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Pavia, Nadia; Floričić, Tamara; Mrnjavac, Edna

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FLEXIBLE WORKSPACES AND REMOTE WORK IN HOTEL ACCOMMODATION OFFER – COMPETITIVENESS CONTEXT

Nadia Pavia
Tamara Floričič
Edna Mrnjavac

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Abstract

Purpose - The dynamic globalisation processes and the processes of tourism and hospitality business development put ever increasing challenges before hoteliers. The COVID-19 pandemic has called for hotel guests' new routines and expectations. The combination of work and holiday is taking hold, especially since the pandemic changed work methods which have become more flexible. Remote work has enabled people to travel and conduct their business activities; therefore, a new word explaining this new concept is forged; *workspitality* (abbreviation of words work + hospitality). The purpose of this paper is to show in what measure hotel companies, given the guests' new routines and expectations, have adapted their offer to their guests' new requirements. By consideration of the tourists' requirements, a new specific trend has been identified, which presumes stays in hotels away from home, with pursuit of business activities. The aim of this paper is to research the hotels' preparedness to offer workspaces as an element of their offer during tourists' stays in the hotels, combining work and leisure activities.

Methodology – includes qualitative and quantitative analyses of the potential of affirmation of the new accommodation concept in hotels. The paper analyses aspects which affect the positioning of remote workplaces as a part of hotel offer, given the tourists' new routines and expectations. The research was conducted using a survey questionnaire on a sample of hotel managers of small hotels, medium-sized and large sized hotels. The questionnaire contained Likert scale 1-5 research and open-ended questions which explored in depth the attitudes by combining them coded by statistical methods with qualitative research where the results were obtained via open ended questions. The methodology, supported by creative thinking techniques, included desktop meta research and impacted the formation of conclusions which point to new scientific knowledge.

Findings – The research results point towards scientific and practical comprehension of hotel offer organisation and innovativeness. The research results influence the formation of scientific knowledge in the area of hotel offer organisation, as well as on the identification of its key elements. Space organisation and Internet communication technologies – ICT services in hotels, by which remote work with simultaneous use of accommodation services and leisure activities would be enabled for tourists, present a prerequisite for new offers. The findings indicate that this new concept produces higher price levels, affirm new market niches and prolong the tourism season.–

Contribution – The paper represents a valuable contribution to the comprehension of the organisation and innovation of a competitive hotel offer. The possibility of remote work enables tourists to stay in a hotel on holiday and take advantage of a wide choice of recreational facilities. Remote work has become commonplace for many employees, and it is predicted that it will become more than a passing trend. The goal was to understand changes in the guest hotel accommodation affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and to examine the attitudes and the resulting hotel managers' answers in the segment of organisation of services for remote work. The research results, as well as the acquired knowledge, could influence the perception of the hotel management about the importance of adaptation of the hotel offer to new expectations of hotel guests, and to its organisation. Namely, it could influence the new strategic decisions related to the investments and innovations in

accommodation structure design. The contribution is reflected in raising awareness and bridging the gap between theory and practice of innovative accommodation organisation which impacts competitiveness.

Keywords remote work, hotel offer, innovative hospitality concept, workspitality, digital nomads

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lifestyles and work routines. They are beginning to experience the "new normality," which also affects the hospitality business. New normal in hospitality is not what we are currently experiencing; it is what hoteliers choose to do with what they are given (Maugin, 2022). They are trying to be active participants of the "new normal" concept, thinking of new steps in innovative offer.

In the last ten years or so, an increase in the number of tourists has been noted, who combine work, travel and free time by staying in accommodation facilities. Hotel facilities are engaging themselves in fast changes in the world of work, becoming coworking centres. Due to this, hoteliers were required to adapt their offer to a modern trend of flexibility of remote working. In their offer, they include spaces for work, in the manner that hotel lobbies and insufficiently used hotel areas are assigned a new role and become a work environment in which individuals, tourists, work at desks in common areas and share other business facilities and services. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed that trend pattern. Namely, "coworking" areas cannot ensure physical distancing and thus adoption of other models of facilitating remote working have been considered. Among them, the most distinctive option is remote working offer in both the guest rooms and the rooms transformed from standard guest rooms into business offices and meeting rooms (<https://hewinghotel.com/>, accessed on 22.01.2022). According to the developed concept of work and hospitality service, developing theory and practical implications, new nomenclature has emerged, "workspitality" (Floričić and Pavia, 2021).

