

# PROPOSAL FOR PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY FOR AGROTOURISM STRUCTURES IN ISTRIA

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## **Abstract:**

*Agrotourism in Croatia as well as in Istria, is a young and insufficiently researched form of selective tourist offer that comes across an entire series of limitations. The most significant limitations are connected with legal provisions, but there are significant defects observed also in its promotion. As a consequence of the great orientation of Croatia to the offer of a classical beach form of tourism, tourists continue not to perceive Croatia and Istria as agrotourism destinations. In addition to other activities, by developing an adequate promotional strategy, the agrotourism in Istra would pass to a new - more intensive development stage. By making this Study, the Authors want to contribute to the discussion about the inadequate treatment of agrotourism structures in the Croatian tourist offer by taking into consideration the example of Istria.*

*So that the formulated hypothesis about defects in promotion can be confirmed, the Authors have carried out a research on Istrian agrotourism offer. In addition to polls, for the purpose of a more comprehensive research, the Authors have examined the numerousness and representation of the promotional materials about agrotourism at a regional and national level. Considering the results of the researches, by making studies, efforts are made in order to determine an optimum agrotourism promotional strategy in Istria. The Istrian Region has been taken in consideration because of its leading role in the agrotourism development.*

**Keywords:** agritourism, disadvantages, promotion, Istria, strategy

## Introduction

History of tourism in Istria is connected with the coastal area. Accelerated development of tourism in the coastal area of Istria commenced in the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time many European countries had successfully recovered from consequences of the Second World War and raised the standard of population. In that period tourists' travelling abroad was liberalized, too. Thanks to extremely favourable combination of tourists' motivation and geographic position, Istria and Croatia have taken an active part in tourist trade. Major Istrian hotel and restaurant companies were established in the period between 1953 and 1974. During that period and continuing until the 1990s Istrian interior was relatively neglected in respect of tourism and tourism was developing more slowly in the interior of the peninsula than in the coastal area. Peninsular interior tourist valorisation was raised by day-trip tourism, various events and gastronomy, while accommodation capacity was limited and negligible in comparison with the coastal area.

The earliest beginnings of agritourist activities in Istria are connected with the organization of excursions by travel agencies to the countryside of Istria to small agricultural households where a one-day programme offered to tourists included typical Istrian food and drinks, folklore presentations and staying with a host in the original rural environment. In the nineteen eighties the first written paper appeared with the new term "agrotourism" which was included in everyday communication. However, a serious and systematic consideration of developing agrotourism in Istria commenced in the stagnation period of tourism in Croatia from 1990 to 1996. The first specific action was carried out in 1997 when the Regional Authority started to realize a development project of agrotourism in the rural areas of Istria. When starting the development a task of the Regional Authority was to secure financial arrangements, to support appearance on the market, to educate offer suppliers and to join together beneficiaries of programme in an association. Project realization started by issuing an educative catalogue named "Agrotourism" comprising instructions for the prospective providers of services informing them about the manner of service rendering, household registration, taxation, and types of support obtained from the County Bodies in charge for tourism. Presentation of the educative catalogue was made in all the towns and communes of Istria and thus a direct contact with the prospective investors was realized. At the beginning the reasons for starting that project were: extension of tourist season, creation of a new range of services and offer expansion to the interior of Istria, stimulation of agricultural activities of comparatively small Istrian agricultural households. By further development of the project of agrotourism its involvement was extended to: protection of environment and presentation of rural landscapes to the tourists, evaluation and presentation of natural resources and cultural heritage, preserving the rural part of peninsula, preserving the environmental architecture and traditional construction, preventing village abandonment and depopulation of rural areas, starting biological production, a revival of handicraft trades by producing souvenirs for use, enabling the inhabitants to make additional earnings and creating attractions and beautiful experiences for the guests. Parallel with education of everybody interested in the project and with help of the Regional Authorities finances were provided by contracting credits on conditions more favourable than those on the market. First loans were granted to the investors interested in agritourism in August 1997. During that year 32 loans were granted in the total amount of 1,1 million Euros with repayment period of 10 years and possible grace period of one year.

