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The Role of Tourism in the National Economy of the Republic of Croatia

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Tourism plays a very important role in the national economy of the Republic of Croatia due to a range of economic benefits including income growth, employment, capital investments, and fostering regional growth and development. One of the main objectives of macroeconomic policy in Croatia, as in other countries, is to maintain a balance of trade. However, Croatia constantly records deficit in foreign trade, and for many years, tourism has successfully mitigated the negative impact of Croatia's trade in goods with foreign countries. This paper aims to examine Croatia's dependence on tourism in its trade balance and propose possible solutions for increasing the competitiveness of other economic sectors. Furthermore, this paper uses empirical research to confirm that dependence on tourism slows down the development of other economic sectors, which poses a threat to the sustainability of the country's economic growth and development in the long run. Given the highly seasonal nature of Croatian tourism, this thesis proposes solutions for development of alternative income sources within the tourism sector, as well as for increasing the competitiveness of other economic sectors.

Keywords: *tourism, economy, foreign trade balance, the Republic of Croatia*

Introduction

The importance of tourism to the national economy of the Republic of Croatia stems from its numerous functions and economic effects. In Croatia, the tourism sector holds significant socio-economic importance and is therefore considered one of the strategic priorities within the nation's economic policy framework. Its growth generates substantial economic benefits for all market participants –private, public, and non-profit sectors - as well as for the local population. An increase in tourism demand, revenue, the standard of living among the local population, attraction and realization of capital investments, and employment enhances the public sector's improved capacity to collect funds necessary for infrastructure upgrades, cultural projects, etc. Another very important economic function of tourism is the encouragement of international exchange. This function manifests in fluctuations in revenues (exports) and expenses (imports) related to goods and services in the current transactions account. Foreign trade balance makes for one of the primary objectives of the economic policy of most countries, including Croatia. One of the most defining traits of tourism is its seasonality, which occurs due to varying weather conditions, the change of seasons, and other unforeseeable circumstances (such as the global economic situation, natural disasters, political instability, change in individual preferences). It is therefore

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necessary to develop a tourism offer beyond the summer season (Ivandić and Šutalo 2018). Accordingly, the development of alternative revenue sources within the tourism industry should focus on the development of special types of tourism. Development of such special types of tourism, such as rural tourism, health tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, nautical tourism among others will certainly have a positive impact on the extension of the tourism season.

Tourism organizations, supranational political bodies and national governments saw sustainable tourism economy as the key to recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic (Jones 2022).

The objective of this paper is to analyze the importance of tourism to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia, with particular emphasis on the effects of tourism on total imports, exports, and the budget of the Republic of Croatia.

Objectives of this paper are as follows:

- to determine the extent to which tourism contributes to the total imports and exports of the Republic of Croatia,
- to identify the challenges arising from the Republic of Croatia's great dependence on tourism with regards to its foreign trade balance (determine the level of dependence, especially in light of a possible sharp drop in revenue due to external shocks),
- to suggest solutions aimed at minimizing the dependence on tourism and increasing the competitiveness of other sectors (consider possible policies that could help minimize dependence on tourism with regards to the foreign trade balance, as well as incite the development of other economic sectors).

Literature Review

Tourism as an Important Revenue Source in the Foreign Trade Balance of the Republic of Croatia

Tourism is one of the most important economic sectors in the modern world and one of its fastest growing economic branches. Tourism is an industry comprised of numerous sectors and can thus be studied from various scientific perspectives. In the past, most tourism-related studies have been focused primarily on its economic contribution; however, nowadays tourism is mostly studied as a whole, i.e. as both an industry and a phenomenon centered around the person - the tourist. This approach is more systemic, meaning it studies all significant parts of tourism, the interdependence of its structures and functions, and the ways in which they influence one another (Čorak et al. 2006). Tourism can be observed from two different perspectives: the economic perspective, where it is important to examine exactly how tourism impacts the development of other economic sectors, and the social perspective, which mainly focuses on improvement of society's cultural level through education about other cultures and maintenance of physical and psychological condition. Tourism cannot exist without tourists. A tourist is defined as a person, i.e. a traveler who spends more than 24 hours but less than a year outside of their country of residence. "The