Considering the ways of offer innovation, as well as hotel business improvement in a comprehensive approach, hotels can raise guest experience to a much higher quality level. According to Landman (2022), this includes all aspects that form part of a comprehensive operational function. Some examples of this are upgrading from legacy systems to data-driven digital technologies and empowering hotel employees with results-oriented training on customer experience delivery, hyperpersonal sales (food and beverage, spa services, activities), and use of technology. Therefore, the platform for the conducted research was established including both the exploration of the competitiveness context; namely, the perceived demand preferences and services diversification that is oriented towards innovative internal organisational changes of hotel services. The categories that were identified are as follows: conceptually innovative services, pricing strategies, physical characteristics of room facilities, technological equipment and ICT, specific food and beverage services and business centre services and facilities. The data gathered and diversified via creative thinking techniques led to the creation of a new model that influences practical application of the identified values.

In principle, guests always appreciate innovations in business. In doing so, they recognise orientation towards a higher quality offer, and it can be expected that many people who

have a possibility to work online will definitely accept the opportunity to spend a certain amount of time in a pleasantly appointed hotel room where, apart from work, they also have a possibility of spending their free time in entertainment and recreation (Breier et al., 2021, 2).

By this research, the intention was to show how prepared hotels are to provide spaces for work as an offer element, combining work and leisure activities. Given the paper topic area, the following problem questions are defined:

Q1 Remote work in hotels (workspitality) is an important segment of tourism offer, created following an increased demand;

Q2 Supported by institutional initiatives, the workspitality concept in the hospitality business impacts season extension and competitiveness;

Q3. The marketing mix of all aspects of the workspitality concept contributes to its recognisability and competitiveness.

1. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Remote work and tourism accommodation

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, some people travelled and worked. These were primarily freelancers and digital nomads. Some ten years ago, remote work was very rare. However, teleconferencing and telework technology has advanced to the point where some businesses thrive with completely remote teams (Pek, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic paved the way for new trends of remote working. For a large part of the workforce, everyday commuting to work, personal meetings and teamwork have been replaced by distance video meetings in improvised home offices or coworking areas. As we start to move beyond or acclimatise to COVID-19, a rise in remote working looks set to be the change in work practices most likely to stick long term (Gifford J. , 2022). A long-term growth in hybrid work seems to be inevitable. According to Herman and Paris (2020), companies around the world are beginning to consider a broader shift towards remote (or hybrid) workforce models as a means of reducing overhead costs while supporting employee productivity and well-being.

An increase is noted in the number of new tourists – digital nomads, who combine work, travel and free time during longer stays in tourist accommodation facilities which offer conditions that are adapted for remote work. Due to information and communication technologies, work is becoming more mobile. Remote work is on an exponential curve and is growing fast. With its growth, thousands of destinations, from tiny surf villages to cosmopolitan mega cities, are now competing to attract remote workers (Floričič and Pavia, 2021).

The pandemic has hit the hospitality sector hard. For hotel companies the pandemic is also, with the aim to overcome the crisis period, an era of new possibilities and of testing of different business strategies. The differences in strategies depend on available resources and previously defined business goals. The accent should be put on inclusion of all stakeholders – employees, guests, suppliers, local administration, government and

other stakeholders at the national and international levels (Dung and Giang, 2021, 2). Within the context of development of the workspitality model, cooperation is especially important with tourist agencies and air carriers who, together with earlier mentioned hospitality businesses, are the most affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in collaboration with whom hotels can offer a high quality and personalised product.