First catalogue of rural tourism in Istria was presented by the Istrian County Tourist Board in 1998. That catalogue was the first one of such type in Croatia and it included offers of 27 households. According to the catalogue 13 households offered accommodation with total 108 beds. Catalogue included in addition to agritourism facilities also an offer of vacation houses, cellars, restaurants, and similar. Since then the offer of rural tourism in Istria has been developing continually. According to the Tourist Sector of Croatian Chamber of Commerce in 2007 there were 64 facilities in Istria rendering services to tourists in agricultural households. According to the report of the County Regional Tourist Organization in 2007 there were 26 facilities in the territory of Istria having accommodation capacity of 170 beds. Discrepancy between the numbers of agritourist facilities has appeared due to the expression of unknown term of "agritourism" in laws, but also in many discussions on the Croatian level.

Referring to the example of Istria, with this paper the authors wish to contribute to the discussion about inadequate manner of dealing with agrotourist facilities in the Croatian tourist offer. Moreover, authors will try to present the current situation of all factors of agrotourism promotion of Istria and indicate incompleteness in promotional activities. The goal of research is with survey method test: examine the deviation poll research of agrotourism of the similar research performed in 2004 in the rural tourism of Istria, determine the important difference and similarities in both research, detect which promotion tool owners use in promotion of agrotourism, determine potential and current obstacles in the process agrotourism promotion structures in Istria and detect the level of cooperation between agrotourism facilities owners with mediators. With poll investigation we detected the current difficulties of promotion which agrotourism subjects face in their presentation on the market.

This paper tries to determine the optimal strategies of agrotourism promotion of Istria based on research result from 2007. We chose Istrian county because it has the leading role in agrotourism development.

The authors hope that this research will contribute to creation of better position for agrotourism of Istria and Croatia and promotion activities on national, regional and local levels. The results of researching will be used by owners of agrotourism structures, but also by tourist associations and other holders of agrotourism promotion of Istria and Croatia.

The research hypotheses are:

I It is understood that agrotourism structures are not enough recognized and promoted of the national tourist organisation.

II It is assumed that owners of agrotourism structures used cheaper funds of promotion.

III Owners of agrotourism structures do not cooperate mutually and with mediators as possible in the purpose of common promotions.

IV It is assumed that the levels of marketing knowledge of owner of agrotourism facilities are low and insufficient.

In this paper we use the methods of descriptive and inductive statistics. For poll research we use the method of stratified haphazard sample.

## **Definition of a term of agrotourism**

Many authors approached a problem to define the term of agritourism, but there is no unique definition of agrotourism generally accepted in the world. Various states and regions define the agritourism taking into consideration their own specific characteristics of the area where that selective form of tourist offer has been

developing. For example, Americans define the agrotourism as a tourism in which tourist's board at farms or in rural villages and experience farming at close hand (Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). University of California Small Farm Center define agricultural tourism as the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation (Lobo, 2001). Americans put emphasis on the role of agrotourism in generating extra earnings for a family farm whose primary activity is agriculture after all. They emphasize also that the agritourism is an integral part of more comprehensive tourism happening in the rural area and it is named the rural tourism. According to American definition the agrotourism includes: recreation in the country (hunting, fishing, horse riding etc.), educative experiences (learning to prepare meals, wine tasting, school excursions etc.), entertainment (various festivals), services of accommodation, direct sale on the farms (Tomcic, Ružic, Velenik, 2002). Like the Americans, the English define the agrotourism as a "business conducted by a farm operator for the enjoyment and education of the public, to promote the products for the farm, and thereby generate additional farm income" (Beall, 1996). The English, too, insist on an extra activity carried out by family farms through agrotourism. Italian definition is not much different from the preceding definitions, however, it is important to point out that the agrotourist activity cannot be a veiled tourist activity for the Italians (Bellencin, 1991). According to OECD, the agrotourism is more specifically defined as the tourist activity organized by family farms and agricultural producers respectively (OECD, 1994). Butler, Hall, and Jenkins emphasizes that the agrotourism and farm tourism are equivalent (Butler, R., Hall, C. and Jenkins, J. 1999). Table 1 illustrates the development of definitions for farm tourism to date.