World Tourism Organization defines a tourist as a visitor or any other person who travels outside of their domicile for any period under 12 months in order to take a vacation, enjoy some leisure or for business purposes" (UNWTO 2019). Despite the aftermath of the war and the burden created by an inefficient business structure, Croatian tourism managed to survive, mostly due to interest from foreign markets, attractive sights, and its overall resilience. Croatian tourism really started to thrive after the year 2000; moreover, it demonstrated remarkable strength during the world economic crisis of 2008, boasting higher growth rates than competitors from other countries. Its potential was recognized by the European Union, leading to the launch of the "Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until the year 2020". At that time, this document represented the foundation for development and improvement of Croatian tourism, and even though it has since expired, it still remains a valuable framework for further tourism development. "Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2020" is a foundational policy document, establishing a strategic framework and providing clear guidance for the future advancement of the tourism sector, i.e., the main activities that will become the cornerstones of future tourism offer. Furthermore, the Strategy also determines organizational, institutional, and human resources necessary to improve competitiveness and generate maximum profits (Gržinić and Bevanda 2021). It enables "a goal-oriented direction of the development and investment process, facilitated access to the European Union funds, a general understanding of key directions for tourism development (which is crucial when it comes to attracting domestic and foreign investors), coordinated actions of policy holders, and systemic coordination of tourism policy measures" (Official Gazette 55/2013-1119). "Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2030" should also be mentioned. It was launched in accordance with the "Croatian National Developmental Strategy until 2030" and the basic policies of the European Union and the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 2/2023). This Strategy represents a programmed starting point for further development of Croatian tourism, and it points out the development of sustainable, innovative, and resilient tourism as one of its top priorities. Another key document, which should provide more detail with regards to priority areas and concrete measures, is currently in preparation - "The National Plan for Development of Sustainable Tourism from 2021 to 2027". "The Strategy for Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030" defines the vision for further tourism development, taking into account the sustainability principles, as well as developmental needs and potentials (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Croatia 2022). Furthermore, it outlines a framework for development of a quality and contemporary tourism offer, one that will inevitably increase the competitiveness of Croatian tourism and launch Croatia among the leading tourist destinations in the Mediterranean (Jurić Borić et al. 2018).

The Croatian Tourism Offer

The Republic of Croatia is a country rich in cultural, historical, and natural heritage. Although the sea and the sun are its most important resources, the Croatian coast also boasts numerous islands, coves, clean beaches, and diversity of nature, forests and greenery (Šimleša 2018). Additionally, Croatia has numerous natural

sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, thus becoming very attractive to tourists. Nevertheless, there is still a notable lack of tourism offer such as tourist attractions, amusement parks, congress centers with contemporary equipment or a tourist route that encompass multiple sights. Furthermore, the cultural and historical heritage are sorely underutilized, and there is a notable lack of an out-of-season tourism offer. Croatian tourism offer also lacks sporting and recreational amenities (biking trails, scuba diving centers, adventure and adrenalin parks, etc.). One of the main downsides of Croatian tourism offer is its limited seasonality (Figure 1), whereas other Mediterranean countries provide a better tourism offer in that regard. According to statistics, Croatia records most overnight stays during July, August, and September.

Figure 1. *Distribution of Foreign Tourists' Overnight stays by Month*

Source: Eurostat, Tourism in Croatia: Comparison to Other Mediterranean Destinations, available at: https://arhivanalitika.hr/blog/turizam-u-hrvatskoj-usporedba-s-drugim-mediteranskim-destinacijama/ (visited on 06 May 2023)

"The Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030" outlines the strategic planning of Croatian tourism for the period until 2030, it is aligned with the "Croatian National Development Strategy until 2030" and the key documents and policies of the European Union and the Republic of Croatia. The strategy is aligned with the "Transition Path for Tourism", which is the backbone of the future "European Tourism Plan until 2030", the "Pact for Skills in the Tourism Ecosystem", and the "Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030". The development of the "Strategy" is part of the reform processes envisaged by the "National Recovery and Resilience Plan".

Tourism represents the dominant economic activity of the Republic of Croatia, which has in the previous period significantly determined both economic and social processes. The "Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2020" (Official Gazette 55/2013-1119) identified five main goals: increasing international competitiveness, improving the structure and quality of accommodation, new employment, realization of a new investment cycle and increase in tourist consumption. Although a step forward was visible in the previous period, the realization of the goals

was largely absent. In the context of increasing the international competitiveness of Croatian tourism, Croatia was planned to enter the top 20 leading tourist destinations in the world, but Croatia ended in 27th place in 2019. Also, the strategy for the previous period sought to create added value by improving the structure and quality of accommodation as stated in the "Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030" (Official Gazette 2/2023).

By analyzing development needs and potentials, and with the goal of achieving its vision, four key strategic goals for the development of sustainable tourism in Croatia have been defined in the "Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030": 1. year-round and more regionally balanced tourism; 2. tourism that preserves the environment, space and climate; 3. competitive and innovative tourism; and, 4. resilient tourism. Strategic goals are interlinked and create a synergistic effect oriented to achieving defined performance indicators, (Official Gazette 2/2023, the "Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy until 2030").

The key element of every tourism offer is its tourism product. The tourism products in the Republic of Croatia can be divided into dominant products and products with a distinct development perspective (Čorak et al., 2011). The dominant products must contribute more than 5% to the overall revenue structure (Official Gazette 55/2013-1119). Some of the dominant products are the sun and the sea, nautical tourism, business tourism, and cultural tourism. Croatia also offers some products with a distinct development perspective, such as: health tourism, cycling, ethno-gastronomic tourism, rural tourism, mountain tourism, adventure and sports tourism, golf tourism, and eco-tourism.

Croatian Product

Croatia's most significant natural attraction is undoubtedly the sea, with its numerous islands and its clean, preserved beaches. Croatia has earned the number one spot in Europe when it comes to the amount of its intangible heritage on the UNESCO list, however, on the global plan, it ranks behind China and Japan (Official Gazette 55/2013-1119). This all serves to attract numerous tourists from all over the world.