The pandemic has encouraged hotel management to reconsider the business model and capitalisation of the hotels which have mixed purpose – as a place for leisure activities and work, mobility and connectivity, business, sleeping and stay. Hotels have already turned their lobbies into spaces where guests can socialise or work (Vora, 2019). Some hotels went even further by setting up coworking areas. Coworking areas appeared in the last decade as a new and promising phenomenon within entrepreneurship. In addition to providing workspace, coworking also offers a community of other entrepreneurs, all working separately on their own ventures, but working together in the same location (Howell, 2022). As a new organisational form, coworking provides unique solutions which is possible only by concentration of entrepreneurs in a single physical space.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many hotels started offering ‘work-from-hotel’ or ‘workation’ packages to attract remote workers to get away from their home offices (Merkel, 2022). The remote work trend enables them to have an extension to the season and often even a year-round business. Folgrado (2020) predicts that tourist traffic could increase by up to 20 percent in destinations where hotels offer office spaces which facilitate coworking and interaction. Apart from accommodation services, hotels also have the possibility of renting different facilities for meetings, socialising and work. In this way, they can use their spaces in several different ways. This hybrid hospitality model ensures a more efficient use of all hotel facilities. The hybrid hospitality model is a combination of provision of accommodation services and services of inspirational workspaces.

As a part of the hybrid hospitality model, the value of integration of coworking areas in the hotel is manifold: (EHL, 2022)

- Plenty of adaptable space – hotels offer a series of adequate workspaces. Business centres and hotel lobbies can relatively easily be transformed into workspaces;
- Excellent on-site amenities – hotels offer a series of additional facilities of entertainment and leisure activities;
- Round-the-clock services and access – hotels are open 24 hours a day and satisfy different working styles and needs;
- Maximum flexibility – hotels do not require long-term obligations, rentals or expensive guarantees; they offer everyday flexibility in workspace hire;
- A ‘hospitality-first’ experience – personalised services and creation of a pleasant environment for guests;
- Connectivity in every sense of the term – apart from fast and reliable Internet, hotels offer a possibility of linking of travelling professionals, entrepreneurs and local communities in central locations.

Attractiveness of coworking areas in hotels is very important. Hotels comply with strict protocols concerning hygiene and cleanliness in order to ensure guests' stay and comfort in a safe and clean environment.

1.2. Hotel accommodation offer – aspects workspitality concept development

The hospitality business is an extremely market-oriented activity, aimed at monitoring of business conditions in the environment and fast reaction to changes. One of the ways to ensure hospitality success is prediction of needs of the new generations of guests and tourists (Ramgade & Kumar, 2021). Observations in the hospitality business indicate that offer innovation could be a solution for the recovery (Breier et al., 2021, Chesbrough, 2020, Sigala, 2020). Offer innovation is affected by technology which has, every day and faster and faster, been developing, which includes the use of digital communication channels to avoid direct contact with guests (Jacobs & Chase 2018, 226-227), and within the context of care for guests' health, as well as of ensuring conditions for guests' pleasant and productive remote work.

The usage of innovative technology in hotels provides an outstanding and excellent guest experience. The great acceleration in the use of technology, digitisation and new safety guidelines for hospitality businesses will continue beyond the pandemic. The benefits are endless, including (Ganzarain, 2022):

- Combine easy access with a secure digital key technology to access guest rooms, meeting rooms, and floors via elevators using a smartphone.
- Offer a contactless guest experience that includes mobile check-in and check-out.
- Smart guest rooms offer personalised modern comfort (lights, heating, and air conditioning) through in-room technology integrations.
- Integrations with unified property management systems deliver greater automation and process optimisation from the guest rooms and guest service doors to the back-of-house.

The COVID-19 pandemic has considerably affected the changes in tourists' behaviour. New habits and expectations have emerged. This has caused significant changes regarding the offers and business operations in order to fulfil a new set of criteria (Kima and Han, 2022). Understanding and timely reaction to the changes in demand for accommodation is crucial for the recovery of the tourism and hospitality businesses. According to Landman (2022), the period of change is set to continue through 2022 and 2023, with shifts in demographics and technology and the post-pandemic transition to a new normal, all playing decisive roles. A newly adopted amended business model does not necessarily have to be a long-term solution – it needs to be adapted to the changes in business conditions of the environment and, in particular, to the movement of the pandemic and tourists' reactions to it (Mrnjavac et al., 2021).