*Table 1. Farm tourism (agrotourism): A chronology of definitions*

Author	Definition
DART (1974)	any tourist or recreation enterprise on a working farm
Hoyland (1982)	the provision of temporary accommodation and/or indirect recreational facilities on a working farm
Frater (1983)	tourism enterprises that are present on working farms and yet are largely supplementary to existing farm activities
Murphy (1985)	working farms that supplement their primary function with some form of tourism business
Wales Tourist Board (1986)	working farms, irrespective of type or size, where the primary activity is agriculture and where tourism is a supplementary activity
Denman and Denman (1990)	active provision of facilities for tourists within a working farm
Davies and Gilbert (1992)	a form of rural tourism whereby paying guests can share in farming life either as staying guests or day visitors on working farms
Pearce (1990)	farm tourism represents continuing ownership and active participation by the farmer in, typically, small-scale tourism ventures
Roberts (1992)	farm tourism is about people who are away from the place where they normally live and work, and about the things they do on a working farm, whether they visit for the day or for a longer holiday
Denman (1994a, b)	a term which covers the provision of facilities for tourists on a working farm
Clarke (1996)	tourism products in which the consumer is aware of the farming environment, at a minimum
Sharpley, R. &J., (1997)	tourism linked to agriculture, directly connected to agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays. Agritourism is the broader concept that encompasses farm tourism
Weaver and Fennell (1997)	rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component
Ilbery et al. (1998)	farm tourism is conceptualized as an alternative farm enterprise (AFE) comprising one of seven possible 'pathways of farm business development
World Tourism Organisation (1998)	involves accommodation being offered in the farmhouse or in a separate guesthouse, providing meals and organising guests' activities in the observation and participation in the farming operations.
Smith, V., Long, V. (2000)	It is also known as agrotourism. It is a portion of general tourism where environmental tourism and cultural tourism overlap. Farm tourism is where tourists reside and sometime participate in the working activities of farms and ranches.
Dettori, Paba, Pulina (2004)	Accommodation and restoration services are identified as agrotourism if they are provided by agriculture operators and the tourist activity can be regarded as connection and complementary to the agriculture activity
European Environment Agency (2008)	Holidays organized in a farm: meals are prepared with natural products and guests are entertained with handicraft, sporting and agricultural activities.

Busby, G., Rendle, S. (2000), The transition from tourism on farms to farm tourism, *Tourism Management* n. 21, Sharpley, R. &J., (1997). *Rural Tourism- an introduction*. International Thomson Business Press, London, World Tourism Organisation (1998), *Guide for local authorities on developing sustainable tourism*. Madrid: WTO, European Environment Agency (2008), [http://glossary.eea.europa.eu/terminology/concept\\_html?term=agritourism](http://glossary.eea.europa.eu/terminology/concept_html?term=agritourism), Dettori, D. G., Paba, A., Pulina, M., (2004), European rural tourism: Agrotouristic firms in Sardinia and their life cycle, <http://www.crenos.it/working/pdf/04-03.pdf>, Smith, V., and Long, V., (2000), *Encyclopedia of tourism*, Jafari, J. (ed.), Routledge, London

