, antibiotic-resistant bacteria, etc.) have increased over the last 30 years, and as global trade and travel increase, international disease spread is expected to grow (Velavan & Meyer, 2020). Therefore, all stakeholders in a tourist destination must continuously work together to improve decision-making, coordination and communication within and between the public and private sectors in terms of risk, travel advice and border measures (Duro et al., 2020). The study's main objectives are to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on the changes in business models in the tourism industry and to create health safety paradigms that will play an influential role in protecting tourists and residents on the Opatija Riviera also in the post-Covid-19 period.

Opatija Riviera became a fashionable resort when the Austrian government declared Opatija the first seaside health resort (Kurort) in 1889, and many European doctors and scientists came here to promote the then modern treatment methods in Opatija. Use of spa component since 1884 initiated tourism development and hotels were built. Opatija Riviera belongs among the Croatian destinations which has the longest and oldest tourist tradition. Its richness in natural (mild Mediterranean climate, clean air and sea, mountains, lush and diverse vegetation, etc.), cultural-historical and other resources, vicinity to the tourist generating markets as well as excellent traffic connection. Opatija Riviera is also well known for the specific tourism offer like health, business, and nautical tourism. (Cerović et al., 2014; Alkier et al., 2019). We chose this destination for a case study because it is an internationally recognised Croatian resort visited mostly by the foreign guests, mostly from the surrounding countries (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, etc.). Up until the development of COVID-19 pandemic Opatija Riviera was registering growing tourism turnover, mostly achieved by foreign tourists. Due to the current pandemic, it is necessary to rethink for the future in which direction to go, and how to adapt in order to attract tourists, and profile Opatija Riviera as a safe and healthy destination. As part of the case study, semi-structured interviews will be prepared with managers of tourist firms and public officers in Opatija Riviera destination. Managers and officers will be questioned about the impact of Covid-19 on changes in health security strategies and their new role in business models (of touristic

firms and riviera as an administrative region), implementations of solutions for protection and security, organisational changes, as well as future approaches to providing health care to tourists and hosts in the post-Covid 19 periods, when new outbreaks of previously unknown viruses or bacteria may occur.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The case study is widely used in the social sciences and is particularly useful in practice-oriented fields (management, public administration). A case study helps us to gain new insights when we want to answer the "how" and "why" questions; when we cannot influence the behaviour of those involved in the study; when we also want to capture the circumstances in context because we believe they are important for exploring the phenomenon (phenomenon) within the study, or when we cannot draw clear boundaries between phenomenon and context (Yin, 2012). We will focus on preparing an investigative or exploratory case study (Yin, 2014). We conduct it to investigate a relatively new field, problem or phenomenon. Given the lack of empirical research in this field, the research is designed as a qualitative case study (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014), where the case is "the impact of Covid-19 on health security and the implications for tourism businesses and the destination itself". We designed the case study as a multiple-case study, as we included four tourism businesses and X municipal governments that make up the Opatija Riviera. Company - individual cases did not conduct the analysis, but, as Yin (2014) says, by the themes which were developed in the data analysis phase.

### **Purpose and objectives**

The study aimed to critically examine the Covid-19 phenomenon and its impact on health security and the changes in business models, security strategies and development policies of both tourism concepts and the destination itself, also due to possible new pandemics in the future.

The research aims are:

- provide an overview of contemporary literature and sources on the impact of Covid-19 on tourist destinations and businesses;
- highlight the importance of Covid-19 for the preparation of future health care security strategies in tourism companies and destinations;
- to determine how Covid-19 will influence the preparation of new business models and strategies of tourism companies and destinations;
- formulate recommendations for further research and practice.

### **Research questions**

According to the above objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- How is the issue of Covid-19 in the field of tourism defined in the contemporary literature, and what is its impact on the possible inclusion of health care in future business models and business strategies of tourism companies?
- What importance do they attach to including healthcare in the business strategies and business models of the top management and employees of the companies studied?
- Is healthcare already part of the strategic direction in the companies studied?

- What role do employees in the companies studied play in the design and concrete implementation of measures to protect guests' health?
- As a community, have you adopted a strategy to protect the health of guests and locals from disease? If you do not have one, are you planning one? What should it include?
- How did you deal with the guest and local health protection situation during the Covid 19 pandemic? How did you collaborate with all stakeholders involved in the destination value chain?
- What solutions will you propose to protect the health of guests and locals and be prepared for possible future cases?

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## ROLE OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT CRISIS IN COVID-19 AND POST-COVID-19 PERIOD: A CASE STUDY OF OPATIJA RIVIERA MICRO-REGION IN CROATIA<sup>2</sup>

**Romina Alkier**  
**Vedran Miložica**  
**Vasja Roblek**

### **Abstract**

**Background/Purpose:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in studying crisis influences grew in the last three years since it significantly impacted tourism and hospitality. Observing adaptations and transformations in hotel business models is necessary for tourism and hospitality firms to remain successful and competitive. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to critically analyse crisis management processes and management decisions regarding changes and adaptations in strategies and business model innovations to facilitate recovery, resilience, and sustained growth of hotels in the Croatian micro-region Opatija Riviera in Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 period.

**Method:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel managers and tourism and hospitality consultants. The transcriptions were checked, and collected data was interpreted based on the narrative analysis. Thematic content analysis (TCA) was applied in the study.

**Results:** Hotels in Opatija Riviera adapt their crisis business models to ensure long-term and sustainable growth and development of hotels and the destination itself. The primary focus is increasing the quality of services and guest satisfaction, achieving competitiveness in the tourist market.

**Conclusion:** The paper includes an exploratory qualitative research study on the impact and consequences of Covid-19 on business and organisational changes in the hotel industry in the Opatija Riviera area, which will have a medium- and long-term impact on the design of resilience and sustainable growth policies. The disruption caused by the pandemic is also important for hotel managers and management from the point of view of introducing crisis management processes, the results of which can be seen in the protection of the well-being of guests, employees and the general reputation of hotels. Therefore, hotel management needs to emphasise the importance of identifying business

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<sup>2</sup> Preliminary results of this research were presented at the International conference on Tourism and Business ICTB. The conference was held from 24th-27th August 2022 in Luzern, Switzerland, and organized by HSLU-Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Edinburgh Napier University and Mahidol University International College.

strategies and practices in business strategies and thus form the basis for effective crisis management.

**Key words:** business models, Covid-19, hotel industry, Opatija Riviera, strategies, risk management, tourism micro-region.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past three years, numerous studies worldwide have focused on the crisis and consequences of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality industry. However, insufficient attention has been given to the changing business models in the tourism and hospitality industry, as Breier et al. (2021) noted. Chanyasak et al. (2022) have specifically examined how hotels adapt their business models during times of crisis. Therefore, researchers must conduct further studies that specifically address the adaptations and transformations of business models, focusing on small and medium-sized hotel firms, to mitigate the consequences of Covid-19. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of these smaller tourism firms during tourism crises, as highlighted by Gursoy and Chi (2020). We conducted research in three large hotels (two five stars and one four-star) and six four stars medium-sized hotels.

Additionally, Ferreras-Méndez et al. (2021) have provided evidence of the mediating role of business model innovation in the relationship between environmental turbulence and performance. More research is urgently needed to fully explore the potential of business model innovations in mitigating the adverse effects of Covid-19 and fostering resilience and sustainable growth in hotel businesses. It is important to consider preventing and reducing the risk of potential new diseases in future. For this reason, we conducted a study that focuses on crisis management processes during the Covid-19 pandemic and includes management decision-making regarding organisational adoption and changes that impact hotel firms' strategic development in the medium and long term. The primary focus was examining business models, and strategy changes from 2000 to 2023. The research was conducted in the Croatian tourism micro-region of Opatija Riviera, employing a qualitative case study design. Semi-structured interviews were prepared with hotel managers, tourism and hospitality consultants, and researchers as part of the study.

The Opatija Riviera is situated in Kvarner Bay on the eastern coast of the Istrian peninsula. It stretches 25 km along the coastal belt from Volosko to Mošćenička Draga, under Učka Mountain. Made popular in the 19th century by the Austro-Hungarian elite, the Opatija Riviera remains a tourism micro-region that exemplifies style and class. Opatija Riviera is a four-star tourism micro-region. It has 16,500 beds in 47 hotels, another 6,905 beds in private rooms, apartments and holiday homes, and three auto camps for 1,680 people. Most medium and large hotels are owned by two hotel chains, Amadria and Liburnija. Small hotels include family hotels with 3 or 4 stars and luxury boutique hotels with 4 or 5 stars. The Opatija Riviera has joined the Croatian national project Safe Stay in Croatia. The project includes the implementation of security protocols in the tourism and hospitality industry (Alkier et al., 2022).

The study aimed to critically analyse crisis management processes and management decisions regarding changes and adaptations in strategies and business model innovations to facilitate recovery, resilience, and sustained growth of hotels in the Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 period. Based on these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

*RQ1: What strategic changes occurred and why within the crisis management processes during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how do they impact hotel industry recovery, resilience, and future sustainable growth?*

The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, the second part includes the theoretical background. The third part of the paper discusses the research methodology, and the fourth part consists of the results. The last part provides a discussion and conclusions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Hotel firms' risk management in the time of disease: Covid-19 case – implications on tourism**

According to the professional and scientific literature findings, which focus on hotels' crisis management during the pandemic, hotels had to adapt or change business models to survive, ensure resilience, and further sustainable business growth (Alonso et al., 2022). As an example of disease risk, Covid-19 is only one of the risks that threatened the hotel industry during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). By changing strategies and business models, hotels ensure resilience, which is defined in the literature as crisis management and business continuity and responding to risks that hotels may face, from cyber threats to natural disasters, supply chains disruptions, wars, diseases, and others (Corrales-Estrada et al., 2021).

The study is focused on the problem of hotel crisis management related to the Covid-19 pandemic, in the context of which it was shown that there is a segment of small and medium-sized hotel firms (family hotels, boutique hotels, city hotels, etc.) that are considered very vulnerable and exposed to various risks. For example, hotel firms must introduce innovative business models to remain competitive. However, when firms are faced with an economic crisis and health risk (while this also applies to other risks such as natural disasters, climate changes, human resource management, and digital and green transformation, which ran parallel to the pandemic and continued even in the period after, and represent one of the essential competitive advantages of hotels, which also affected the reduction of business risk) with Covid-19, it becomes obvious how much smaller hotel firms (family hotels, city hotels) are more vulnerable concerning the larger ones. The reasons are the size (limited personnel, financial and professional capacities) and the ownership structure, which under normal circumstances represents a risk to liquidity and profitability. However, unlike larger firms, private ownership and distribution of ownership, small size, and generally flat organisational structure allow small hotels greater flexibility during business interruptions (Crovini et al., 2021). Otherwise, small hotels are usually considered less resilient than larger hotel firms because they take



longer to return to normal functioning (if they survive at all) after a disruption (Engeset, 2020).