If there is one bright spot for hoteliers amid COVID-19, it is that our current situation has most certainly led to greater innovation within the hotel industry (Deflorian, 2020). This pandemic has not only encouraged a technological revolution, but also a creative revolution, especially when it comes to packages and offers. Many advantages that hoteliers can incorporate in their packages (sightseeing in the destination, organisation

of excursions, etc.) are currently not an option for potential guests. Hoteliers have started thinking outside the box, making sure that they do not affect the overall offer integrity. One of the most recent new offers is a package “remote working.”

Verdon (2021) observes that an increased number of companies plan to combine remote work and on-site work in a new hybrid model designed for a pandemic-changed world. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the trend of working from any location. This has forced hotels to be more flexible and creative than ever, resulting in offers ranging from “office for a day” workspaces to packages that combine remote work with travel, workouts and fitness routines, and even adventures like archery and axe-throwing lessons (Verdon, 2021).

Verdon (2021) quotes five trends which hotel operators are responding to with their new offers for remote workers, digital nomads and business convention attendees:

- *Extended-stay vacations* – certain hotels expand their service packages; there are offers of remote working with benefits of free use of meeting areas; by booking of longer stays, remote workers benefit from better accommodation; there are discounts for extended stays, and similar.
- *Wellness and working out - while working* - some hotels anticipate that fitness routines and opportunities to enjoy nature will be important to those taking long-haul vacations.
- *Making remote working a learning experience* – certain hotels offer experiences and courses which can improve working holidays.
- *Hotels as alternative office spaces* – hotels are also offering options for remote workers who occasionally need a work setting that is more professional than their living room, and to companies that are getting rid of their traditional office spaces.
- *Hybrid industry convention to revive the event business* – hotels organise various conferences, congresses, and similar, offering hybrid packages which welcome both personal and virtual participants.

According to Berry et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has brought concrete, lasting innovation to the service sector. These innovations also inherently improve the service experience in the long term.

Considering the ways in which to innovate offers, as well as to improve hotel operations in a comprehensive approach, hotels can raise guests’ experiences to an extraordinary level. According to Landman (2022) this includes all aspects that form part of a comprehensive operational function. This encompasses upgrading from legacy systems to data-driven digital technologies and empowering hotel employees, with results-oriented training on customer experience delivery, hyperpersonal sales (food and beverage, spa services, activities) and use of technology.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The authors intended to research medium-sized and large hotels that tend to be open all year round. Given that the research was conducted outside of the peak tourism season, and as a consequence of the pandemic, medium-sized to large hotels were mostly included.

They base their business on year-round operations, striving to adapt their offer to market demands. Therefore, the sample is rather small but indicative as 88.2% are medium-sized and large hotels with high management expertise level. This led to the conclusion that the sample, although of smaller size, is very indicative and reliable. The research was conducted from December 2021 until March 2022 by using questionnaires with combined questions. The sample consisted of 34 respondents, which represents a response rate of 68% of 50 questionnaires that were sent in total. The primary research was firstly based on a survey of hotel managers directed towards the sample profile characteristics, and its reliability and competence. General attitudes were explored next, as well as preferences and the level of knowledge related to the potentials for remote work during tourist stays in hotels which are equipped for it. By means of the Likert research, the questionnaire further examined the level of preferences and agreement with the contexts of the “workspitality” concept. Finally, through open-ended questions, it explored the suggestions related to innovative services that could impact the competitiveness of the concept. The methodology also included metasearch of the attitudes and readiness of various accommodation offer providers (i.e. self-catering apartments, B&B and residences) for implementation of innovations, enabling remote working offer. After acknowledging the perception and platform for offer organisation, the attitudes of hotel managers of large hotels were explored. The qualitative and quantitative methodology processes the attitudes, addressing the supply and demand positions with the aim to detect deviations in attitudes and perceptions of the key factors. Creative thinking techniques were used for the model formation. The open-ended questions produced statements, opinions and suggestions of hotel managers, which influenced the proposed model. The overall methodology includes general scientific methods, analysis, synthesis, generalisation, induction, deduction and historic methods, as well as statistical methods which support the paper’s consideration and problem questions:

Q1. Remote work in hotels (Workspitality) is an important new segment of tourism offer formed after increased demand (Likert scale statements numbers 5, 6 and 11 in the second part of the research, supported by open-ended questions)

Q2 The Workspitality concept, supported by institutional initiatives in the hotel industry, impacts prolongation of the tourism season and competitiveness (Likert scale statements in the second part of the research: 3, 4, 10, 11, 12)

Q3. The marketing mix of all aspects of the workspitality concept contributes to its recognisability and competitiveness (Likert scale statements in the second part of the research: 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, supported by open-ended questions)

The methodology, supported by creative thinking techniques, impacts the formation of conclusions, which points to new scientific knowledge.