Croatian Infrastructure

Traffic and connectivity between destinations are also very important to tourists. The Croatian traffic infrastructure has been significantly upgraded during the past decade, which is mostly reflected in the newly built highway network. However, Croatia still needs to invest into its local and regional roads to keep up with other countries of the European Union. The biggest successful upgrade in the recent Croatian history was the completion of the Pelješac Bridge, which opened to traffic in July 2023, finally connecting the south of Croatia with the rest of the country. Air traffic provides good connectivity with all tourism destinations - notably, 5 out of 7 airports in Croatia are situated in the coastal area. Some challenges still occur, mostly due to a lack of interest from the airlines in establishing non-stop flights. Railroad and ferry traffic rank last when it comes to upgrades and infrastructure optimization, as some significant investments are due so they could reach their full potential (Kos

et al. 2020). Communal infrastructure also requires some improvements, mostly for problems such as waste drainage and waste management, which pose a serious problem to both guests and locals during peak season. When it comes to fresh water, Croatia is characterized by fresh, high-quality drinking water.

Croatian Tourism Demand

Although it cannot compare to countries such as Spain, France, Italy, Greece or Turkey, Croatia has been steadily recording an increase in tourists year after year, thereby landing a spot among the most developed tourism destinations in the Mediterranean. The fact that Croatia has been mentioned and lauded for its cultural and natural sights by many notable global magazines and other media has certainly helped elevate its status. Foreign guests play a crucial role in the structure of Croatian tourism. During the summer season, the majority of overnight stays are generated by the Istria County, followed by the Split-Dalmatia County, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, Zadar County, Dubrovnik-Neretva County, Šibenik-Knin County, and Lika-Senj County. According to statistics and parallel analyses, the number of foreign guests keeps growing each year, whereas the domestic guest count either remains stagnant or keeps decreasing. Foreign guests mostly book their overnight stays in rooms, apartments and vacation houses, followed by hotels and camps (Rašić 2020, 2022).

Analysis of the Impact of Tourism on the Total Export and Import of the Republic of Croatia

Due to its economic and employment potential, as well as its social and ecological implications, tourism plays an important role in the European Union (Eurostat 2023). Tourism has a significant impact on the total export and import of the Republic of Croatia. While the contributions of export keep growing through tourism services, they also cause an increase in the import of tourism products. Proper tourism sector management is instrumental in achieving a balanced foreign trade in the Republic of Croatia. Although Croatia currently has a trade deficit, the mentioned deficit is significantly decreased by the tourism-generated revenue, thus turning tourism into Croatia's number one export (Stipetić 2012).

The total export of the Republic of Croatia has been growing. However, the fact that the export rate for high-tech products remains low with a dramatically pronounced contribution of tourism to the total export (which is usually characteristic for low-income countries) is somewhat concerning (Privredni.hr 2019). According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics exports increased by 13.7% in 2023, amounting to 5.8 billion Euro. Imports also rose by 6.1%, which amounted to 9.8 billion Euro total import. This new data provides a slight correction of the data that was first published by the CBS. According to the initial information, the total for imported goods for 2023 amounted to 3.44 billion Euro, representing a growth of 9.1% compared to the previous year. The initial recorded import growth was 11.1%, amounting to 6.07 billion Euro. The foreign trade deficit reached 2.7 billion Euro during the first two months of 2023, with exports covering 56.1% of imports. Only 15% of Croatian companies export goods and services. However, the companies

that do export goods and services employ around 51% of the total workforce, invest 62%, generate around 66% of revenue from their sales, and invest around 73% of their total investments into further development. They also generate a profit of around 76%. Further growth of such healthy and advanced companies strengthens the entire economy of the Republic of Croatia (Izvoz.gov.hr 2023).

Dependence on Tourism in the Foreign Trade Balance of the Republic of Croatia

Tourism has become a vital sector of the Croatian economy with significant impact on the country's foreign trade balance (Bašić et al. 2023). This section analyzes the dependence on tourism in the foreign trade balance and considers key related aspects. Croatian tourism is vulnerable to risks and possible sharp drops due to external expenses. External expenses include unforeseeable events and factors that can significantly impact the tourism industry and contribute to a drop in tourist numbers and the overall revenue. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and fires could have an extremely negative impact on the Croatian tourism industry. For example, the earthquake that hit the Sisak-Moslavina County in December 2020 resulted in loss of human life and material damage. It also harmed the tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and attractions, leading to a decrease in tourist visits. Similarly, epidemics or pandemics are another example of external shocks that can cause a sharp decline in the tourism industry. This was particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus initially spread in March 2020, forcing the Croatian government to react by closing the borders and restricting all travel. These measures had devastating effects on tourism. Tourist visits and overnight stays, as well as tourism revenue, recorded a significant drop due to a decrease in demand, cancellations and imposed business restrictions that applied to tourist venues. Figure 2 shows the tourists' overnight stays in the Republic of Croatia between 2010 and 2021, with notable continuous growth over the years.

Figure 2. *Tourists' Overnight Stays (2010-2021)*

Source: Author's work according to Eurostat (2021), *Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TOUROCCNINAT/default/table?lang=en (visited on 12 May 2023)

The coronavirus pandemic ultimately placed great pressure on the tourism industry across European Union member states. According to the global statistic

data, 2020 will forever be recorded as the worst year in recent travel history. Estimates show a drop in tourism by about 60%, whereas the global travel sector recorded losses up to 840 billion Euro. Croatia is the most tourism-dependent European Union member, with tourism making up to 24% of its total GDP. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that the pandemic affected trends on the domestic market. Despite the European Union's quick and efficient policies in response to the pandemic, a deep economic recession was imminent (Benko et al. 2022).