To recover from significant disruptions in hotel firms' internal and external business environment, it is necessary to ensure business resilience related to the firm's ability to adapt to changes in the background and new circumstances that led to disruptions (Margherita & Heikkilä, 2021). Given all the impending current risks, hotels face the challenge of existence and resilience to ensure medium- and long-term enterprise growth. It is necessary to be aware that the more hotel firms are exposed to disruptions, the more resilience it needs to survive and ensure business (Hu & Xu, 2022). Saad et al. (2021, 6) define firm resilience as: 'the firm's adaptability to disruptions, growth (positive performance), and ability to seize the business opportunity amid a challenging business environment.' The authors point out that core capabilities (i.e., flexibility, growth, and seizure of opportunities) also include the concept's operative and dynamic features. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure the development of SMEs to make them more resilient. The goal of action is to build capacity to a higher level. Zighan and Ruel (2023) thus emphasise that ensuring firms' continuous improvement increases short- and long-term resilience. Therefore, resilience can be transformed into tangible working constructs for firms in visualising and making decisions about risks, adapting, absorbing changes, and prevailing over time. The concept of hotel firms' growth is essential because it strengthens SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).

### **Crisis hotels management measures**

Crisis management in the hotel industry encompasses a range of comprehensive measures to identify, assess, and respond to potential crises, particularly those arising from various health conditions. These measures consist of proactive and reactive strategies that hotels can adopt to minimise the impact of disruptions and ensure the continuity of their business operations (Le & Phi, 2021; Pforr & Hosie, 2008).

Proactive crisis management involves implementing preventive measures to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks in the hotel (Pforr & Hosie, 2008). It includes establishing sound health and safety protocols, such as regular sanitation and disinfection procedures, implementing strict hygiene practices, and training staff on disease prevention and response protocols. In addition, proactive crisis management includes conducting risk assessments, monitoring global health trends, and being informed about emerging diseases to anticipate potential threats and take appropriate preventive measures (Lai & Wong, 2020). Reactive crisis management focuses on how hotels respond during a disease outbreak (Çoban & Özel, 2022). Effective communication with guests, employees, and competent authorities is crucial. Hotels should establish clear lines of communication, including designated spokespersons, to disseminate accurate and timely information, address concerns, and guide guests and employees (Chalupa et al., 2021). In addition, hotels must establish flexible cancellation policies, adopt guest tracking systems, and work closely with local health authorities to implement necessary quarantine or isolation measures (Chan et al., 2021).

The role of crisis management does not end with implementing processes to prevent the spread of infection (Sasangohar et al., 2020). Because its important, if not critical, function is also to prepare strategies and changes to business models that will ensure recovery from the crisis and strengthen resilience (Liu-Lastres & Cahyanto, 2023). Hotels must implement specific measures to facilitate recovery and increase their ability to withstand future crises (Ho & Law, 2023). The following are the key actions that hotels can undertake to promote recovery and resilience:

- *Assessing and adapting*: conduct a thorough assessment of the crisis's impact on the hotel's operations, financials, and reputation (Nhamo et al., 2020). This evaluation will help identify areas requiring immediate attention and guide decision-making. Use the findings to adapt and update crisis management plans, incorporating lessons learned from the crisis to enhance future resilience (Ghaderi et al., 2022).
- *Financial Planning and Resource Management*: develop a robust financial recovery plan that includes cost-saving measures, revenue generation strategies, and contingency funds for future crises (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2021). Prioritise expenses based on their importance and potential impact on recovery efforts (Lai & Wong, 2020). Efficient resource management is crucial during recovery to ensure optimal utilisation of available resources (Agarwal, 2021).
- *Marketing and Communication*: implement targeted marketing campaigns to rebuild customer confidence and attract guests. Highlight safety measures, enhanced cleanliness protocols, and any certifications or accreditations obtained during the recovery (Tiong et al., 2021). Utilise various communication channels, such as social media, email marketing, and website updates, to inform guests about the hotel's recovery progress and any new services or offerings (Nguyen et al., 2023).
- *Guest Experience Enhancement*: focus on providing exceptional guest experiences to regain customer loyalty and trust—train staff to deliver personalised and attentive service, paying attention to guest preferences and needs. Implement feedback mechanisms, such as guest surveys, to improve services and address concerns promptly and continuously (Beverland et al., 2023).
- *Diversification of Revenue Streams*: explore new revenue streams and business opportunities to reduce dependency on a single market or segment. This could involve targeting new customer segments, expanding conference and event services, or partnering with local businesses for joint promotions or packages (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2021). Diversification can help hotels withstand future disruptions by mitigating the impact of a single crisis on their operations (Yuan et al., 2022).
- *Employee Support and Engagement*: invest in employees' well-being and professional development to build a resilient workforce (He et al., 2019). Provide training on crisis management, health and safety protocols, and stress management (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Foster open communication channels to address employee concerns and encourage them to contribute ideas for recovery and resilience (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2021; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021).
- *Collaborations and Partnerships*: form strategic alliances with industry stakeholders, such as tourism boards, travel agencies, and local businesses. Joint efforts can generate synergies, promote destination recovery, and strengthen the hotel's position in the tourist market (Peiró-Signes et al., 2015). Collaborations may

include joint marketing campaigns, shared resources, or coordinated crisis response plans (Filimonau & De Coteau, 2020).

- *Continuous Monitoring and Preparedness*: maintain a proactive approach to crisis management by continuously monitoring global health trends, emerging risks, and regulatory changes (Lai & Wong, 2020). Stay informed about industry best practices and participate in relevant training programs or conferences. Update crisis management plans regularly to reflect new knowledge and ensure preparedness for future crises (Verma & Gustafsson, 2020).
- *Technology adoption*: embrace solutions that enhance operational efficiency, guest experiences, and crisis response capabilities (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). This may include contactless check-in/out systems, mobile apps for communication and service requests, and advanced data analytics for demand forecasting and resource allocation (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2022).
- *Sustainability and environmental considerations*: incorporate sustainability practices into hotel operations to promote long-term resilience (Chen et al., 2022). This includes adopting energy-efficient measures, reducing waste, and supporting local communities and smart ecosystems (Buhalis et al., 2023)—emphasising sustainable marketing practices to attract environmentally conscious guests.

By implementing these measures, hotels can effectively recover from crises, build resilience, and position themselves for long-term success. Crisis management should be an ongoing process, with continuous evaluation and adaptation to address evolving challenges and ensure the sustainability of the hotel industry (Sharma et al., 2022). As part of crisis management, there are changes in strategies and business models. We present the key meanings of business models, business model innovation, and the differences between business models and strategies.

### **Hotel industry measures for recovery, resilience, and sustainable growth**

Covid-19 affected the business conditions of most tourism firms, and the hotel industry was no exception. If we look at hotel firms, the pandemic has increased organisational inefficiencies. According to French and Bell (1999), organisational inefficiencies arise at the individual level and in organisational processes (communication patterns, ways of setting goals, making decisions, resolving conflicts, leadership, and organisational learning). The pandemic deepened the otherwise structural tourism problems, reflected in below-average added value, personnel and quality deficits. In the medium and long term, this can hinder the recovery and preservation of the industry's competitiveness and, of course, the hotel industry within it (de Vries et al., 2021). If we look at the hotel industry's response to recovery measures, we see that the answer to the pandemic requires a two-step strategy (Li et al., 2022). In the first step, we distinguish between short-term measures for recovery and reaching markets from long-term elimination of structural problems and strengthening of resilience (Hynes et al., 2022). In the period between and after the pandemic (when the hotel industry had to be prepared for a future crisis), hotel firms began to formulate customised strategies for products and (macro) destinations (Huang et al., 2023). It is necessary to be aware that the success of adapting to the new normal will depend on the well-thought-out direction of further incentives and the innovation, boldness and efficiency of moves towards an even more sustainable and

digitally oriented operation of the hotel industry. During the pandemic, hotels introduced strategies as part of changes to their business models (Rapaccini et al., 2020), which they supplement in the period after the pandemic is over. These measures will significantly reduce future disease risks (Rajić et al., 2023). During the pandemic period and after, the hotels did the following:

- Improvement of health and safety measures. The key objective is to ensure guests' and employees' health and safety (Sharma et al., 2021). To this day, cleaning protocols have been improved, the frequency of disinfection has increased, and new technological solutions have been introduced, such as contactless check-in/check-out, digital room keys, chatbots and robots—all to reduce physical contact (Aguiar-Castillo et al., 2021).
- Change in operational procedures. The hotel management had to implement operational adjustments, thus aligning the operation following the capacity limitations and social distancing guidelines (Alonso et al., 2022). I.e. in hotels, there was a transformation of common areas, distance measures in restaurants and bars, and restrictions on the number of guests in elevators or fitness centres (Arica et al., 2023).
- Prepare flexible cancellation policies that eliminate uncertainty and limit travel. The flexibility of cancellation policies allows guests to change or cancel a reservation with minimal change costs, resulting in greater peace of mind (Chanyasak et al., 2022).
- Becoming aware of remote work and extended stay is important in accelerated digitisation and the limitation of social contacts (Di Marino et al., 2023). There has been an increase in the number of people working remotely. This trend is also growing in the post-pandemic period, and individual hotels have therefore adapted their offer and created the so-called remote work packages that include an extension of stay (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). To this end, hotels have offered guests benefits, including high-speed internet and customised workspaces. In this way, hotels want to attract a new structure of guests, the so-called digital nomads, looking for alternative work and living environments (Pacheco & Azevedo, 2023).
- Emphasis on local and domestic markets and sustainable policies: it is worth mentioning that during international travel restrictions, the focus was placed on regional tourism (domestic demand) and local attractions (Panzer-Krause, 2022). In the post-pandemic period, accepting this offer of a domestic environment as a competitive advantage is necessary, which provides the guest with an authentic experience (Afrić Rakitovac & Urošević, 2023). Because guests increasingly seek genuine and personal contact with local culture and community, COVID-19 has brought greater awareness of personal well-being and environmental sustainability. Thus, sustainable services and products are coming to the forefront of guest demand after the pandemic (Dang-Van et al., 2023). For this purpose, the hotel management must provide a strategy of sustainable development, which tailors both practices of food procurement and processing as well as the entire facility maintenance protocol and care for the well-being of guests and the relationship with the local community (Elkhwesky et al., 2022). They cooperate with local food producers, which includes selecting local and seasonal products of the highest quality. The sustainable effects of the efforts are reflected in shorter supply chains (no middlemen) and a smaller

carbon footprint while stimulating the small local economy (Meuwissen et al., 2021). It is also important that hotels promote the surrounding locally owned restaurants, activities and services to their guests. It is also important for hotels to take care of reducing waste, reducing water consumption, taking measures to reduce energy consumption and having a vision for a holistic reduction of the environmental impact (Abdelhady, 2023).