3. RESEARCH, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research indicate the positions of hotel managers as representatives of accommodation offer that predominantly produce hospitality industry turnover and reach the highest level of prices. The sample size consisted of 34 participants, of which 50% (N=17) were female and 50% (N=17) were male respondents. The experience of work on managerial positions in the hospitality industry was explored in order to evaluate the reliability and competence of the sample; 61.8% of participants (N=21) had more than 10 years of work experience, 26.5% (N=9) had from 5 to 10 years of experience and 11.8% of participants (N=4) had less than 5 years of work experience in the position of hotel managers. Further presentation of the sample includes the size of the hotels where of a total of 34 hotels, 4 of them were small hotels with up to 50 rooms (11.8%), 15 of them were medium-sized hotels (44.1%) and 15 hotels were large-sized hotels, with more than 150 rooms (44.1%). When exploring the region of respondents' origins, the results were as follows: 23 of them were from Istria and the Kvarner region (67.6%), 7 respondents were from Dalmatia (20.6%) and 4 respondents were from the continental part of Croatia and the City of Zagreb (11.8%).

The results of three questions related to the sample characteristics confirmed that the sample was reliable and that respondents had good knowledge about hotel services, potentials of innovations and growing trends in tourism demand. The size of the hotel influences the concentration of the workspitality facilities and, when concentrated and clustered, the promotional campaigns at various levels, from institutional to professional, has stronger results and competitiveness impact. The location of hotels confirms the pattern of dispersion of Croatian hotel accommodation offer, predominantly on the Adriatic coast.

Further questions explored the general characteristics of the hotel offer. The results showed that 22 hotels (64.7%) offer facilities for conference tourism, which suggests that the majority of hotel managers already have experience in specific needs and requests from the guests who travel and work. Although workspitality presumes a different concept of service organisation; specifically, hotel rooms and public areas, when additionally combining the co-working offer concept, should also be considered for innovation exploration.

Furthermore, hotel managers were asked about their familiarity with the workspitality accommodation concept, and 26 of them (64.7%) stated that they were familiar with it and, when the level of the technological equipment in hotel rooms was explored, 10 of them (29.4%) stated an excellent position, 15 of them (44.1%) stated a good position and 9 of them (26.5%) stated that the technological equipment in their hotel rooms was at a basic level.

When analysing technological equipment, the range of specific in-room business services was identified (Floricić and Pavia, 2021) and analysed through the hotel managers' perspective.

Table 1: Remote work facilities and services offer in hotels

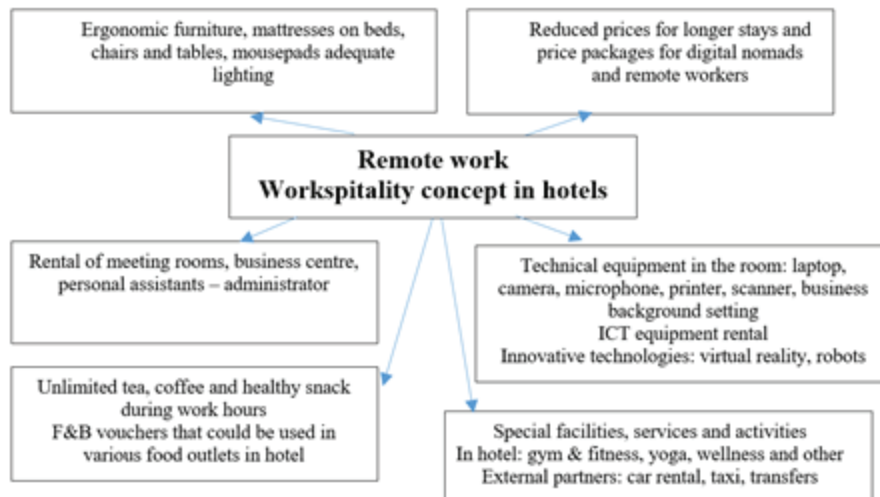
Remote work offer of facilities and services	YES	%	NO	%	
Free Wi-Fi	33	97.1	1	2.9	34
Strong signal throughout whole hotel	25	73.5	9	26.5	34
Services of business assistant	1	2.9	33	97.1	34
Services of printer, scanner	26	76.5	8	23.5	34
Offer of coffee, tea, water, healthy snacks available in room	16	47.1	18	52.9	34
Equipment and ergonomic furnishing in room	4	11.8	30	88.2	34