The year 2020 remains recorded as the worst year in recent travel history, mostly due to a staggering drop of 74% in international arrivals. It is believed that this year caused great harm to the Croatian economy. In 2020, Croatia recorded a drop of 55.3% in overnight stays compared to 2019. However, there was a slight positive trend in domestic tourism. Foreign guests usually make up about 90% of total tourist, which amounts to one of the greatest shares in the Mediterranean (alongside Malta and Cyprus). In 2020, domestic tourists generated about 13.3% of total overnight stays amounting to a 23.7% drop, whereas the total overnight stays by foreign tourists plummeted by a shocking 58% (Krešić Lončar et al. 2021).

The previous chart shows a dramatic decline in the number of both foreign and domestic tourists in 2020 (Kordej - De Villam et al. 2023). Compared to 2019, there was a 34.1% drop in domestic arrivals and a 68.0% drop in foreign arrivals in 2020. Furthermore, there was a 64.2% drop in total arrivals (both domestic and foreign) in 2020, directly due to the pandemic. Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that the arrivals kept growing over the years, reaching their peak in 2019, followed by a shocking drop in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The number of tourists began to grow again in 2021; however, the industry has still not recovered back to its former 2019 glory.

The travel market made a slight recovery in 2021, however, due to numerous travel restrictions the number of international arrivals dropped by 85% for the period between January and May 2021 (compared to the same period in 2019). Furthermore, the percentage dropped by 65% compared to the same period in 2020. Despite the concerns about the success of the tourism season, a favorable epidemiological situation in conjunction with successful government measures resulted in a relatively good 2021 season, especially when compared to 2020, which was dubbed "the worst year for travel in recent history" (Krešić Lončar et al. 2021). As stated earlier, the Croatian economy is largely dependent on the tourism sector. Foreign tourism revenue amounted to 13 billion Euro, accounting for 19% of the country's GDP (Stojić 2023). Tourism activities contribute a staggering 88.3% to the direct gross tourism value in the Croatian economy (Rašić 2020). For comparison, tourism revenue amounted to 18.3% of GDP in 2018 and 21% of GDP in 2019, while the mentioned figures dropped to 8.9% in 2020 and 15.8% in 2021 (due to the pandemic). Despite the decline in tourism revenues, Croatia still recorded the highest tourism revenues in the European Union when expressed as a share of total GDP (Lidermedia.hr 2022).

According to the data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics ("Tourism by numbers 2021"), the national GDP amounted to 50.224 billion Euro in 2020, and 57.232 billion Euro in 2021. Tourism-generated revenue amounted to 9.121,8 billion Euro in 2020, and 4.813,5 billion Euro in 2021. The share of tourism in the national GDP was 9.6% in 2020 and 15.9% in 2021. Tourism-related activities generated 11.8% of the total

GDP in 2019. The gross added value of tourism-related activities amounted to 10.9 billion Euro that year (24.4% of the total gross added value) (Lidermedia.hr 2022).

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, revenue generated from foreign tourists amounted to 13.1 billion Euro in 2022, which is an increase of 44% compared to 2021; moreover, this also amounts to an increase of 24% compared to the record year of 2019. Looking at the data from 2020 (the pandemic year), it can be concluded that the pandemic caused a sharp decline in revenue – a drop of 89% compared to 2021, to be exact. The aforementioned improvements achieved in 2021 were probably directly linked to the government measures and quality sector preparation, which served to maintain stability in the national tourism industry (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2023).

All of the above clearly demonstrates how external shocks can cause a sudden drop in tourism. It is important that the tourism industry of the Republic of Croatia remains aware of the mentioned risks and implements measures to mitigate their effects. This can include the development of crisis management strategies, diversification of the tourism offer, as well as promotion of lesser-known destinations in order to reduce the dependence on several main tourism centers. Moreover, investments into infrastructure aimed at prevention and mitigation of natural disasters, as well as the development of safety protocols and epidemic suppression measures could be crucial for minimizing of the aforementioned external shocks. External shocks can be unforeseeable and often arise from various sources. It is therefore indispensable to always keep an eye on global trends, analyze risks and implement prompt and flexible crisis-management strategies in the tourism industry (Bašić et al., 2023).

Methodology/Materials and Methods

The research was conducted through a survey questionnaire created and distributed using Google Forms. To ensure confidentially, all participants remained anonymous. The questionnaire was disseminated via email, Viber, WhatsApp, and various Facebook groups to reach a diverse sample.

The collected primary data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics software. Initially, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, confirming the internal consistency of the survey items. Descriptive statistics were then used to summarize the sample characteristics and to explore initials patterns related to hypotheses H1 and H2.

To test the hypotheses, inferential statistics methods were employed. Both T-tests and ANOVA analyses were conducted to examine differences and relationships relevant to H1 and H2:

> H1: A sharp drop in revenue due to external shocks causes problems in the foreign trade balance. To prevent these problems, more attention should be paid to the tourism offer outside of the summer season.
> H2: High levels of dependence on tourism tend to slow down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia, which poses a threat to the sustainability of economic growth and further development of the country in the long run.