- Begin with preparing measures to recruit personnel due to the increased outflow of personnel from tourism during the pandemic and the actual decrease in the interest of young people in pursuing professions in the field of tourism and hospitality (Bardukova, 2022). It is necessary to provide: (i) scholarships for deficit professions. Thus, in addition to the secondary vocational education program in gastronomy and hotel services (including apprenticeship), following the state of the labour market, it is also necessary to include education programs in the field of tourism at all other levels (middle, higher, high), including new programs that develop; (ii) in parallel with measures for the activation and development of local personnel, due to the demographic situation, it is necessary to increase flexibility and simplify the mechanisms for recruiting foreign labour, especially seasonal ones (Chen, 2022).
- Begin with the diversifying revenue streams that involve exploring alternative revenue streams, including partnering with local businesses to create new packages and promotions (Balasubramanian & Hanafiah, 2022).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on conducting an investigative or exploratory case study (Yin, 2012) of a relatively new field, problem, or phenomenon. Given the lack of empirical research in this field, the research is designed as a qualitative case study (Stake, 2013), where the case is “the impact of Covid-19 crisis on hotel industry organisational changes and future development in Opatija Riviera”. It is widely used in social sciences and is particularly useful in practice-oriented fields (management, public administration). A case study helps us gain new insights when we want to answer the “how” and “why” questions; when we cannot influence the behaviour of those involved in the study; when we also want to capture the circumstances in context because we believe they are important for exploring the phenomenon within the survey, or when we cannot draw clear boundaries between phenomenon and context (Yin, 2012).

As part of the research, we conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews with hotel managers and tourism and hospitality consultants who are professionally connected with the Opatija Riviera. The interviews were prepared from 15<sup>th</sup> April until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The authors jointly developed the research design and triangulated the questionnaire design and analysis in their previous research. Face-to-face open-questioning interviews were conducted in the study. The interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes. According to Patton (2002), only these offer more flexibility and freedom during the conversation. The purposive sample had to be relevant to our research questions (Engel & Schutte, 2005). For this purpose, we chose a sample of managers and experts to deepen the knowledge about the issue of the impact of Covid-19 on changes in the hotel business because the knowledge and experience gathered will be useful in new challenges related to disease risks and other risks that can potentially threaten tourism, and hotel industry

in the future. For this purpose, even today, in the first phase of the post-pandemic period, it is necessary to prepare strategies and develop business models that will influence the reduction of the consequences of potential future risks. All the interviewees agreed with the publishing of the content in the article. Their identity is not revealed in the study. Data on the respondents are selected in Table 1. All interviews were digitally recorded using a mobile phone. In the next step, the interviews were transcribed. When all the data were collected and analysed, we sent them to the respondents and asked them for corrections or comments.

**Table 1.** Respondents' demographical data

Demography		Frequency
Gender	Male	9
	Female	5
Age group	Up to 20	0
	21-30	0
	31-40	4
	41-50	8
	Above 50	2
Education level	Bachelor's degree	9
	Master of Arts	3
	PhD	2
Occupation	Senior hotel manager	9
	Hotel board member	2
	Consultant	2
	Researcher	1

These comments were taken into account in the final interpretation of the data. We analysed and interpreted the collected data based on the narrative analysis. We followed a systematic approach that included the following steps (Richmond, 2002): (i) review of interviews and selection of important information; (ii) we defined topics based on keywords; (iii) coding the data allowed us to capture the essence of each theme; (iv) data analysis allows us to select important findings, contradictions, different patterns and variations; (v) data interpretation and connection to existing theories; (vi) validation of narrative based on feedback from respondents. Qualitative data were quantified for data interpretation, and in vivo evidence citations were added (Langley, 2012). Non-numerical review and interpretation lend themselves to processing large amounts of unstructured primary data to explore underlying meaning, perception, reflection and relational patterns (Babbie, 2007). The Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was chosen for analysing the collected data. The TCA enables to define the concepts and theoretical formulations. QDA Miner software was used for the TCA of qualitative data by generating several coding references and word clouds (see Figure 1). According to Stirling (2001), TCA's main advantage is its ability to reveal silent themes throughout the data at various points. As shown in Table 2, 12 themes have emerged from individual interviews.



**Figure 1.** Graphical representation of the results: QDA Miner

**Table 2.** Word frequency for respondents’ association with Covid-19 crisis: QDA Miner

Word	Frequency	Rate per 10K
Health	79	78,2
Firm (hotel)	69	68,3
Employees	57	56,5
Business	53	52,5
Tourists (guests)	50	49,5
Measures	47	46,5
Opatija Riviera (tourism microregion)	44	43,6
Covid	39	38,6
Safety	31	30,7
Management	24	23,8
Investments	17	16,8
Quality	17	16,8

The following topics appear most often in the respondents’ interviews: health, firm (hotel), employees, business, tourists (guests), measures, Opatija Riviera (tourism micro-region), Covid, safety, management, investments, and quality.

### RESULTS

Based on the analysis of the interviews, we combined certain topics proposed by QDA Miner based on their content similarity (for example, Covid-19 was combined with the topics of health, employees, Opatija Riviera, safety, management, investments, and quality). In this way, seven themes were identified. The key themes are shown in Table 3. They are described below, and individual interviewee quotes are added.

**Table 3.** Interview themes

Sr. No.	Main themes	Sub-themes	Concepts
1	Health	Education, employees, measures, guests, Covid-19, hygiene, safety	implementing adequate hygiene measures; education safety; preserving the general level of health of all stakeholders in the process
2	Employees	Education, safety, work, workforce	Implementation of protection measures and showing openness to new information and knowledge; the importance of employee health and their protection at the workplace; an increase of material rights and paying monetary rewards to full-time and seasonal workers; employee benefits (e.g., hot meals for all employees); talent management and career development.
3	Opatija Riviera	Cooperation, community, Covid-19, development, destination, safety, tourists	Preparing a strategic shift in tourism development - further improvements and upgrading of tourist products and experiences; importance of cooperation between all stakeholders on the Opatija Riviera; safe destination.
4	Safety	Health, measures, guests, employees, destination, pandemic, risk	The current level of security for tourists staying on the Opatija Riviera is very high; no security risks (disease, terrorism, robberies) have been recorded; the Opatija Riviera, due to its proximity, pleasant climate, clean air and sea and certainly a high level of safety can be among the main destinations for tourists to visit on the Adriatic and beyond; to prevent new outbreaks, it is necessary to properly and regularly maintain a high level of hygiene in the facilities, as well as through training of staff and guests.
5	Management	Data, business, employees, hotel, responsible, services, stakeholders, strategic, sustainability, risk	Risk management; principles of socially responsible business; further promotion of the creation of added value and instil confidence in the stakeholders, inflationary trends.
6	Investments	Energy improvement, development, hotel, future, services	Investments in digital transformation and sustainability projects; the importance of guest experience.
7	Quality	Business, Covid-19, hotel, services, standards	Hotels provided Covid-19 prevention measures intending to enable the quality of services; in the post-pandemic period, hotels strive for continuous improvement in the quality of services, which is also positively influenced by the constant improvement and increase in the efficiency of energy use; the importance of adapting the daily diet to the needs of modern people using the HACCP, halal, and kosher quality systems.

### Theme 1: Health

According to the respondents, Croatia is safe in terms of health to the extent that people are aware of their responsibility for their health through their lifestyle. Health is indirectly considered only by implementing adequate hygiene measures in different parts of the organisation. As far as employees are concerned, there are certain guidelines on



safety at work, which indirectly concern health. As far as the guests are concerned, and if we are not discussing hygiene - no. Namely, health is a very individual thing that consists of several factors, and health is entirely the responsibility of each individual and not any organisation. Responders so exposed:

*„It's hard to be smart in this situation. The best preservation is for the guest to take care of himself. We, as hotel workers, primarily me as the director, make sure that we enable all disinfection, that means washing clothes with special disinfectant detergents, the rooms are aired every day, we have a special climate, ventilation systems, I don't know what they are called, but to kill Covid-19, and everything else being said, the guests should take care of themselves, keep some distance. Everyone is treated individually. Someone is complying. Today, masks are no longer visible. Yesterday a group of ten Spaniards came to me, all wearing masks. I haven't seen anyone wearing a mask in the last two months.“*

The issue of education on disease prevention in hotels was also highlighted. Thus, the interviewees pointed out:

*„Although my primary interest is related to the academic community, my job allows me to be in constant contact with the hotels. As part of this cooperation, numerous programs are created, primarily education for employees and tourists related to increasing the offer quality, safety and preserving the general level of health of all stakeholders in the process.“*

## **Theme 2: Employees**

The interviewees highlighted the importance of protecting workers from infections and educating employees on this topic. The employees must propose introducing new measures and adopting workplace health protection policies to the hotel management. We highlight a few quotes that touch on the issue of hotel employees and otherwise more or less overlap with topic 1, i.e., health:

*„According to my knowledge, employees in hotel firms participated mostly in implementing protection measures and showed openness to new information and knowledge provided to them on that occasion. Unfortunately, some employees were not interested in actively participating in implementing or enforcing policies, especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees expressed dissatisfaction under the influence of social networks, unverified information, and supporters of conspiracy theories. According to my knowledge, the hotel management has done everything to ensure that they also respect the specified parameters and get involved in implementing safety and health measures. To strengthen the awareness of the employees, but also of the guests of our facilities, we held, in cooperation with hoteliers, several panels where the importance of preserving health, safety and general reliability of our firm in the tourist market was discussed.“*

In addition to the importance of employee health and their protection at the workplace, the managers also highlighted the importance of ensuring a quality workforce, which hotels need to continue to provide year-round quality services and guest satisfaction. Employees ensure stability, quality, and long-term sustainable growth. For this purpose,

the hotel owners and management must agree with the employee unions on increasing material rights and paying monetary rewards to full-time and seasonal workers.

For a hotel firm, one of the primary goals of the firm's operations must be to ensure employee satisfaction. For this purpose, it must provide them with material, working and temporary living conditions because only satisfied employees will ensure high service quality for guests. As one of the managers says:

*“In addition to the commitment to respect all legal requirements and internal standards for protecting the health and safety of employees, contractual partners and guests, providing additional employee benefits (i.e., hot meals for all employees), talent management and career development, our firm continuously invests in facilities for accommodation of seasonal workers.”*

### **Theme 3: Opatija Riviera**

The vision of the Opatija Riviera is to position itself as one of the best Mediterranean tourism micro-regions. However, this is why the tourism micro-region needs a strategic shift in tourism development, which will bring further improvements and upgrading of tourist products and experiences in the final phase. To this end, tourism firms must speed up internal reorganisation processes, improve business models, renovate existing capacities, and add new ones in line with competitive trends and guest demands. In Croatia as well, Covid-19 harmed all economic and tourist flows, and thus the cash flow of tourism firms on the Opatija Riviera. Therefore, in the last three years, there has been a decrease in the volume of planned investments compared to the original expectations and developmental plans. However, the trends in 2023 show that tourism firms on the Opatija Riviera have begun to realise the importance of a strategy to stimulate growth and create new added value. Thus, both acquisitions and reorganisation processes took place as the first step towards building the foundations for sustainable investments, which also includes taking care of talent and introducing innovative solutions, which will enable the marketing of services with high added value and the recognition of the tourism micro-region itself as an international brand. A great advantage of the Opatija Riviera is its partial natural protection from tourist disturbances due to its convenient location and the geographical location of the tourism micro-region, which is primarily a traditional car tourism micro-region of the most important tourism generating markets (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Italy, Serbia). It is also important for the tourism micro-region that, in the past, there has been good integration and cooperation between all stakeholders. Here, it is worth mentioning the role of the local community and the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management (which is situated in Opatija Riviera), which plays an important role in preparing tourism micro-region development strategies and caring for the development of personnel needed by tourism firms on the Opatija Riviera and beyond. Thus, one of the interviewees emphasised the importance of the stakeholders of the tourism micro-region during the pandemic and the role of the faculties within the University of Rijeka:

*“In my opinion, the management of the Opatija Riviera acted responsibly from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and applied all the recommendations to preserve the health of tourists and employees who live and work in our tourism micro-region. The*

*destination management regularly informed all stakeholders about the protection measures implemented and ways to improve the existing health protection system. I hope that with our activities, we have also contributed to the success of preserving the health and perception of the Opatija Riviera as a safe tourism micro-region in the time of Covid-19, which, among other things, is shown by the successful tourism data achieved during the past three pandemic years.*

*Our cooperation with all stakeholders on the Opatija Riviera was excellent from the beginning, so we coordinated health protection measures and tried to provide our employees with the best protection. We actively participated in programs to promote health protection. We created workshops and educational seminars for stakeholders in tourism so that everyone was aware of the risks and ways to prevent the spread of Covid-19 while we tried to present additional health risks. Our study program, dedicated to health and designed in cooperation with the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka, also testifies that we think about health actively and systematically.”*

#### **Theme 4: Safety**

The current level of security for tourists staying on the Opatija Riviera is very high, as evidenced by the large number of tourists already in our tourism micro-region, and no security risks have been recorded. However, stakeholders must not be deceived and think security, health, or other crises cannot happen here. The awareness of possible future crises gives destination stakeholders a chance for development and an opportunity to be faster and better and to create security policies that will not threaten any negative consequences. For the modern tourist, safety is the basis for deciding on choosing a certain destination, and the interviewers' opinion is that the Opatija Riviera, due to its proximity, pleasant climate, clean air and sea, and certainly a high level of safety, can be among the main tourism micro-regions for tourists to visit on the Adriatic and beyond. Interviewers exposed:

*„Security on the Opatija Riviera is at a high and enviable level. In cooperation with the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Croatia, the destination management must pay further attention to preserving security, public order and peace in the tourism micro-region of Opatija (Riviera). Regarding Covid-19, it is necessary to ensure additional general activities with the Department of Public Health Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, educate visitors and employees, and ensure a greater number of places for free testing of tourists. The proposal is to introduce the so-called service at the tourism micro-region level. Community police officers who, through educational activities for all stakeholders in the tourism micro-region, will contribute to increasing security, both general and health, by their very presence. As for the scientific and educational segment, there is constant and active cooperation between the management of the tourism micro-region Opatija and the scientific and professional community.“*

*„Although currently the situation with Covid-19 is much more favourable than last year and the level of safety is extremely high, in general, in my opinion, it can be considered a medium level of security because we cannot claim with complete certainty that some bottom layer of Covid-19 will not appear or some other epidemics/pandemics that may hit us in the future. However, hoteliers can achieve this by properly and regularly maintaining a high level of hygiene in the facilities, as well as through training of staff and guests.“*

*„Well, we coped like everyone else, it wasn't easy, but we tried to move forward day by day. Thank God there were not many infected employees here, which means that we complied as much as we could and as much as it allowed in the house, and now, outside the house, who acted how, remains an enigma. And as far as tourism is concerned, we cooperated very well with the participants of the tourism micro-region. The tourist board was also available, so here we are; we fought like everyone else, as they say.“*

### **Theme 5: Management**

The interviewees pointed out that their hotel firms are exposed to many risks in their daily operations. Therefore, one of the main goals of management is to take care of risk management and further promote the creation of added value and instil confidence in the stakeholders. During the pandemic, intending to reduce the risk of disease, hotels increased the policy of active management to adapt the business to the pandemic's effects and aim for an increase in demand. For this purpose, there was an adjustment to the daily prices of tourist facilities and the creation of packages that included additional services, which certainly contributed to the realisation of a significant increase in the average daily expenses in the high season. The management of the hotel firm is also aware of the political risk of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and, based on the available facts, knowledge, and circumstances, constantly assesses all possible negative impacts on business and implements all measures intending to minimise negative aspects of the firm. The interviewees also point out the inflationary trends, which affect the too-rapid growth of prices of basic products and energy because only the limitation of inflation will enable tourism to gain accelerated business empowerment and ensure the impact of multiplier effects of the recovery on the national economy as well, while at the same time encouraging investments in key business resources (mainly workforce and assets).

The interviewees also highlighted the importance of the principles of socially responsible business. Thus, they highlighted the importance of zero tolerance for corruption, protection of the privacy of employees, guests and partners, no discrimination against employees or guests, environmental programs to decrease pollution and cooperation with stakeholders in developing the local community.

### **Theme 6: Investments**

Soon after COVID-19 appeared in Croatia, hoteliers promptly introduced strict cost control, primarily by reducing the cost of employees, closing the hotels and/or postponing capital investments. Interviewees exposed that 2022 began with preparing investments in digital transformation and sustainability projects, which is crucial for further development, especially in Opatija Riviera. As the interviewees point out, within the investment cycle, they focus on the “new” guest who wants to experience travel and interaction with nature. At the same time, the hotel industry has become a trend of changing hotel architecture in terms of larger spaces, more open spaces, spacing, etc. Investments in services, technologies, and infrastructure must be directed to the needs and demands of the modern guest (for example, enabling the guest to perform work from the hotel). Thus, it will be possible to develop a new way of doing business that puts the guest first. The hotel industry must become more of a service industry that is not product-

oriented but service-oriented. Instead of the previous 4Ps (product, place, price and promotion), marketing activities should include additional 3Ps: people, processes, physical evidence and create a virtual community through activities on social networks. For hotels, innovating business models are increasingly coming to the fore. According to Martin-Rios and Ciobanu (2019), only 19% of hotel organisations follow an intensive innovation strategy in formulating a business model. It is noticeable that there is a strong positive relationship between business model innovations and all performance indicators, except the average bed occupancy rate because seasonal fluctuations and external socio-economic factors have important economic implications for hotels (Martin-Rios & Ciobanu, 2019).

### **Theme 7: Quality**

The interviewees pointed out that during the pandemic, their hotels improved the quality of the guests' well-being and ensured the quality of the services. They implemented activities that, in addition to general information about the spread of Covid-19 and prevention measures, also included the implementation of crisis procedures. Occurrence and control of the reach of respiratory viruses, limitation of the number of seats in catering establishments following prescribed measures, mandatory wearing of masks by all employees in contact with guests, possibility of testing guests and delivery of results, required temperature measurement of employees and constant disinfection of all public spaces and accommodation units, including additional disinfection measures after guest departure (which they adhere to even in the post-pandemic period).

In the post-pandemic period, according to the interviewees, hotel firms strive for continuous improvement in the quality of services, which is also positively influenced by the constant improvement and increase in the efficiency of energy use (electricity, heating oil, gas, water) and the procurement of energy-efficient products and services. In the context of quality assurance, the interviewees mentioned the importance of adapting the daily diet to the needs of modern people using the HACCP, halal, and kosher quality systems.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Effective crisis management is crucial for protecting the well-being of guests, employees, and the overall reputation of hotels. The focus should be identifying key strategies and practices hotels can employ to navigate crises effectively (Chanyasak et al., 2022). The emergence of diseases like the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for hotels to have robust crisis management plans (Le & Phi, 2021).

The hotel industry is particularly vulnerable due to its characteristics, such as large numbers of people congregating in common areas and a constant influx of guests from different regions (Le, Phi & Le 2021). As a result, hotels must be prepared to respond swiftly, efficiently, and successfully to reduce risks and protect the health and safety of all stakeholders (Permatasari & Mahyuni, 2022; Sharma et al., 2021).

When a hotel firm is exposed to risks in times of crisis or challenging circumstances, it must adapt or completely change its business models to survive and recover and ensure resilience and sustainable growth (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic hotel industry was also dealing with climate change, natural disasters, digital and green transformation, staff shortages, and other risks (e.g., liquidity risk). It is so important that hotel firms implement crisis approaches and business models (Hao & Chon, 2022).

For this reason, during the pandemic period, the hotels on the Opatija Riviera made several strategic decisions in the framework of which they changed their business models and strategies with the aim not only of the hotels surviving the crisis but also of recovering, becoming resistant to disruptions, and enabling further sustainable growth. During the pandemic, hotel management dealt with the issue of reducing the risk of Covid-19. For this purpose, it had to adopt strategic guidelines for providing health protection to its employees and guests. To decrease business risks and their consequences, hotel management after the year 2000 focused on: (i) cost optimisation, which affects the increase of financial resilience. To this end, management rationalises operations, introduces a business model of lean management, reduces overhead costs and optimises costs related to external suppliers (Crepi et al., 2021); (ii) diversification of income streams during crises can mitigate risk and reduce dependence on a single source (alternative options for monetising assets, introduce new services/products, and change supply chain management (new suppliers, shorter delivery routes, new markets for finding guests, etc.) (Alkier, Milošić & Roblek, 2023; Strange, 2020); (iii) crisis communication with stakeholders, because maintaining good relations with stakeholders is considered to be of key importance in times of crisis (Ritchie, 2004); (iv) Digital transformation, because crises and the Covid-19 crisis were no exception, sped up the introduction of digital solutions in hotel operations (Sharma, Thomas & Paul, 2021); (v) cooperation (formation of consortia and acquisitions as a form of ownership takeover) enables hotels (specially hotel chains) and other tourism firms to acquire the human resources they lack, gain new professional skills, access new segments of guests and suppliers, and new innovative solutions (Konovalova et al., 2020); (vi) focusing on the main services that guests demand the most or to satisfy critical needs. For this purpose, the management has the opportunity to transform the offer, change existing resources or introduce solutions that are intended to specifically address the emerging demands of guests during the crisis (the need for sustainable and green solutions) (Mzembe et al., 2021); (vii) use of government support measures - for business liquidity and keeping the current level of headcount which almost all hotel companies used (González-Torres et al., 2021); (viii) scenario planning and risk management because crisis business models include robust scenario planning and risk management (Sax & Andersen, 2019); (ix) sustainable practices and social responsibility because the time of crisis raises the awareness and importance of sustainable business models and social responsibility. The hotel industry thus strives to promote socially responsible business concerning key stakeholders with whom hotels maintain continuous communication. The strategies of hotel firms are aimed at the sustainable development (e.g., circular economy, waste management, sharing economy, reducing the consumption of energy and natural resources, sustainable architecture) of the tourism micro-region and the support of the

local community, as well as care for the protection of the environment, the satisfaction of employees and guests (Camilleri, 2022).