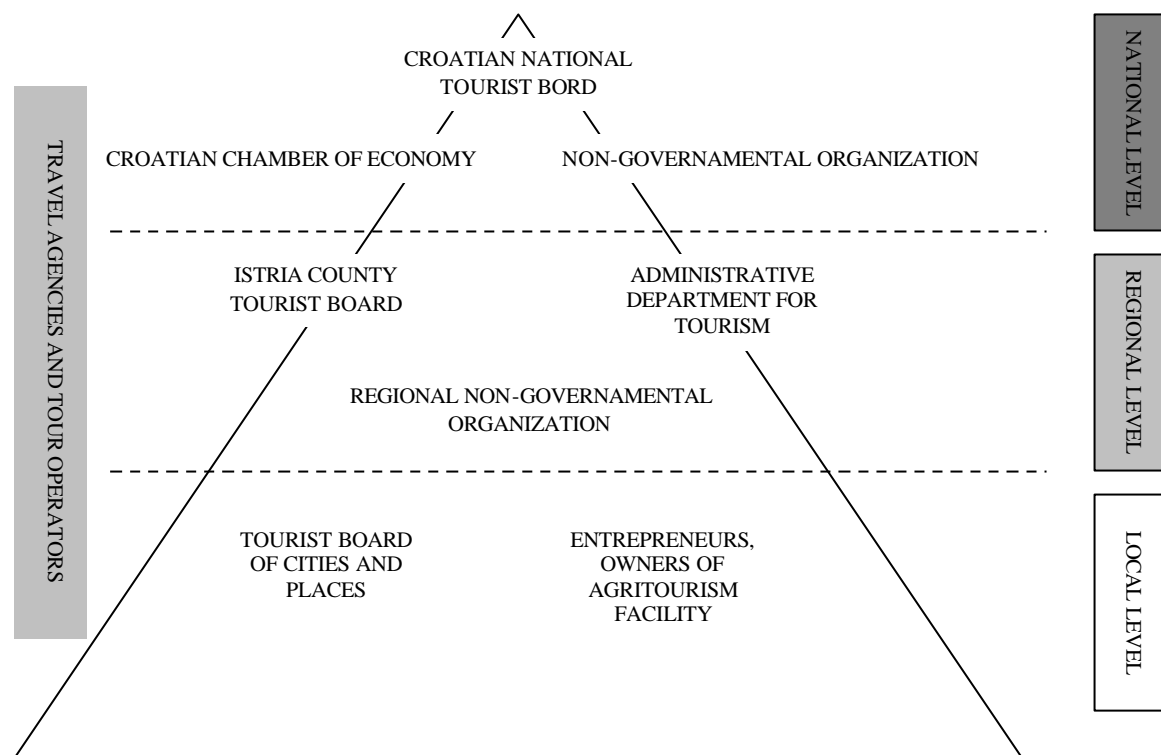
In Croatia the expression of agritourist household is identified with the expression of a homestead. As such it has been included in the Regulations of rendering catering

services in the homestead (private farm) (Official Gazette No. 22/96). According to the said Regulations the house stead, as a basic unit of agrotourist activity, is considered as a household where its members have residence, and where they realize their activity by rendering services of board and lodging using chiefly own agricultural products. Like in other countries, Croatian legislation puts emphasis on the role of agrotourism as an incentive activity providing extra assets to the house stead, while agriculture should be the essential activity. However, the present legislative regulations do not recognize the term of “agrotourism” which is frequently used in many occasions and has been adopted from the Italian term of *agriturismo* and English *agritourism* or *agrotourism*. Regardless of the fact in which part of the world it has been developing, the agrotourism represents a genuine experience of traditional life style in contact with the nature, people and customs of the area where it is developing gaining more and more promoters in the world. Istrian and Croatian agritourism is still unrecognized at the European and World level, where destinations to Italy, France, Austria and Switzerland prevail. Due to stronger role of coastal area, modesty of offer and presentation on the market, it is necessary to detect deficiencies in the promotion of that selective form of tourism and to determine more efficient strategy that will have a positive effect to demand.

### **Promotion of agrotourism in Istria today**

Some authors point out that the tourist promotion in Croatia is the most organized segment of Croatian promotion in the world (Skoko 2007). Main task of promoting Croatia on the tourist market is carried out by Croatian Tourist Board as the umbrella organization in charge of promoting all kinds of tourism. Promotion of Croatian tourism is carried out on more levels, i.e. on the national, regional and local levels. Systematic promotion on the national level is carried out by the Croatian Tourist Board. Kotler underlines that national tourist organizations have two marketing functions: formulation and development of a tourist product or a destination product, and promotion of tourist products on the corresponding market (Kotler, Bowen, Makens 2003). The said marketing functions of the national tourist organizations are mostly realized through: collection and data processing, presentation on the market by organizing *workshops* and fairs, study tours, taking part in joint marketing projects, supporting business undertakings in tourism, help and protection of consumers – tourists, and general education. World Tourist Organization has defined national tourist organizations in the following way: “National tourist organization is an autonomous government body, sometimes semi-government or body which has no official character, founded or recognized by the state, in charge on the national level for promotion, and in some cases also for international tourism marketing.” (Razovic 2004). Croatian Tourist Board as the umbrella organization in charge of promoting Croatian tourism has been cooperating with 21 County Tourist Boards, and on the local level with about 299 Tourist Boards of towns, communes and places. Organization chart of the national tourist organization and other subjects dealing with promotion of tourist facilities in Croatia, and thus with the agritourist facilities, is shown in the figure 1.