These tests helped determine the significance of observed differences and relationships between variables related to seasonality effects and economic sector dependencies in Croatian tourism.

Results

Research results are primary data obtained through the survey questionnaire and used to conduct the analysis. The survey consisted of of 26 closed-ended questions and was available from May 1 to May 17, 2023. The survey was completed by 204 respondents. The first section of the survey referred to the socio-demographic status of the respondents, the second section evaluated their satisfaction with the Croatian tourism offer, its contents and its prices. The remaining questions were presented using a Likert scale, whereby the respondents evaluated predetermined claims on a scale from 1 to 5. Number 1 on the scale corresponded to "Strongly disagree", "Not promoted at all", and "Zero information", whereas number 5 corresponded to "Completely agree", "Very well promoted", and "Excellent" (Benšić and Šuvak, 2013).

The total respondent count was 204 - 66.2% respondents were female and 33.8% were male.

Table 1. *Sample Description (n=204)*

	n	%
SEX		
Male	69	33.8%
Female	135	66.2%
SUBJECT AGE		
18-24	5	2.5%
25-34	32	15.7%
35-44	99	48.5%
45-54	44	21.6%
55-64	22	10.8%
Over 65	2	1.0%
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
Elementary school	4	2.0%
High school	86	42.2%
Bachelor's degree	36	17.6%
Master's degree	73	35.8%
PhD	5	2.5%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
Entrepreneur; Artisan	7	3.4%
Employee of the Private sector	86	42.2%
Employee of the Public sector	93	45.6%
Unemployed	5	2.5%
Student	3	1.5%
Retired	10	4.9%

Source: Author's Work

Table 2 shows the reliability coefficient values (Cronbach's Alpha). Generally, Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 are considered acceptable, whereas values above 0.8 indicate high reliability. In this case, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.668, which is lower than 0.7 and thus indicates a certain variability or inconsistency in responses. The value of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient based on standardized items is also 0.676, which is very similar to the results obtained based on the original items. This suggests that the standardization didn't have a significant impact on internal consistency. In summary, the results indicate a moderate internal consistency of the measuring instrument. The research was directed at 12 particles that were answered by respondents on a scale from 1 to 5. Given that the reliability coefficient amounted to 0.668, the reliability of the measuring scale can be considered acceptable.

Table 2. *Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha)*

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.668	.676	12

Source: Author's Work

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics results for claims related to H1, which is as follows:

A sharp drop in revenue due to external shocks causes problems in the foreign trade balance. To prevent these problems, more attention should be paid to the tourism offer outside of the summer season. The respondents indicated a certain degree of agreement or disagreement with a certain claim on the Likert scale (from 1 to 5). The mean value shows the arithmetic mean of responses to a certain claim. The highest mean was recorded in response to the claim "External shocks (such as pandemics, natural disasters, and political crises) have a negative impact on the Croatian tourism season" (3.93). The lowest mean was recorded for the claim "Prices of accommodations, foods and beverages in Croatian tourism are acceptable" (2.35).

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics for H1*

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
I am appropriately informed about the local culture, history, and sights of every tourism destination I visit in the Republic of Croatia	204	1	5	3.35	.921	.849
Prices of accommodations, foods and beverages in	204	1	5	2.35	.974	.949

Croatian tourism are appropriate						
The Croatian tourism offer is diverse and provides high-quality tourism products and services	204	1	5	3.47	.970	.940
Lesser-known tourism destinations in the Republic of Croatia aren't sufficiently promoted	204	1	5	2.68	1.158	1.341
The Croatian tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups (such as families, adventurers, history enthusiasts, gastro-tourists)	204	1	5	3.87	.906	.821
Dependence on tourism poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia	204	1	5	3.74	.852	.725
External shocks (such as pandemics, natural disasters, and political crises) have a negative impact on the Croatian tourism season	204	1	5	3.93	.982	.965
Valid N (listwise)	204					

Source: Author's Work

Table 4 shows descriptive statistics results for claims related to H2, which is as follows: High levels of dependence on tourism tend to slow down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia, posing a threat to the sustainability of economic growth and long-term development. The respondents indicated a certain degree of agreement or disagreement with a certain claim on the Likert scale (from 1 to 5). The mean value shows the arithmetic mean of responses to a certain claim.

The highest mean was recorded in response to the claim "Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia" (4.34). The lowest mean was recorded for the claim "High levels of dependence on tourism slows down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia" (3.63).

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for H2*

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia	204	1	5	4.34	.842	.709
Tourism provides a significant contribution to the economic development of the Republic of Croatia	204	1	5	4.23	.881	.776
The Republic of Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies	204	1	5	4.29	.814	.662
High levels of dependence on tourism slows down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia	204	1	5	3.63	1.016	1.033
It is necessary to invest more funds into development of other economic sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism	204	1	5	4.22	.855	.732
Valid N (listwise)	204					

Source: Author's Work

To prove the statistically significant correlation between variables and hypothesis H1, it was necessary to conduct a t-test. Based on the t-test results, it is possible to draw a conclusion about the statistical significance of the variables – *information received about sights and amenities offered by the destination, prices in Croatian tourism, diversity and quality of the Croatian tourism offer, promotion of destinations, direction of tourism offer toward interest groups, issues of dependence on tourism as well as negative influences on the tourism season*, as shown in table 5.