The hotel industry also takes care of the sustainable development of the local community. Thus, it invests in the construction of sustainable tourist infrastructure and provides financial support for cultural, gastronomic, educational and entertainment programs, projects and initiatives that improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourism micro-region and contribute to the extension of the tourist season and thus nurturing the cultural identity and values of the local community (Bacari et al., 2021; Liang, T. C., & Wong, 2020). As part of the investments, hotels also want to connect better with the local community and provide their guests with a better experience. Hotels in the Opatija Riviera survived the Covid-19 crisis relatively successfully. The tourism micro-region's proximity to the main markets, from which mainly car guests come, helped significantly. For guests who arrived at a tourism micro-region during the pandemic, all stakeholders in the tourism micro-region needed to decide on appropriate hygiene and safety measures. The tourism micro-region is also attractive for guests due to the relatively mild climate and low risks of natural disasters, environmental disasters, terrorism and robberies.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that 2022 was the first post-pandemic year in which hotel companies operated normally and restarted the investment cycle. We can conclude that, in the post-pandemic period, hotels focus mainly on adapting existing crisis business models. Their improvement is primarily aimed at ensuring a long-term sustainable concept of growth and future development of both hotels and the tourism micro-region itself. In their current operations, hotels focus on achieving a further increase in the level of service quality and guest satisfaction. To this end, they started a new investment program focusing on (i) optimal positioning, segmentation, and development of the tourism portfolio, prioritising year-round operations, ii) definition and realising long-term strategic business goals, iii) corporate management, culture and climate. The aforementioned active approach includes the utilisation of existing and the creation of additional expertise in the development of the tourism portfolio and the management of hotel capacities to actively create added value for all stakeholders of hotel companies (owners, creditors, local communities and tourism micro-regions, business partners and employees).

### **Practical implications**

It is important to note that specific changes in business models differ between hotels, depending on their size, location (city, rural environment), target market and existing infrastructure. It should be emphasised that the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of new digital technologies (e.g. localised guest services, IoT, mobile app check-ins, contactless payments, rich guest data and analytics, Cloud PMS, the revenue management system), innovative approaches (smart rooms that enable lower energy and water consumption smart and source locally produced, sustainable food for restaurants) and innovative strategies that satisfied guests' and evolving needs and expectations in a post-Covid world. The pandemic has intensified the effects of disruption, which requires greater flexibility in business strategies. For this purpose, management must adapt

strategies more often. Hotel firms must realise that radical changes need to be made before they are forced to do so by disruptions in the external business environment and competitors. In the post-pandemic period, hotels must adopt business models to consider new executive management functions, focusing on resilience and growth, business transformation and sustainable development. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly important that strategies treat all stakeholders equally, and for successful business in an uncertain future, hotels must also form partnerships with competitors. It is expected that in certain future, management teams will have to consider a wider range of stakeholders that will influence their strategy, accept the fact that ecosystems and competitive relationships are changing at an increasingly rapid pace, include new leadership positions that will influence strategy formation, and through reorganisation, improve the firms' speed and agility to keep up with changes in strategy.

### **Study limitations and future research proposals**

A possible limitation of the research is its geographical limitation and the homogeneity of the interviewees. In addition, only a qualitative survey was conducted, covering fewer respondents. In the future, it will be necessary to conduct studies in the hotel industry following their changes and adaptation of business models, risks, innovation, and relations with internal and external stakeholders. In addition, it will be essential to implement quantitative approaches that illustrate complementary aspects but require a correspondingly larger number of respondents. Research should be carried out throughout the country and compared with the countries (tourism micro-regions) with the biggest competitors.

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## TOURIST'S PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ON BEACHES OF OPATIJA RIVIERA

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the relevance of monitoring how tourists perceive safety during their stay on beaches of Opatija Riviera. The authors conducted empirical research by collecting primary data with the use of a structured questionnaire. A 5-point Likert Scale was used. The data was analysed with the use of statistical package SPSS 21, and descriptive statistics and T-test were used. Empirical findings indicate the necessity for improvements considering that unsatisfactory results were determined for health and sanitation and tourist's protection. The results for level of concern on experiencing potential crime, harassment and terrorist crime during their stay on a beach indicate that tourists feel rather safe during their stay on a beach. Based on the findings, suggestions for improvement were stated.

**Key words:** safety, beach, perception, Opatija Riviera.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The world is faced on daily basis with numerous safety challenges that have a tremendous impact on world economy (instability of world regions, illegal migrations, use of various types of weapons of mass destruction, occurrence of terrorist attacks, criminal activities, natural hazards, etc.), which is why tourist destinations are searching the best possible way of ensuring the highest level of safety for their tourists and domestic population, and at the same time trying to profile themselves as safe on the tourist market. Safety is one of the most important factors of a tourist's decision making process when choosing a holiday destination (Vučenović, 2013) and needs to be improved continuously, which is something that numerous world destinations are focused on. Opatija Riviera is a destination which has been cherishing its tourist tradition for decades and aiming to develop its tourist offer according to the world trends to attract tourists with high purchasing power. When observing the structure of its tourist product, over the years specific forms of tourism were significantly developed, like health tourism, nautical tourism, and business tourism. Bathing tourism still participates the most in the

tourist product, considering that Opatija Riviera achieves most of its tourist turnover in the summer period. During the season beaches are visited by a high number of tourists, due to which destination stakeholders are obligated not only to satisfy visitor's demand for quality and diversity of beach facilities in the best possible way (Peña-Alonso et al., 2018), but also to enable them maximum level of safety while being there. In order to be able to achieve that, it is crucial to observe how tourists evaluate and perceive its safety. Until now no research was made towards determining how tourists perceive safety during their stay on Opatija Riviera beaches, which is the reason why the authors decided to conduct the evaluation of the current state. The purpose of this paper is to determine tourist's attitudes in terms of safety during their stay at the beaches of the Opatija Riviera, one of the Croatian tourist destinations with the longest tourist tradition.

## **BATHING TOURISM AND SAFETY-THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Safety and security have been of significant importance in human society for a significant amount of time. World is continuously being faced with multiple instabilities among which global risks and threats are strongly represented, influencing countries, institutions, and human population. Instabilities and insecurities tremendously influence economy and social relations on world level. When discussing the economy, and tourism industry in particular, safety and security were always considered as one of the most important preconditions for its successful and competitive tourism development. Destinations not being capable to guarantee safety for their tourists will result in serious consequences for the local population, as well as the state's economy. Today safety and security are being considered as one of the key factors when choosing a holiday destination. If destinations fail to ensure safety and security, they will be perceived as risky and unreliable, which will restrict tourists to visit, which will consequently affect the tourism competitiveness globally (Velho Gouveia, 2020).

Beach or Bathing tourism represents a form of classical 3S tourist offer which combines Sun, Sea and Sand, and as such has been registering the largest and fastest growth in the world for decades (Sivadasan, 2018). During their stay in a destination, tourists relax in the sun (passive holiday) or engage in recreational activities like swimming, fishing, playing volleyball, etc. This form of tourist offer today represents an important contributor to the achievement of a higher GDP of many world destinations considering that millions of tourists tend to travel motivated precisely by the previously stated motives (Alves et al., 2014). When choosing their holiday destination, tourists pay attention to the beach development in terms of its functionality, comfort, user-friendliness of the beach facilities, but also to the safety, considering that they can be faced with various dangers during their stay at the beach (Breton et al., 1996). Health and safety of tourists in water-based environments is of significant importance due to the incidents that can occur in water and on land (Wilks, 2021). Today safety on beaches is a topic of significant relevance, and as such became a topic of not many, but still various research that are focused on providing tourists the necessary information to spread the awareness about the beach safety. I.e., Warton & Brander (2017) conducted very interesting research connected to the world-famous television show called Bondi Rescue, which is based on the lifeguards employed at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. The

study examined how TV shows like this contribute to the safety awareness of beach visitors by being a potential global beach safety intervention. The authors of this research used video contents of the shows and an online survey in which global viewers of the show participated. Positive influence was registered in the results from watching the show, more precisely, tracking the show increased the awareness of the viewers about the dangers of rip currents and the relevance of swimming in the vicinity of lifeguards. 78% of the respondents stated that watching the experiences from the show improved their knowledge about the safety on the beach. Also, watching the show has proven to be extremely positive in improving awareness about the beach safety for international beach visitors who would have no other option to learn any beach safety information. Research focus is also placed on determining profile of tourists as well as their safety perception during their stay in a beach destination. The ultimate goal is to determine what is necessary to improve tourist's safety during their stay on beaches in a destination. I.e., Uebelhoer et al. (2022) focused in their research on determining the profile of tourists who visit beaches unpatrolled by lifeguards in New South Wales, the reason of their visit as well as to identify the risk factors that are connected with their behaviour and knowledge about the beach safety. The results have shown that the majority of respondents did not visit the beach frequently and had poor knowledge about the hazards of currents, did not observe safety signs onsite and despite them entered the water to bathe. In terms of their reasons of visit, the respondents emphasized the vicinity of their accommodation, as well as the interest in spending time in a beach that is quieter in relation to the crowded places. Based on the findings the authors were able to propose that in terms of beach safety interventions they will need to be extended beyond the standard of swimming between the flags since numerous beaches will remain unpatrolled for the time being. Future beach interventions in terms of safety will need to be planned according to the various demographic groups of beach visitors. Lee et al. (2017) focused in their research on determining structural relationships among service quality on beaches, level of satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and perception of safety of beach visitors. The goal of the research was to determine possibilities of improving the quality of service and safety on beaches in Korea. Research findings indicated service quality being significantly connected with the customer's satisfaction, as well as satisfaction being connected with customers revisiting intention. Also, it was determined that safety perception has a mediating effect on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention, respectively it influences their level of satisfaction and future revisit intention. The focus of Lee et al.'s research (2019) was on determining of tourist's safety perception on their visit intention by applying the extended goal-directed behavioral model. In terms of safety, the results of the empirical research have shown that the respondent's safety perception was significantly connected with their desire and intention to visit the particular beach, respectively, they consider safety as an extremely relevant factor when choosing a beach for their holiday. Preko's research (2021) was focused on observing the attitudes of migrant visitors on safety and security of Ghanaian beaches in Accra. The results of the empirical research indicated that there was a significant connection among sociodemographic characteristics of beach visitors (age of the respondents, marital status, level of education as well as their nationality) and safety and security concerns. In total, the attitudes of the respondents were quite optimistic about the beach destinations in Ghana. The research results contributed towards



determining the respondents' attitudes about safety and security on Ghanian beaches which represents a significant contribution to the destinations tourism development.

In order to be able to achieve further development of a beach tourist offer in a destination, it is mandatory to not only pay attention to the improvement of quantity and quality of beach facilities, but also to provide them the maximum level of safety and security. Safety on beaches represents the basic precondition of a success of a coastal tourist destination, due to which it is necessary to monitor beach visitors attitudes about it (Alves et al., 2014).