Source: Authors' research

The results of the research indicate that almost all hotels (97.1%) offer free Wi-Fi, which enables seamless communication in all hotel areas (73.5%). The stable and strong internet connectivity is predominantly important for the whole remote work concept, as it presumes that persons during their stay in hotels would need to respond to emails, join conference calls and conduct business activities in flexible workspaces and various hotel areas and not just in hotel rooms, although they are organised and turned into temporary office spaces. Furthermore, the research shows that 76.5% of hotels offer the services of printer and scanner, which represents additional hardware either per room, floor or hotel business centre, which can be connected wirelessly to the tourists' laptop computers. The specific services that are less often offered in hotel rooms are ergonomic furnishing (11.8%) and the services of a business assistant (2.9%). This represents a platform for further development and organisation, as it could provide new advantage and competitiveness for the hotel offer.

When considering the specific services, the packaging concept within the marketing context could contribute to the competitive advantage of remote work facilities and services. Its benefits are not recognised among Croatian hotel managers, as 79.41% of respondents stated that they do not offer packages of the specific services which would enable remote work in their hotels. After exploring suggestions, according to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the identified possibilities could be grouped and could be presented in a new model.

Figure 1: Categories of the specific services that contribute to the hotel workspitality concept



Source: Authors' research

The last question of the first section of the questionnaire explored the recognition of the increased demand for remote work special services. The new trends of tourism development and the changes in the lifestyle impact the demand increase, i.e. specific requests for remote work facilities that hotel managers recognise as a platform for further development. 20 respondents (58.8%) confirmed this.

Hereafter follows the analysis of the attitudes of hotel managers regarding various aspects which affect the organisation of remote work in hotels and which contribute to the findings that refer to the problem questions.

Table 2: Remote work and workspitality aspects and hotels managers' attitudes

Statements - agreement	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%	Total		AVR
1. My hotel considers investment in offer repositioning, namely technological enhancement and innovations	2.0	5.9	3.0	8.8	16.0	47.1	9.0	26.5	4.0	11.8	34	112	3.29
2. Through promotional channels the specific offer for remote workers can be efficiently presented	2.0	5.9	1.0	2.9	6.0	17.6	13.0	38.2	12.0	35.3	34	134	3.94
3. I am familiar with the new "work friendly" badge, designed by booking.com	2.0	5.9	1.0	2.9	2.0	5.9	11.0	32.4	18.0	52.9	34	144	4.24
4. I am familiar with the initiative of the Croatian Tourism Board "Croatia - your new office"	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.9	4.0	11.8	10.0	29.4	19.0	55.9	34	149	4.38
5. Remote work in hotels (Workspitality) is an important new segment of demand and offer	10.0	29.4	0.0	0.0	4.0	11.8	16.0	47.1	13.0	38.2	34	151	4.44
6. Croatia is an important destination for the "Workspitality" demand segment	2.0	5.9	1.0	2.9	14.0	41.2	9.0	26.5	8.0	23.5	34	122	3.59
7. For the specific offer, specialised channels of distribution should be used	0.0	0.0	3.0	8.8	5.0	14.7	14.0	41.2	12.0	35.3	34	137	4.03