Table 5. *T-test – Hypothesis H1 – 95% Significance Level*

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
I am appropriately informed about the local culture, history, and sights of every tourism destination I visit in the Republic of Croatia	204	3.35	.921	.065
Prices of accommodations, foods and beverages in Croatian tourism are appropriate	204	2.35	.974	.068
The Croatian tourism offer is diverse and provides high-quality tourism products and services	204	3.47	.970	.068
Lesser-known tourism destinations in the Republic of Croatia aren't sufficiently promoted	204	2.68	1.158	.081
The Croatian tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups (such as families, adventurers, history enthusiasts, gastro-tourists)	204	3.87	.906	.063
Dependence on tourism poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia	204	3.74	.852	.060
External shocks (such as pandemics, natural disasters, and political crises) have a negative impact on the Croatian tourism season	204	3.93	.982	.069

Source: Author's Work

Based on the t-test conducted for hypothesis H1, Table 6 indicates that the respondents lacked information on lesser-known destinations in Croatia, and found the prices of accommodations, foods, and beverages in Croatian tourism unacceptable. Therefore, these variables were not statistically significant to the hypothesis, given

that the mean of the variables was below 3. According to the results, the remaining five variables are statistically significant to hypothesis H1.

Table 6. *T-test – Hypothesis H1 – 95% Significance Level (test value=0)*

One-Sample Test							
	Test Value = 0						
			Significance			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
I am appropriately informed about the local culture, history, and sights of every tourism destination I visit in the Republic of Croatia	51.907	203	0.000	0.000	3.348	3.22	3.48
Prices of accommodations, foods and beverages in Croatian tourism are appropriate	34.503	203	0.000	0.000	2.353	2.22	2.49
The Croatian tourism offer is diverse and provides high-quality tourism products and services	51.127	203	0.000	0.000	3.471	3.34	3.60
Lesser-known tourism destinations in the Republic of Croatia aren't sufficiently promoted	33.068	203	0.000	0.000	2.681	2.52	2.84
The Croatian tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups (such as families, adventurers, history enthusiasts, gastro-tourists)	61.039	203	0.000	0.000	3.873	3.75	4.00
Dependence on tourism poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia	62.728	203	0.000	0.000	3.740	3.62	3.86
External shocks (such as pandemics, natural disasters, and political crises) have a negative impact on the Croatian tourism season	57.089	203	0.000	0.000	3.926	3.79	4.06

Source: Author's Work

To prove a correlation between the statistical significance of the variables and hypothesis H2, it was necessary to conduct a t-test. Based on the t-test results, it is possible to draw a conclusion about the statistical significance of the variables – *tourism as an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia, importance of tourism to the economic development of Croatia, strengthening of the economy via innovations and new technologies, deceleration of development of other sectors due to the country's great dependence on tourism, and the necessity to invest in other economic sectors*, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *T-test – Hypothesis H2 – 95% Significance Level*

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia	204	4.34	.842	.059
Tourism provides a significant contribution to the economic development of the Republic of Croatia	204	4.23	.881	.062
The Republic of Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies	204	4.29	.814	.057
High levels of dependence on tourism slows down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia	204	3.63	1.016	.071
It is necessary to invest more funds into development of other economic sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism	204	4.22	.855	.060

Source: Author's Work

Based on the t-test conducted for hypothesis H2, Table 8 indicates that the respondents had insufficient knowledge about deceleration of other sectors' development due to tourism dependency. According to the obtained results, and given that the arithmetic mean of all variables exceeded 3, it is possible to conclude that all variables remain statistically significant to hypothesis H2.

Table 8. *T-test – Hypothesis H2 – 95% Significance Level (test value=0)*

One-Sample Test							
	Test Value = 0						
			Significance			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia	73.657	203	0.000	0.000	4.343	4.23	4.46
Tourism provides a significant contribution to the economic development of the Republic of Croatia	68.490	203	0.000	0.000	4.225	4.10	4.35
The Republic of Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies	75.390	203	0.000	0.000	4.294	4.18	4.41
High levels of dependence on tourism slows down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia	50.978	203	0.000	0.000	3.627	3.49	3.77
It is necessary to invest more funds into development of other economic sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism	70.397	203	0.000	0.000	4.216	4.10	4.33

Source: Author's Work

Table 9 shows variance analysis conducted to test hypothesis H1. This analysis was used to determine whether there were significant differences in respondents' thoughts, opinions and answers.

- *Prices of accommodations, foods, and beverages in Croatian tourism are appropriate*

There is a very slight variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 0.189), with a low mean square (Mean Square = 0.047).

F-value (F = 0.049) is statistically insignificant (Sig. = 0.995).

Analysis shows there are no statistically significant differences when it comes to the perception of prices between groups.

- *The Croatian tourism offer is diverse and provides high-quality tourism products and services*

There is moderate variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 2.365) with an average mean (Mean Square = 0.591).

F-value (F = 0.624) is statistically insignificant (Sig. = 0.646).

Analysis shows there are no statistically significant differences when it comes to the perception of the diversity of the tourism offer and the quality of goods and services between groups.