Figure 1. Promotion subjects of agritourism in Istria and Croatia



Source: Authors, 2007.

In addition to the County Tourist Boards, there are also Offices of the national Croatian Tourist Board operating in tourist generating countries that attract interest of Croatia. Croatian Tourist Board Offices are in the following foreign countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Great Britain, USA, Poland, Sweden, Belgium, Russia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland. Accordingly, there is well-developed network of offices and town and county tourist boards.

Croatian Tourist national organization is defined by the Tourist Board and Croatian Tourism Promotion Act (Official Gazatte No. 30/94). According to this Act a tourist board is founded for the purpose of developing and promoting tourism in the Republic of Croatia as well as business interest of legal and physical persons dealing in tourism, hotel and catering trade and activities closely connected. Accordingly, the Croatian Tourist Board creates and promotes identity and reputation of Croatian tourism, makes plans and carries out promotional activities at home and abroad with common interest of all subjects connected with tourism.

With regard to the tasks of the Croatian Tourist Board and its Offices, CTB as the umbrella organization in charge of promoting Croatian tourism should be also in charge of promoting agritourism as a new selective form of tourist offer. Unfortunately, on the national level agrotourism as the new tourist product has not been recognized and promotion of agrotourism as the new form of offer in rural areas does not exist. Authors of this paper have acquired this information by applying directly to the Information Centre of the Croatian Tourist Board and also by exploring websites of the most important portal of Croatian tourism at the web address *croatia.hr*. Analyzing the said websites we found out that Istrian as well as Croatian agritourist facilities were promoted within the category of accommodation facilities privately owned under the

name “accommodation with a host”. Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that lack of agrotourism promotion on the national level hinders its development, although this matter has been discussed and debated many times at the scientific conferences, expert and public debates and symposiums (Agrotourism is mentioned in the Strategy of Rural Development of the Republic of Croatia from 2004 to 2010). Contrary to Croatian Tourist Board promoting the whole tourism of Croatia, but not also agrotourism, the other countries, first of all Slovenia, Italy, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland have been intensively developing and also promoting rural tourism for many years.

In addition to the Croatian Tourism Board, tourism has been promoted also by the Croatian Chamber of Commerce. Within the Croatian Chamber of Commerce there is a specialized professional association in charge of development of tourist small agricultural households. Board of Rural Tourism of Small Agricultural Households has been established in 1995. The Association in cooperation with the Croatian Automobile Club has published so far an economic and tourist map of Croatia intended for tourists. Moreover a booklet was published named “Tourism on Small Agricultural Households” with instructions who and how can be engaged to manage the agritourism. Except for the map and booklet the Board of Rural Tourism of Small Agricultural Households of Croatia did not promote the agritourism towards the tourists.

There is another association called the Club of Members “Selo” (“Village”) dealing with issues of agrotourism on the national level, however, their promotional activities were not sufficient for the significant attraction of tourists, especially foreign tourists, to the destinations of agritourism in Istria and Croatia. One of the reasons for this can be found in the Association orientation to education of small agricultural households and tradition and culture popularization with the general public.

It is necessary to conclude that the agents of promotion of Croatian tourism on the national level have not recognized a necessity of promoting agrotourism adequately. In other words, the agrotourism is not recognizable in the Croatian tourist product, and for that reason the agrotourism in Croatia encounters considerable difficulties. In spite of that the offer has been developing, it is especially the case in coastal counties where Istria is leading in development. By integrating the offer on the national level and joint promoting, first of all by the Croatian Tourist Board, Istrian agrotourism would benefit and develop much faster than it is the case now.

On the level of the Istrian County, activities of promoting agrotourism have been carried out by Istrian County Tourist Board together with the Administrative Office for Tourism and Commerce of Istrian County. Istrian rural tourism has been promoted also by other subjects. An outline of the other subjects taking part in promotion on the regional level is shown in the figure 1.