Opatija Riviera is a destination with a rich tourist basis on which it has been tirelessly developing its tourist offer for decades. The richness of tourist resources enabled it to develop specific forms of tourism (health tourism, nautical tourism and congress tourism), but the one that is still the most dominant is Bathing tourism. Beaches represent the basic resource for its development (Cerović et al., 2014; Zadel, 2016) and a significant attention was given to the development of diversity and quality of their facilities, to be able to attract tourists and satisfy their needs in the best possible way, to stimulate them to revisit in the future and recommend the destination to others. However, quality and diversity of beach facilities are not sufficient today for a destination to be able to achieve competitiveness on the tourist market. Particular attention has to be given to the safety of tourists during their stay. In the following chapters the authors will present the methodology, results of the empirical research and the propositions of the necessary improvements.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of this research, the authors conducted empirical research. Primary data was collected with the use of a structured questionnaire, prepared according to the methodology of Preko (2021), and a 5-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaire was prepared in Google docs form and distributed through email and Facebook. The data collection was conducted in August 2022 and analysed with the use of statistical package SPSS 21. In terms of the methods, the authors used the descriptive statistics and T-test.

## **RESULTS**

Questionnaire was tested for the purpose of this research, and Cronbach Alpha was calculated, amounting 0,797 which indicates high reliability. The following table presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1.** Gender of the respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	49	40,50
Female	72	59,50
Other, please specify	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Total	121	100,0

Source: Authors' research

The data in the previous table indicate that the female respondents dominate in the sample with 59,50%, after which follow male respondents with 40,50%. No other genders were registered within the respondent's sample.

**Table 2.** Age of the respondents

Age	N	%
up to 17	1	0,83
18-24	19	15,70
25-34	27	22,31
35-44	57	47,11
45-64	17	14,05
65+	0	0
Total	121	100,0

Source: Authors' research

When observing the age of the respondents, it is visible that the majority of the respondents belong to the age group 35-44 (47,11%), after which follow the groups 25-34 (22,31%), 18-24 (15,70%), 45-64 (14,05%). Only 0,83% respectively 1 respondent was under 18 years of age. No respondents were registered in the age group 65+.

**Table 3.** Level of education

Level of education	N	%
High School Degree or less	11	9,09
Undergraduate	24	19,83
Graduate and more	86	71,08
Total	121	100,0

Source: Authors' research

The data in table indicate that a significant majority of the respondents are highly educated; 71,08% of the respondents have a graduate degree or more, followed by the respondents with an undergraduate degree (19,83%), and only 9,09% of the respondents have a high school diploma or less.

**Table 4.** Country of origin

Country	N	%
Slovenia	28	23,14
Austria	8	6,61
Italy	7	5,78
Bosnia and Herzegovina	21	17,37
Serbia	28	23,14
Germany	5	4,13
Croatia	24	19,83
Total	121	100,0

Source: Authors' research

When observing the respondent's country of origin, we can see that the majority were from both Slovenia and Serbia (23,14%), followed by Croatia (19,83%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (17,37%), Austria(6,61%), Italy (5,78%). The least respondents were from Germany (4,13%).

**Table 5.** Employment status

Employment	N	%
Employed full time	90	74,38
Employed part time	14	11,57
Temporarily unemployed	2	1,65
Retired	0	0
Student	15	12,40
Total	121	100,0

Source: Authors' research

The data in the previous table present the respondent's employment status. The majority of them belong to the group of fully employed ones (74,38%), followed by students (12,40%), those who are employed part time (11,57%). Only 1,65% of them were temporarily unemployed.

**Table 6.** Marital status

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Unmarried/single	26	21,49
Married	44	36,36
Widowed/Widower	0	0
Separated/Divorced	2	1,65
Domestic partnership	49	40,50
Total	121	100,0

*Source: Authors' research*

According to the marital status, 40,50% of the respondents are in a domestic partnership, 36,36% are married, while 21,49 are unmarried or single. Only 1,65% are separated or divorced.

**Table 7.** Monthly income in Euro

<b>Monthly income (EURO)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
up 500.00	16	13,22
501.00 to 1,000	19	15,70
1,001 to 1,500	39	32,23
1,501 to 2,000	31	25,63
2,001 to 2,500	14	11,57
2,501 to 3,000	2	1,65
3,001 to 3,500	0	0
3,501+	0	0
Total	121	100,0

*Source: Authors' research*

The respondents possess a high purchasing power; 32,23% of them have a monthly income ranging 1,001 to 1,500 and 25,63% have 1,501 to 2,000.

**Table 8.** Monthly income in Euro

<b>Travel frequency</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Hardly	0	0
Rarely	3	2,48
Sometimes	95	78,51
Often	23	19,01
Normally	0	0
Total	121	100,0

*Source: Authors' research*

In terms of travel frequency, most of the respondents (78,51%) stated that they travel sometimes, and 19,01% travel often.

Following the authors will present tourists attitudes on safety during their stay on Opatija Riviera's beaches. The respondents were asked to express the level of satisfaction with the elements for Health and Sanitation and Tourist's protection at the Opatija Riviera beaches with the mark 1-5 (1-I am completely dissatisfied to 5-I am completely satisfied).

**Table 9.** Tourist's satisfaction with the elements for Health and Sanitation and Tourist's protection

<b>HEALTH AND SANITATION ELEMENTS</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>SD</b>
Presence of clinic on site	1,95	1,02
Availability of a First aid box	1,20	0,53
Closeness of an Ambulance	3,08	0,99
Availability of an Ambulance	3,55	1,05
Hygiene of food and beverage services	3,64	0,66
<b>Average</b>	<b>2,68</b>	<b>0,50</b>
<b>TOURISTS PROTECTION</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>SD</b>
Written safety and security policy	1,56	0,72
Presence of CCTV camera	1,26	0,59
Presence of Tourists safety and security desk	1,47	0,62
Clarity and visibility of Safety signs	1,74	0,77
Security alarms	1,36	0,59
Good lighting system at the beach	3,17	0,91
Police presence	1,79	0,81
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,77</b>	<b>0,51</b>

*Source: Authors' research*

The results for Health and Sanitation indicate that tourists show an average level of satisfaction. The highest, yet moderate result was registered for Hygiene of food and beverage services ( $\bar{x}$  3,63 SD 0,66), availability of an ambulance ( $\bar{x}$  3,55 SD 1,05) as well as closeness of an ambulance ( $\bar{x}$  3,08 SD 0,99), while the lowest level of satisfaction was expressed for presence of clinic on site ( $\bar{x}$  1,95 SD 1,02) and availability of a first aid box ( $\bar{x}$  1,95 SD 1,02). The average level of satisfaction for all the elements was below average ( $\bar{x}$  2,68 SD 0,50). The results presenting the level of sense of tourist's protection during their stay at a beach are dissatisfying considering that only the element good lighting system at the beach was marked with an average mark ( $\bar{x}$  3,17 SD 0,91), while all the others were exceptionally lower, like police presence ( $\bar{x}$  1,79 SD 0,81), Clarity and visibility of Safety signs ( $\bar{x}$  1,74 SD 0,77), written safety and security policy ( $\bar{x}$  1,56 SD 0,72), presence of tourists safety and security desk ( $\bar{x}$  1,47 SD 0,62), security alarms

( $\bar{x}$  1,36 SD 0,59), and presence of CCTV camera ( $\bar{x}$  1,26 SD 0,59). The average mark for tourist's protection amounted  $\bar{x}$  1,77 SD 0,51.

Respondents were also asked to express their level of concern with the possibility of experiencing crime, harassment, and terrorist crime during their stay on a beach with a mark 1-5 (1-I am completely unconcerned to 5-I am completely concerned).

**Table 10.** Level of concern with the crime, harassments and terrorist crime

<b>CRIME</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>SD</b>
Pickpocketing	3,00	0,87
Property theft	2,99	0,86
Physical attacks	1,20	0,48
<b>Average</b>	<b>2,40</b>	<b>0,59</b>
<b>HARASSEMENTS</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>SD</b>
Asking for money	1,85	0,97
Asking for address	1,53	0,76
Asking for borrowing electronic appliances	1,67	0,86
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,68</b>	<b>0,70</b>
<b>TERRORIST CRIME</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>SD</b>
Brandishing guns	1,02	0,13
Kidnapping	1,61	0,84
Brandishing of knives/sword	1,03	0,26
Sighting of bombs	1,01	0,09
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,17</b>	<b>0,25</b>

*Source: Authors' research*

The results indicate quite clearly that beach visitors show very low level of concern with the observed factors. In terms crime, the highest result, but moderate level of concern was expressed with pickpocketing ( $\bar{x}$  3,00 SD 0,87), followed by the concern with the property theft ( $\bar{x}$  2,99 SD 0,86), and physical attacks ( $\bar{x}$  1,20 SD 0,48). The average result for crime amounted  $\bar{x}$  2,40 and SD 0,59. The results for the level of concern for harassment also indicate low level of concern with the observed factors. Possibility of asking for money was marked the highest ( $\bar{x}$  1,85 SD 0,97), after which follow asking for borrowing electronic appliances ( $\bar{x}$  1,67 SD 0,86) and asking for an address ( $\bar{x}$  1,53 SD 0,76). The average result for crime amounted  $\bar{x}$  1,68 and SD 0,70. The concern of occurrence of terrorist crimes during tourist's stay at the beach was marked the lowest; concern of occurrence of kidnapping was marked  $\bar{x}$  1,61 and SD 0,84), followed by brandishing of knives/sword ( $\bar{x}$  1,03 SD 0,26) or guns ( $\bar{x}$  1,02 SD 0,13), and the lowest was sighting of bombs ( $\bar{x}$  1,01 SD 0,09). The average mark for terrorist crimes was  $\bar{x}$  1,17 and SD 0,25.

The following table presents the t-test of independent samples which was used to test the potential presence in perception of separated factors in relation to the respondent's gender.

**Table 11.** T-test

Variables	Gender		t-value	p
	Male	Female		
Health and Sanitation	2,6490	2,7028	-.578	0.564
Tourist Protection	1,6385	1,8532	-2.295	0.024*
Crime	2,3537	2,4259	-.662	0.509
Harassment	1,4830	1,8194	-2.457	0.015*
Terrorism Acts	1,0612	1,2396	-4.353	0.000**

\*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

Source: Authors' research

The results presented in the previous table indicate the presence of a statistically significant difference with the factors Tourist Protection (t = -2.295, p = 0.024), Harassment (t = -2.457, p = 0.015) and Terrorism Acts (t = -4.353, p = 0.000). In the Tourist Protection factor, it was observed that women give statistically significantly higher scores than men, while in the Harassment and Terrorism Acts factor, women give statistically significantly lower scores than men.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Previously presented results of tourist's satisfaction with the health and sanitation and tourist's protection can be considered as very unsatisfactory, due to the results being mostly below average. This indicates the necessity of significant improvements. I.e., in terms of health and sanitation, it is necessary to pay more attention towards providing food services at the beach in a more safe and cleaner way. Health represents an important factor of tourist's satisfaction during their stay in a destination. Tourists expressed an average result with the satisfaction with the availability and closeness of an ambulance, and the availability of a first aid box. Their level of satisfaction as well as safety perception of Opatija Riviera's beaches could be improved through provision of more detailed information on the precise location, working hours and detailed disposition of services that can be done in a particular medical facility in case of necessity. The level of tourist protection during their stay at the beach could also be improved. Not all beaches in Opatija Riviera have an appropriate lighting system that guarantees more safety, so it is advisable to introduce them where necessary, and increase the light strength where the lighting is already provided. More frequent police patrolling, increase of the clarity and visibility of safety signs on beaches, formation and presentation of a clear and precise safety and security policy on a destination level, use of CCTV cameras, etc., are also the safety elements that need to be considered for improvement in the near future. The results for level of concern on experiencing potential crime, harassment and terrorist crime

during their stay on a beach on the other hand have proven that tourists feel mostly safe. It is the author's opinion that these results would be even better if previously mentioned proposition would be applied of increasing the police patrols in the destination. The presence of police officials would certainly decrease the possibility of occurrence of any form of crime.