- *Lesser-known tourism destinations in the Republic of Croatia aren't sufficiently promoted*

There is high variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 11.390) with a high mean square (Mean Square = 2.847).

F-value (F = 2.172) has an approximate statistical significance (Sig. = 0.074).

Analysis shows there is a difference in perception of promotion of lesser-known destinations, however, its statistical significance is marginal.

- *The Croatian tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups*

There is high variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 19.610) with a high mean square (Mean Square = 4.903).

F-value (F = 6.633) has high statistical significance (Sig. < 0.001).

Analysis shows there are statistically significant differences in perception of the necessity to direct the tourism offer toward certain interest groups.

- *Dependence on tourism poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia*

There is high variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 14.633) with a high mean square (Mean Square = 3.658).

F-value (F = 5.490) has high statistical significance (Sig. < 0.001).

Analysis shows there are statistically significant differences in perception of the problem that tourism dependency poses to the foreign trade balance.

- *I am appropriately informed about the local culture, history, and sights of every tourism destination I visit in the Republic of Croatia*

There is moderate variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 8.179) with a mean square (Mean Square = 2.045).

F-value (F = 2.480) has statistical significance on level $p < 0.05$ (Sig. = 0.045). Analysis shows there are statistically significant differences in perception of knowledge about culture, history, and sights of the destination between groups.

Table 9. *ANOVA test for Hypothesis H1 – 95% Significance Level*

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Prices of accommodations, foods and beverages in Croatian tourism are appropriate	Between Groups	.189	4	.047	.049	.995
	Within Groups	192.399	199	.967		
	Total	192.588	203			
The Croatian tourism offer is diverse and provides high-quality tourism products and services	Between Groups	2.365	4	.591	.624	.646
	Within Groups	188.459	199	.947		
	Total	190.824	203			
Lesser-known tourism destinations in the Republic of Croatia aren't sufficiently promoted	Between Groups	11.390	4	2.847	2.172	.074
	Within Groups	260.899	199	1.311		
	Total	272.289	203			
The Croatian tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups (such as families, adventurers, history enthusiasts, gastro-tourists)	Between Groups	19.610	4	4.903	6.633	.000
	Within Groups	147.076	199	.739		
	Total	166.686	203			
Dependence on tourism poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia	Between Groups	14.633	4	3.658	5.490	.000
	Within Groups	132.597	199	.666		
	Total	147.230	203			
I am appropriately informed about the local culture, history, and sights of every tourism destination I visit in the Republic of Croatia	Between Groups	8.179	4	2.045	2.480	.045
	Within Groups	164.110	199	.825		
	Total	172.289	203			

Source: Author's Work

Table 10 variance analysis was conducted to test hypothesis H1. This analysis was used to determine whether there were significant differences in respondents' thoughts, opinions and answers.

- *Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia*

There is moderate variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 4.167) with a mean square (Mean Square = 1.042).

F-value (F = 1.483) has no statistical significance on level $p < 0.05$ (Sig. = 0.209).

Analysis shows there are no statistically significant differences in the perception of the importance of tourism as a revenue source between groups.

- *Tourism provides a significant contribution to the economic development of the Republic of Croatia*

There is a very slight variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 0.596), with a low mean square (Mean Square = 0.149).

F-value (F = 0.189) has no statistical significance on level $p < 0.05$ (Sig. = 0.944). Analysis shows there are no statistically significant differences in the perception of contribution of tourism to economic growth between groups.

- *The Republic of Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies*

There is moderate variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 7.937) with a mean square (Mean Square = 1.984).

F-value (F = 3.124) has statistical significance on level $p < 0.05$ (Sig. = 0.016).

Analysis shows there are statistically significant differences in perception of the need to strengthen the economy via innovations and new technologies between groups.

- *It is necessary to invest more funds into development of other economic sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism*

There is a significant variation between groups (Sum of Squares = 25.047) with a high mean square (Mean Square = 6.262).

F-value (F = 10.093) has high statistical significane (Sig. < 0.001).

Analysis shows there are statistically significant differences in perception of the need to invest into other sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism between groups.

Table 10. *ANOVA Test for Hypothesis H2 – 95% Significance Level*

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Tourism represents an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia	Between Groups	4.167	4	1.042	1.483	.209
	Within Groups	139.814	199	.703		
	Total	143.980	203			
Tourism provides a significant contribution to the economic development of the Republic of Croatia	Between Groups	.596	4	.149	.189	.944
	Within Groups	157.031	199	.789		
	Total	157.627	203			
The Republic of Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies	Between Groups	7.937	4	1.984	3.124	.016
	Within Groups	126.416	199	.635		
	Total	134.353	203			
It is necessary to invest more funds into development of other economic sectors to decrease Croatia's dependency on tourism	Between Groups	25.047	4	6.262	10.093	.000
	Within Groups	123.463	199	.620		
	Total	148.510	203			