Istrian County Tourist Board published already in 1998 the first catalogue of agrotourism in Croatia. That catalogue presented the offer of 27 households. It included in addition to addresses, pictures of offered facilities and telephone numbers of the households, also information how far the facilities were from the sea and bigger coastal centres, working time, offer of recreation facilities of a household, and agricultural products and animals raised. Distinction between rural tourism, agrotourism, and ecotourism was not made in the catalogue and a joint offer was quoted. The following similar catalogue was published by Istrian Tourist Board in 2000. That catalogue included 45 households offering 280 beds in 105 accommodation units. Offer covering facilities in rural areas, where agritourist facilities were also included, expanded subsequently. In 2003 another catalogue was published offering 184 various facilities. The latest catalogue covering agrotourist offer was published in 2005 and since then its reprinted editions have been regularly issued. That catalogue was offering 182 facilities

of board and lodging and 24 out of them were agrotourist facilities. The said catalogues were distributed at the international tourist fairs where Istrian Tourist Board was present. Catalogues were also distributed at information desks of Tourist Boards in towns and places all over Istria. During the years agrotourist offer was becoming more and more present on the Internet. Introduction of the agrotourist offer on the Internet pages of the Regional Tourist Board was of great importance because of increasingly more frequent Internet use by tourists and great number of visitors to those pages. Internet pages at the address [www.istra.hr](http://www.istra.hr) included basic information about households of agrotourism and their offer as well as contact numbers and the owner's e-mail address.

Administrative Office for Tourism and Commerce of Istrian County has strongly stimulated development of agrotourism in Istria. By popularizing agrotourism among small agricultural households that Office, at the beginning when facilities of agrotourism were organized, was supporting the owners by providing favourable loans and education for all concerned. For the purpose to promote agrotourism, the Administrative Office for Tourism and Commerce of Istrian County had organized press conferences for foreign journalists, presentations of agrotourist facilities on the spot and together with the Regional Tourist Board promoted agrotourism at Fairs.

Consortium "Ruralis" has a positive effect in stimulating and promoting rural tourism on the regional level. As "Ruralis" is a member of European Federation for Rural Tourism "Eurogites", who by means of Internet pages has been promoting also agrotourism towards the prospective consumers, Istrian agrotourism offer is present on the greater market by means of Internet (Basic objective of "Eurogites" is promotion, organization and development of rural tourism, and by this also of agrotourism in Europe). In addition to "Ruralis", two more associations operated in the area of Istria, i.e. "Agroturist" and "Agrotour Histria" who tried to unite the offer of agritourism of Istria and the "Agroturist" Association had made Internet pages comprising offers of agrotourism for tourist, however, those associations do not exist any more quite a long period of time.

Tourist Boards of towns, communes and places have been in charge of promoting agrotourism on the local level. There are 30 Tourist Boards of towns, communes and places in total in Istria and among them those more significant for the promotion of agrotourism are the Tourist Boards of Buje, Buzet, Grožnjan, Kanfanar, Kaštelir and Labinci, Kršan, Motovun, Oprtalj, Pazin, Svetvincenat, Višnjan and Vižinada. Those Tourist Boards are located in the rural area and they are very important concerning development and promotion of agrotourism. However, their budget intended for promotion is limited and, therefore, scope of the promotional activities is also modest. Mostly, the promotional activities are reduced to publishing leaflets of the whole offer of a place where it is located and offer of agrotourism, as well as to display offer on the web pages. In addition to the Tourist Boards, the individual facilities of agrotourism have been promoted by the owners themselves. More details about the promotion carried out by the owners of facilities will be given in the following chapter.

In the promotional activities of the agrotourism facilities tour operators and specialized travel agencies have played a significant role, too. One of the first tour operators who recognized Istrian agrotourism potential is I.D. Riva Tours of München who included in their catalogue in 2004 no less than 87 accommodating facilities of the rural area of Istria. In addition to I. D. Riva Tours, the agrotourism facilities have been included in the catalogues of other touroperators and travel agencies in Croatia, Great Britain and Germany. Apart from the catalogues offered by agencies in their regions and at fairs,

they have been promoting the agrotourism also by means of their Internet pages and portal.