8. By investing in the Workspitality offer in hotels, a higher level of prices can be achieved	1.0	2.9	3.0	8.8	7.0	20.6	15.0	44.1	8.0	23.5	34	128	3.76
9. Workspitality offer contributes to the hotel competitiveness	1.0	2.9	1.0	2.9	7.0	20.6	12.0	35.3	13.0	38.2	34	137	4.03
10. State support for the concept through the visas regime for digital nomads contributes to a higher level of competitiveness	2.0	5.9	0.0	0.0	4.0	11.8	14.0	41.2	14.0	41.2	34	140	4.12
11. Post-COVID tourism will continue to develop and offer Bleisure and Workspitality characteristics	2.0	5.9	1.0	2.9	13.0	38.2	10.0	29.4	8.0	23.5	34	123	3.62
12. The Workspitality concept will influence the prolongation of the tourism season	7.0	20.6	0.0	0.0	11.0	32.4	6.0	17.6	9.0	26.5	34	109	3.21
SDEV													0.40
VAR													1.00

Source: Authors' research

The research points out that the strongest level of agreement results from the statement that refers to the general recognition of the Workspitality concept (4.44%) and which influences affirmation of the first problem question (Q1: "Remote work in hotels (Workspitality) is an important new segment of tourism offer formed after increased demand"). It could be explained by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic situation affected all industries globally, and that the general trend of remote work that presumes work online encouraged the development of new technologies and internet platforms that enable further development of remote working. Therefore, the global pattern of remote work emerged and its combining with hotel accommodation stays impacted creation of new products that hotels continue to develop and valorise as competitiveness advantage. Hotel managers find that Post- COVID tourism will continue to develop and offer Bleisure (business + leisure) and Workspitality characteristics. The aspects of the problem question were explored via statements 5, 6 and 11.) as well as using open-ended questions in the third part of research.

The second problem question Q2: “The Workspitality concept, supported by institutional initiatives in the hotel industry, impacts prolongation of the tourism season and competitiveness” is related to a group of statements – Likert statements 3, 4, 10, 11 and 12. The findings contribute to the knowledge related to certification and special labelling. The familiarity with the special label “Croatia – your new office” scored a grade of 4.38 on the scale of agreement. The familiarity with “work friendly badge,” designed by booking.com, the largest booking engine portal, follows the local certification as the same percentage of respondents (85.3%) confirm it. This contributes to the wider acknowledgement and further promotional possibilities which impact recognition and product development. Administrative support to the development of the concept continues with the creation of the visas regime which regulates the legal aspects of remote work of digital nomads and of those tourists who decide to prolong their stay and continue to live in an extended stay tourism accommodation unit, i.e. a hotel suite or a hotel room. Hotel managers positively perceive this innovation in a legislative framework – 82.4% (grade 4.12). The last statement that refers to the administrative and legislative support is related to the results generated by it. The statement that the conducted measures will influence the prolongation of the tourism season scored a 3.21 grade, which represents the lowest grade of all the analysed statements. Although the overall sentiment is positive, this points to the conclusion that hotel managers believe that tourist demand could not be boosted solely by administrative support. There are a wide range of educational and promotional activities which should be identified and conducted in a long-term process.

The third problem question Q3: “The marketing mix of all aspects of the workspitality concept contributes to its recognisability and competitiveness” is explored through the prism of separate variables of marketing mix – 4Ps: product, price, place and promotion. The research question is explored via Likert scale of attitudes, namely, the questions 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9. The product aspect is considered through the question related to readiness for investment and innovation adoption, where only 38.3% of respondents replied positively and a significantly higher number, 47.1%, showed an indifferent attitude. This points to the conclusion that the respondents were not sure that the concept could produce a higher level of prices and, respectively, income. This statement is supported by further analysis of price increase potential (grade 3.76), where hotel managers (67.6%) expressed a positive sentiment and potential for a new pricing policy. The influence of promotional channels is recognised as very important (grade 3.94), where 73.5% of the respondents valorised promotion and efficient distribution (grade 4.03, percentage 76.5%), which is significant for the success of the concept affirmation. The use of specialised and innovative channels contributes to the success because remote workers are experienced technology users and tend to optimise work activities via ICT technologies through remote work.

When exploring the overall competitiveness potential, the respondents stated that workspitality offer contributes to the hotel competitiveness (grade 4.03), as tourism development in the future will continue to lean on the technology and trend of remote work in all industries (grade 3.62).

Research on remote working from hotel facilities, coupled with leisure activities, has not been conducted so far. The research results have enabled the creation of a model by

which the specific service categories were defined. They contribute to the workspitality concept in hotels.