Research results presented in this study clearly indicate the relevance of monitoring how tourists perceive beach safety during their stay in a destination, in order to determine what are the actual advantages and potential, as well as flaws that need to be reduced or completely removed in order to ensure for tourists best possible experience. This is in accordance with the research of Velho Gouveia (2020), Warton & Brander (2017), Uebelhoer et al. (2022), etc.

The main purpose of this research was to determine how do tourists perceive safety during their stay on beaches of Opatija Riviera, respectively, their level of satisfaction with safety and level of concern with the potential occurrence of crime during their stay. The results enabled to determine the weak points where destination stakeholders should focus in the future in order to make appropriate improvements. This paper contributes both theoretically and empirically towards better understanding of relevance of monitoring tourist's safety perception during their stay in a destination and its beaches, considering that this is of significant relevance in tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. The limitation of this research is most definitely the small statistical sample. It is advised that this research should be continued until a much larger sample of respondents is obtained in order to get a clearer picture of state of things.

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## SAFETY AND DESTINATION CHOICE IN A POST- PANDEMIC PERIOD: A STUDY OF OPATIJA RIVIERA

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### **Abstract**

Safety is one of the fundamental elements in the tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. Over the years numerous destinations were faced with challenges how to function and survive on the tourist market. To plan future developmental activities, it is mandatory to observe how tourists perceive safety of a destination, and what are the motivational factors that are connected with safety, that influence their decision-making process the most, and in post- pandemic period in particular. Empirical research was conducted with the use of a structured questionnaire to examine what are the safety motivation factors that influence tourists to choose Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination in the post- pandemic period. Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. The results indicate that tourists pay significant interest for communication with service providers, general information about the destination, what is the current criteria for entering the country, organization of health insurance and health protection during their stay, and possibility of doing a simple test for COVID. Moderate relevance was given to Opatija Riviera belonging to the "green region" and keeping the social distance during stay. Determined findings represent a good basis for formation of developmental activities which will improve the level of Opatija Riviera's safety and its competitiveness on the tourist market in the future.

**Key words:** safety, decision-making process, tourist destination, Opatija Riviera.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism industry has been registering growth of tourist turnover for years, which made it one of the most developed industries worldwide. Throughout time it has been influenced by various crises, however the strongest one ever so far was actually the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. The effects caused by this pandemic have proven quite clearly just how tourism industry actually is sensitive to such type of stimulations. These occurrences placed a challenge on tourist destinations on how to survive on the tourist market (Alkier et al., 2021; Alkier, 2021; Podovac & Milojica, 2021).

Fast progress of the development of the pandemic in 2020 had strong effects on the world economy due to the fact that human interaction had to be reduced severely in order to put the spread of the virus under control. Economic indicators have shown a decrease of European Union GDP of 6.6%, and the GDP of the Republic of Croatia decreased 8.4%. According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer for 2020, tourism industry registered the worst result ever, a decrease of 1 billion of tourist arrivals (-74%) in comparison to the year before. International tourist revenue also registered a decrease of 1.3 trillion of US dollars in relation to the previous year which is in accordance with the decrease of tourist arrivals (Mikulić et al., 2022 according to Eurostat, 2021 and UNWTO, 2021).

Data published by the UNWTO (2023) indicate that in 2022 international tourism registered better results than previously imagined, all as a result of reducing the travel restrictions. Approximately over 900 million of tourist arrivals was registered in 2022, a double increase in relation to 2021, although when compared to 2019, there was still a decrease of 37%. Europe registered a total of 585 million of arrivals in 2022, respectively it reached nearly 80% of the arrivals from the pre-pandemic period. However, when compared to 2019, there was still a decrease of 21%. Middle East registered the biggest relative increase among the world regions in 2022 by achieving 83% of tourist arrivals in relation to the pre-pandemic period (in relation to 2019 there was still a decrease of 17%). Africa and both Americas achieved approximately 65% of the international tourist arrivals in relation to the pre-pandemic period, and Asia and the Pacific only 23%. Forecasts for 2023 state the possibility of Europe and Middle East reaching 80-95% international tourist arrivals in relation to the pre-pandemic period. It is expected that in the upcoming period tourists will be searching to experience value for money more than ever before, and that they will be visiting destinations that are closer to home due to the challenging economic environment.

Taking into consideration the effects of the pandemic caused by the virus COVID-19 as well as previously stated forecasts, it can be justifiably considered that in the upcoming period tourists will be paying attention more to safety during their stay in a destination, respectively, that safety as an element of a tourist product will be one of the key factors of their decision-making process when deciding where to go on a holiday. In order to achieve success, destination stakeholders need to be aware what safety motives can be of crucial importance when trying to successfully win over the tourists and stimulate them to visit a particular destination.

The purpose of this paper is to determine which are the exact factors that visitors pay attention to when choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination. The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, the authors will present the theoretical background of the relevance of safety as a motive for tourists when choosing a holiday destination, used methodology, results of the empirical research with a brief discussion, and finally concluding remarks.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Safety and security in tourism have been an important topic of many research papers in the last couple of decades. The reason why was the actual nature of tourist services by which we mean intangibility, and of course provision of experiences for tourists. The world has experienced numerous crises in the last few decades, but the most recent and most impactful was the one caused by COVID-19 (Alkier, 2022; Preko & Gyepi-Garbrah, 2021) which resulted in tourists changing their way of perception of tourist destinations, traveling and tourism in general (Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011; Kesić & Jakeljić, 2012). In order to be able to plan future activities and form developmental strategies for safety improvement in the post-pandemic period, destination stakeholders will have to monitor tourist's behavior, with a particular accent to determining what are the safety factors that tourists consider important in their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. This is supported by the research of Carvache-Franco et al. (ahead-of-print) who focused their research on determining tourist's motives for traveling in the post-pandemic period, establishing a demand segmentation in the post-pandemic period, and determining the relations between post-pandemic segments and loyalty.

The results of their empirical research determined four motivational dimensions in coastal cities of Lima, Peru: novelty & escape, learning and culture, destination safety, and service safety. Two post-pandemic segments that were determined were "safety seekers", respectively tourists who wish to feel during their stay in a tourist destination, and who wish to enjoy the services in a safe way, and "multiple motives" which are motivated by safety, novelty and escape, and learning and culture. Multiple motives have proven to have influence on tourist's loyalty respectively higher return intentions in the post-pandemic period.

Aebli, Volgger, Taplin (2022) focused in their research on determining both motivators and demotivators that influence travel in the period of pandemic caused by COVID-19 virus. The results have shown that primary motives for traveling were socio-psychological needs for achieving mental wellbeing as well as social connections. Furthermore, the results determined health and safety risks, as well as risk of traveling experience being the dominant travel motivators. Balakrishnan Nair & Sinha's research (2020) emphasized a strong impact of COVID-19 on people's way of functioning and forced them to adapt to the "New Normal". This had a significant impact on ways how tourists make travel choices. Focus of this research was placed on getting an insight into current ways how tourists make travel decisions, as well as speculations about potential decision-making choices in the post-pandemic period. Empirical research was aimed on researching destinations selection motivation as well as to determine the differences among travellers when discussing motivators that are based on choosing a holiday destination in post-pandemic period. As a result, three motivators were determined for choosing a holiday destination: accessibility of the destination and getting discounts, health and hygiene, as well as low frequency of incidents caused by the COVID-19 virus. Research results have also shown interrelations among tourist's history of travelling and previously mentioned motivators for selecting a destination, respectively, it was determined that those tourists who were quarantined for a long period of time were very motivated by accessibility and possibility of a discount, as well as health and hygiene.

Also, those tourists who had less travelling experience going abroad have shown greater concern for the factor of lower incidents caused by the COVID-19 virus. Gupta, Shukla, Pandiya (2022) also emphasize changes in the motives for traveling. Focusing in their research on observing tourist's motives for traveling in the post-pandemic period, they determined that for tourists the most important factors related to choosing India as a holiday destination are health and hygiene, safety and security, accessibility and connectivity, information about destination, travel risk perception, and value for money.

Ivanova, Ivanov & Ivanov (2021) analyzed travel intentions of tourists in the post-pandemic period on the example of Bulgaria. Findings indicated a reliable health system, hygiene as well as disinfection being the most relevant factors in the decision-making process of tourists. Also, female respondents as well as the older respondents have proven to be having higher preferences in terms of health and safety in relation to male and younger respondents.

## METHODOLOGY

Empirical research was conducted in the period from the end of August until mid November 2022 by using the structured questionnaire adapted according to the methodology of Alkier (2021). The questionnaire was distributed online through e-mail and social network Facebook. A total of 108 respondents accepted voluntarily to participate in research. The respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of safety factors when choosing Opatija Riviera as their holiday destination. For the data analysis the authors used the methods of descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Within this chapter the authors will present the results of the empirical research. Table 1 provides an overview of the basic features of the sample.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

	<i>N</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	29	26.85
Female	77	71.29
Other	1	0.93
Prefer not to say	1	0.93
<b>Age</b>		
up to 17	2	1.85
18-24	27	25.00
25-34	19	17.59
35-44	32	29.63
45-64	27	25.00
65 and more	1	0.93

<b>Level of education</b>		
High school degree or less	26	24.07
Undergraduate	22	20.37
Graduate and more	60	55.56
<b>Country of your origin</b>		
Slovenia	20	18.52
Austria	3	2.78
Italy	4	3.70
Bosnia and Herzegovina	15	13.89
Serbia	19	17.59
Northern Macedonia	0	0
Germany	5	4.63
Croatia	41	37.96
Spain	0	0
Portugal	0	0
Poland	1	0.93
<b>Your employment status</b>		
Employed full time	76	70.37
Employed part time	7	6.48
Temporarily unemployed	0	0
Retired	1	0.93
Student	24	22.22
<b>Your current marital status</b>		
Unmarried/single	37	34.26
Married	52	48.15
Widowed/Widower	0	0
Separated/Divorced	5	4.63
Domestic partnership	14	12.96
<b>Monthly income (in EUROS)</b>		
up to 500	20	18.52
501,00-1.000,00	21	19.44
1.001,00-1.500,00	20	18.52
1.501,00-2.000,00	30	27.77
2.001-2.500,00	13	12.04
2.501,00-3.000,00	3	2.78
3.001,00-3.500,00	1	0.93
3.501,00 +7	0	0
<b>Travel frequency</b>		
Hardly	1	0.93
Rarely	9	8.33
Sometimes	71	65.74
Often	26	24.07
Generally	1	0.93

Source: Authors' research

The data indicate that the majority of the respondents were female (71,29%), while 26,85% of the respondents were male. One respondent marked belonging to other gender (0,93%), and one respondent expressed the preference of not expressing the belonging to a specific gender (0,93%).