Source: Author's Work

Discussion

According to the obtained data, it can be concluded that more women (66.2%) than men (33.8%) took part in this research. The majority of respondents were in the 35-44 age bracket (48.5%), whereas only 1% of respondents belonged to the "over 65" age bracket. Furthermore, 42.2% of respondents were employed in the private sector, 45.6% of respondents were employed in the public sector, and only 1.5% of respondents belonged to the student population. The majority of respondents were high school graduates (42.2%). A mere 2.5% of respondents only completed elementary education. Research results suggest that the respondents usually used Croatian tourism services two or three times per year, preferring a beach vacation that lasted anywhere from one week to ten days. The majority of respondents stated that their engagement in tourism activities in Croatia usually cost between 500 and 1000 Euro per year, or between 1000 and 2000 Euro per year, and they mostly took part in the activities offered by the local tourist board. Most respondents were well-informed about the culture, history, and sights of the destination they were visiting; however, 36.3% of respondents found the prices of accommodations, foods, and beverages

unacceptable. Furthermore, 43.1% of respondents found the Croatian tourism offer diverse and thought it was characterized by high-quality products and services. Approximately half of the respondents agreed that tourism is an important source of revenue for the Republic of Croatia. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents agreed that tourism significantly contributed to the economic development of the country. Respondents found ecological standards and sustainability of the tourism offer very important: however, they were only partially satisfied with the current tourism offer and services. 67.2% of the respondents were partially familiar with other industries that could contribute to economic growth in Croatia. The majority of respondents agreed that Croatia should strengthen its economy via innovations and new technologies. Furthermore, the majority of respondents stated they mostly visited lesser-known Croatian destinations and agreed that these destinations do not get enough promotion. Regarding the tourism offer, respondents found activities such as hiking, cycling, and water sports only partially important. Most respondents believed the tourism offer should be directed at certain interest groups. According to this research, respondents found that tourism dependency poses a problem to the foreign trade balance of the Republic of Croatia and that external shocks have a negative impact on the tourism season. They also found that great levels of tourism dependency decelerate the development of other economic sectors; moreover, they agreed it was necessary to invest more funds into other economic sectors to decrease this tourism dependency. Further research employed descriptive statistics in order to confirm or reject the following hypotheses:

> *H1: A sharp drop in revenue due to external shocks causes problems in the foreign trade balance. To prevent these problems, more attention should be paid to the tourism offer outside of the summer season.*

According to the obtained data, it can be concluded that the respondents agreed with most variables and that there is a positive correlation between variables that are statistically significant to hypothesis H1. Hypothesis H1 has therefore been confirmed.

> *H2: High levels of dependence on tourism tend to slow down the development of other economic sectors in the Republic of Croatia, which poses a threat to the sustainability of economic growth and further development of the country long-term.*

According to the obtained data, it can be concluded that the respondents agreed with all variables and that there is a positive correlation between variables that are statistically significant to hypothesis H2. Hypothesis H2 has therefore been confirmed.

Future research should choose a representative sample that includes respondents from all over Croatia. It would be useful to include certain tourism management institutions that monitor sustainability indicators for tourism (such as agencies, bureaus, institutes, etc.). It could also be useful to compare the conducted analysis with other Mediterranean countries that provide examples of good practice.

There are certain limitations to this research. The survey questionnaire was sent out via email, Viber, WhatsApp, and various Facebook groups, and was subsequently filled out by 204 respondents. This represents one of the fundamental research limitations, as it was not filled out by respondents from all regions of the Republic

of Croatia. The fact that the survey questionnaire was filled out by 66.2% of women and only 33.8% of men represents another limitation. Given that the questionnaire was filled out by only 2.5% of respondents from the 18-24 age bracket and only 1% of retirees, it is impossible to draw conclusions about the opinions of this particular age group. The same applies to unemployed persons, given that only 2.5% of them took part in this research. Another limitation is a small number of postgraduates (2.5%), students (1.5%) and persons who only completed elementary education (2.0%) who took part in this research.

Conclusion

Tourism is one of the most important economic branches in Croatia. The Republic of Croatia is becoming a very attractive tourist destination, and it is therefore imperative to increase the competitiveness of its tourism in the future. Croatia is a country with an abundance of tradition, history, and natural beauty. However, Croatian tourism is characterized by its seasonality, which is why it is necessary to develop specific forms of tourism to expand the season. Apart from beach vacations, tourists are are increasingly seeeking experiences that align with their needs. It is therefore necessary to adapt the tourism offer to the current market demands. It is very important to develop alternative sources, such as rural tourism, health tourism, wellness tourism, sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, etc. Moreover, it is necessary to digitalize the tourism industry to achieve sustainability and competitiveness. Croatia is one of the most tourism-dependent European Union member states, which is why it is crucial to appropriately manage the tourism sector and achieve foreign trade balance. One of the biggest problems arises from the decades-old foreign trade deficit on the Croatian books, which has significantly affected the economic stability of the country. Tourism is vulnerable to unforeseeable events and factors that could have a negative impact on the tourism industry, so it is imperative to continuously analyze risks and promptly implement crisis management strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how external shocks can have a negative impact on tourism back in 2020, when a dramatic decrease in the number of foreign and domestic tourists caused a great drop in revenue and subsequently GDP.

Great dependency on tourism leads to deceleration of development of other sectors (such as industry, agriculture, and information technology). It is crucial to diversify export by expansion of current markets. Croatia has ample potential due to its numerous natural resources, which means it could open new export possibilities if it made some investments into modernization of agricultural production or provided some support to local producers. Significant investments into other sectors apart from tourism, as well as funding for development of innovations and technologies, could improve the overall competitiveness and create new workplaces.

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