The obtained results indicate that all the three problem questions are replied to positively and speaks in favour of confirmation that the workspitality concept in hotel accommodation structures has a high level of competitiveness and that further organisational and marketing efforts should be made for its further development.

CONCLUSION

The COVID – 19 pandemic has changed the ways of working, routines and lifestyle of people around the world. It has created a trend of remote working, without physical presence at workplaces. The acceleration in the use of technology, digitalisation and new safety guidelines for hotel companies will continue also after the pandemic. It is predicted that this will become more than just a passing trend, that it will become a “new normal” for work which can be performed in this way and which, due to the development of technology and business platforms, has been on the incline. The changes in guests’ behaviour caused by the pandemic have changed hotel operations. Hoteliers are trying to attract tourists by innovative offers and to convince them that it is possible to perform quality work in a hotel facility and enjoy the hotel offer and the destination.

The purpose of this paper was to provide a contribution to the understanding of the new trend of a flexible workspace organisation and, generally, of remote work in hotels. By the research, hotel managers’ attitudes were examined and this analysis presents one of the first explorations of this innovative concept. There are few studies of hotels managers’ attitudes related to the concept of competitiveness, so further steps should include research on a larger scale and on a larger sample. Considering the limitations of the research, reflected in the representation of the concept and summarisation and differentiation of the existing workspitality-character services with an innovative concept, and with the aim to achieve the reliability of the study, the research results indicating the following, were obtained:

- the majority of hotel managers have experience in the specific needs and requirements of guests who travel and work, as well as in the shaping of offers of remote working and organisation of conferences,
- a large number of hotel managers are familiar with the concept of workspitality accommodation,
- during their stay in hotels, guests work online, join conference calls and conduct their business activities in flexible workspaces and at flexible times, for which a reliable Internet connection is required in the hotel,
- the concept of marketing presentation of offers of hotel services for remote working raises the hotel competitiveness,
- the advantages of the “workspitality” concept are not recognised in the Croatian hospitality sector, as they do not offer specific services which facilitate remote working,
- the results which were obtained through open-ended questions in the questionnaire

show that hotel managers recognised the potential of remote working in raising of hotel competitive advantage.

The obtained results agree with the fragmented theoretic knowledge presented in the literature review. Barry et al. (2020) explained that the technology is the prerequisite for the development of the hospitality industry and accommodation facilities which wish to provide services for remote workers who combine tourism stays with business activities. At the same time, the work of Floricic and Pavia (2021) is confirmed, as well as the Landman (2022) work, which discusses the macro level and deals with the legislative platform for remote working in tourism structures. Verdon (2021) presents trends that hotel managers discussed via structured, extended statements and open-ended questions which confirmed the theoretical knowledge. Along with this, the authors of this paper also confirmed that the workspitality business practices are already developing in the hospitality industry, supported by the leading booking enterprise (booking.com), as well as by specialised distribution channels.

In conclusion, the conditions of remote working in hotels (“workspitality”) are an important new segment of hotel offer. It is, therefore, necessary to further invest organisational and marketing efforts in its further development, as well as in the research of the marketing aspects of the competitiveness concept. This represents a platform for future research.

The research has resulted in a scientific and practical comprehension of the organisation and innovation of the hotel offer by combination of stays and leisure activities. The comprehension of the new model of “workspitality” represents a development path of the offer and competitive advantage of the Croatian hospitality business. The paper represents a valuable contribution to the research of this new segment of the offer, by which it contributes to the development of science and the profession.

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NADIA PAVIA, PhD, Full Professor Tenured
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Primorska 46, 51410 Opatija, Croatia
Phone: ++385-51-294190
E-mail: nadiap@fthm.hr

TAMARA FLORIČIĆ, PhD, Associate Professor
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism
“Dr Mijo Mirković
Preradovićeva 1, 52100 Pula, Croatia
Phone: ++385-38-55237700
E-mail: tamara.floricic@unipu.hr

EDNA MRNJAVAC, PhD, Full Professor Tenured
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Primorska 46, 51410 Opatija, Croatia
Phone: ++385-51-294196
E-mail: ednam@fthm.hr