In terms of age, most of the respondents belonged to the age group 35-44 (29,63%), followed by 18-24 (25%), 45-64 (25%), 25-34 (17,59%), up to 17 (1,85%) and 65+ years of age (0,93%). When observing the education level, most of the respondents were highly educated (55,56%), 24,07% had a high school diploma or less, and 20,37% had a bachelor's degree (20,37%). According to the country of origin, most of the respondents from Croatia (37,96%), Slovenia (18,52%), Serbia (17,59%), Bosnia & Herzegovina (13,89%), Germany (4,63%), Italy (3,70%), Austria (2,78%), and Poland (0,93%). Most of the respondents (70,37%) were fully employed, followed by students (22,22%), part-time employees (6,48%), and retired (0,93%). No temporarily employed respondents were registered. According to the marital status, 48,15% of the respondents were married, 34,26% were unmarried or single, 12,96% live in a domestic partnership, and 4,63% were either separated or divorced. No widowers were registered. The information about the respondent's monthly income in EURO show that 27,77% of the respondents have a monthly income of 1.501,00-2.000,00 EURO, followed by the ones having 501,00-1.000,00 EURO (19,44%), up to 500,00 (18,52%), 1.001,00-1.500,00 (18,52%), 2.001-2.500,00 (12,04%), 2.501,00-3.000,00 (2,78%), and only 0,93% have a monthly income of 3.001,00-3.500,00 EURO. No respondents were marked having a monthly income of 3.501,00 +. When observing the frequency of traveling, most respondents travel sometimes (65,74%), 24,07% often, and 8,33% of the respondents travel rarely.

**Table 2.** Relevance of factors when choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination

Factors	$\bar{x}$	SD
Low level of risk of infection with the coronavirus ("green region")	3.77	4.50
The possibility of simple testing for coronavirus in the destination	3.89	3.91
Possibility of social distancing	2.84	6.23
Organization of health insurance and protection of tourists in the destination	3.96	3.52
Information available to the guests before their arrival at the destination about the criteria for entering the country (in accordance with epidemiological measures)	3.98	3.46
Information available to guests about the general safety in a destination	4.01	3.38
Communication between the service provider and the guest	4.14	3.49
The possibility of canceling reservations free of charge	3.71	4.05

Source: Authors' research

Following the respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of the offered criteria when choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination with a mark 1 to 5 (1-extremely irrelevant, 2-irrelevant, 3-neutral, 4-relevant, 5-extremely relevant). The highest results were registered for the relevance of tourists being able to communicate with the service

provider ( $\bar{x}$  4,14 SD 3,49) and well as tourists being informed about the general safety in a destination ( $\bar{x}$  4,01 SD 3,38). This indicates tourists showing a high level of responsibility considering that they wish to have a normal open communication with the service providers and know how their tourist services will be provided to them. This is also in accordance with the tourist's interest for information about general level of safety in a destination which can be interpreted by the possibility that in this case we dealt with the first timers who did not stay in Opatija Riviera before, and the destination as such was possibly unknown to them. Tourists also expressed a relatively high interest in learning about the criteria for entering the country before arriving at the destination (whether the entry is in accordance with epidemiological measures in the sense of requiring the proof of having a negative test on COVID-19 virus) ( $\bar{x}$  3,98 SD 3,36), as well as how health insurance and protection of tourists are organized during their stay in the destination ( $\bar{x}$  3,96 SD 3,52) which also indicates that they show interest for their health protection in the case of need. This is in accordance with their interest for learning the information about being able to do a simple test for coronavirus during their stay in a destination ( $\bar{x}$  3,89 SD 3,91) (which is not surprising considering that simple tests can be found easily in a local pharmacy and due to the simplicity of the actual test, tourists can do the test by themselves if they find it necessary, or they can search for a professional to do it for them and issue them a certificate if it is necessary before traveling home). A bit lower mark was given for the information if a destination is a "green region" respectively whether there is a low level of risk of infecting themselves with the coronavirus ( $\bar{x}$  3,77 SD 4,50) and the possibility of free canceling of reservations ( $\bar{x}$  3,71 SD 4,05). Possibility of social distancing was marked as the factor that is the least relevant for the respondents when choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination ( $\bar{x}$  2,84 SD 6,23) which can be interpreted that tourists are not so bothered with keeping the distance among themselves.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The focus of this study was placed on determining what safety factors do tourists take into consideration when choosing Opatija Riviera as a holiday destination in a post-covid period. The results have indicated quite clearly that tourists who wish to visit Opatija Riviera pay significant interest to good communication with the service providers in a destination about the actual provision of the tourist services during their, as well as general information about the safety in a destination and the criteria for entering the country before going on a journey.

Bearing in mind these high marks, it is the author's opinion that in the upcoming period attention will have to be placed on active improvements, where necessary, in communication with a goal of providing tourists high quality of information provided in a sincere manner, since this represents an important pre-condition for establishing trust among guests and service providers. They showed an interest for organization of health insurance and health protection during their stay, and ability of doing a simple test for COVID, which indicates that destination management will have to pay attention to this in order to be able to meet their needs for safety.



During their stay, tourists can also be exposed to various situations like car accidents, fights, medical situations (asthma attacks, allergic reactions to inhalation oralimentary allergens or insect stings (bees, wasps, etc.), problems related to cardiovascular system, or any other chronic health problems). In these situations, it is normal that they wish to sense safe and know that they have someone to go to for help. Information whether Opatija Riviera belongs to the “green region” has proven to be moderately important which is somewhat in accordance with the result for social distancing when choosing Opatija Riviera. In the upcoming period Opatija Riviera will have to focus further actions in safety improvement in order to remain competitive on the tourist market.

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## SUMMARY

The research team on the scientific project "New security paradigm and valorization of the tourist destination" presented the results of the research and conclusions to the public in their published papers, which are collected in this book and will not be listed separately.

The main goals of the project have been realized and relate to the research of security paradigms and valorization models of the tourist destination, as well as the examination of tourists' attitudes about safety in the destination, examination of the perception of decision makers in the destination, destination managers and tourism workers in tourism.

There is a close connection between tourism and safety, i.e. tourism and the perception of safety of tourists during their stay in the destination, which is confirmed by this research. Also, health is an important factor in tourists' satisfaction during their stay in the destination.

During their stay, tourists may be exposed to various situations such as traffic accidents, fights, medical situations (asthma attacks, allergic reactions to inhalation or alimentary allergens or insect stings (bees, wasps, etc.), problems related to the cardiovascular system, or any other chronic health problem). In such situations, it is normal for them to want to feel safe and know that they have someone to turn to for help. In the upcoming period, the Opatija Riviera will have to focus on active improvement of communication with the aim of providing quality information to tourists in a fair way, as this is an important prerequisite for establishing trust between guests and service providers.

Tourists are significantly interested in communication with service providers, general information about the destination, what are the current criteria for entering the country, organization of health insurance and health care during their stay. The results clearly showed that tourists who want to visit the Opatija Riviera devote significant interest to good communication with service providers in the destination about the actual provision of tourist services during the visit, as well as general information about safety at the destination, and the criteria for entering the country before departure.

Tourists perceive the Opatija Riviera as a low-risk tourist destination, which indicates that the Opatija Riviera managed to profile itself as a safe destination for tourists, which is in line with the growing tourist turnover (except for the period affected by the pandemic caused by COVID-19). Safety and security are globally recognized as one of the most important factors for tourists when choosing a holiday destination. Tourists

want to feel relaxed during their stay in the destination and do not want to worry about their safety in any way, so it is important to monitor their perceptions and act in accordance with them in order to meet their expectations and needs as much as possible.

The results of the research on the perception of the safety of the beaches of the Opatija Riviera clearly indicate the relevance of monitoring how tourists perceive the safety of the beaches during their stay in the destination, in order to determine what the real advantages and potentials are, as well as the shortcomings that need to be reduced or completely removed in order to ensure the best possible experience for tourists.

The Opatija Riviera is currently doing its job well in the post-COVID period, but it is necessary to continuously work on improvements that will contribute to tourists recognizing and perceiving the destination as even safer, which will result in an increase in tourist arrivals and overnight stays, as well as in increasing the tourist loyalty and recommendation of the Opatija Riviera as a safe holiday destination.

The disruption caused by the pandemic is also important for hotel managers and management from the point of view of introducing a crisis management process, the results of which can be seen in the protection of the well-being of guests, employees and the hotel's general reputation. Therefore, hotel management should emphasize the importance of recognizing business strategies and practices in business strategies and thus form the basis for effective crisis management. For this reason, hotels on the Opatija Riviera made several strategic decisions during the pandemic period in which they changed business models and strategies with the aim not only not only surviving the crisis, but also recovery, resistance to disruptions and enabling further sustainable growth. During the pandemic, the hotel management dealt with the issue of reducing the risk of Covid-19. For this purpose, it had to adopt strategic guidelines to protect the health of its employees and guests.

In the post-pandemic period, hotels mainly focus on adapting existing crisis business models. Their improvement is primarily aimed at ensuring a long-term sustainable concept of growth and future development of both the hotels and the tourist microregion itself.

It is expected that in a certain future, management teams will have to consider a wider range of stakeholders that will influence their strategy, accept the fact that ecosystems and competitive relationships are changing at an increasingly rapid pace, include new management positions that will influence the formation of strategy, and through reorganization improve speed and the agility of the company to keep pace with changes in strategy.

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus had significant implications, both for world tourism and the entire world economy. Numerous studies have confirmed the already known fact that world tourism was strongly affected by the emergence of the

crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus, but due to the quick and conscious reaction of the world's leading organizations, tourism started to record positive development relatively quickly. The sensitivity of tourism to such extraordinary situations, as well as changes in the attitudes of tourists towards undertaking tourist trips and staying in tourist destinations, points to the important fact that it is necessary to monitor how they perceive safety in destinations, given that today it represents a key factor in achieving a competitive advantages of the destination on the tourist market.

Safety and security have become a key component of a complete tourism product. The perception of risk among tourists is changing, which ultimately affects their future behavior when choosing a holiday destination. The ability to offer tourists a safe stay during their holiday contributes to the attractiveness of the destination and its tourism product. Safety is a prerequisite and motive that many tourists consider crucial when choosing a holiday destination. For this reason, tourist destinations must focus on raising the level of security and protection, which will contribute to the satisfaction of tourists, and they will be more interested in visiting and revisiting the destination. Measuring tourists' safety perception is an initial step towards thinking about what to focus on in terms of improving tourist safety, as well as developing awareness of the importance of safety in tourism. This is something that destination management and marketing should consider as a valuable strategy to achieve competitiveness in the tourism market.

To plan future development activities, it is mandatory to observe how tourists perceive the safety of the destination, and what are the motivational factors related to safety, which most influence their decision-making process, especially in the post-pandemic period.

The established findings represent a good basis for shaping development activities that will improve the level of safety of the Opatija Riviera in the future and its competitiveness on the tourist market.



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## NOTES OF RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS



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