It is clear from this chapter, that the most frequent way of Istrian agrotourism promotion includes: specialized catalogues, Internet pages, catalogues covering offers of tour operators and travel agencies, and visits to specialized fairs. Organized visits of journalists to the rural area in Istria are more significant activities that should be mentioned. It has been found out that reporter's stories upon the visits to the rural areas in Istria have considerable influence on enquiries and visits of tourists to "green Istria" which they frequently compare with the Italian region of Toscana. Regardless of all mentioned, number of promotional means oriented to agrotourism and their variety does not meet requirements of the facilities owners which could lead to the identification of this type of tourism by foreign tourists on the greater tourist market in Europe and the world.

## **Methodology of the poll research**

Opinion poll was carried out on a sample of 14 small agricultural households rendering services to tourists in Istria during the period between 7<sup>th</sup> August and 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007. Basis of choosing samples was a number of agrotourist facilities according to the catalogue of Istrian County Tourist Board published in 2005. from which 58% of total offers were polled. A questionnaire was an instrument of data collecting applying the following methods: owners were asked to fill in the questionnaire and they were also interviewed. Our research results from 2007 were compared with similar research carried on in 2004.

In order to define in what way the owners agrotourist facilities promote their capacities of accommodation in 2004. we have carried out a poll about rural tourism offer in Istria. Instrument of data acquisition had been the poll questionnaire. Owners had filled the questionnaire with guidance of interviewer. Polls were carried out from 15. June up to 1. November 2004. in different facilities of rural tourism accommodation: agrotourism facilities, rural family hotels, rooms and apartments in the rural environment and rural houses for holiday. In research we used the method of stratified haphazard sample. The sample was the number of facilities of rural tourism in the catalogue of Istrian tourist board printed in 2003 that had 184 facilities of rural tourism. Beside the interval of error of 9 % and the confidence of 95 % it was necessary to poll 72 facilities of rural tourism. (In field we polled 75 facilities, 41 % of offer.) Polling was performed in whole rural Istria. From this research in 2004 we set a research frame for agrotourist facilities: ways of tourist promotion, business cooperation between owners of agrotourism facilities and between them and intermediators (tourist agencies and tour operators). Based upon these scientific frames we created our research in 2007.

Besides the polling in 2007 authors used analytical-synthetic and descriptive method research and the representation of promotional materials about the agrotourism on national, regional and local levels.

## **Promotional activities in agrotourist facilities - research**

Field research was carried out in order to find out which promotional means are most frequently used by the owners of agrotourist facilities, and which obstacles they meet in their work related to the promotion.

The question “Which promotional means do you use to attract guests to your household?” respondents answered as shown in the following table:

*Table 2. Promotional means used by the owners of rural tourist facilities*

Rank	Promotional tools	Agritourism 2007. (%)	R. tourism 2004. (%)
1.	Brochures, leaflets, prospects Specialized catalogues of the Istria Tourist	100	59,42
1.	Board	100	65,22
1.	Internet	100	72,46
2.	Catalogues of domestic tourist agencies	79	26,09
3.	Foreign magazines articles	57	2,90
3.	Other (mouth to mouth, business cards)	57	13,04
4.	Catalogues of foreign tourist agencies	50	39,13
5.	Informative panels beside the road	36	43,48
5.	TV/ radio in the country	36	2,90
6.	Printed tourist guidebooks of rural tourism	29	15,94
6.	Tv and radio in foreign country	29	0
7.	National daily newspapers	21	4,35

*Note: Number of options they could mark was not limited. In the group " Other " owners of agritourism have cited the promotion "mouth to mouth " and using the business cards. Source: Research of the authors, 2007. and Velenik, R. „ The Promotion and selling channels in the Istrian rural tourism“, Master's thesis, Opatija, 2006.*

As it results from the table, all the owners of agrotourist facilities in Istria use Web pages, booklets, leaflets and posters, as well as the specialized catalogues of the Regional Tourist Organization. Reason why Web pages have the leading position in promoting is the fact that relatively small funds are necessary to create Web pages and there is wide range of prospective tourists approached on the Internet. It is possible to approach the global market on the Internet. In addition to the above, the owners of facilities have become aware of the fact how the Internet was important for promoting and approaching the prospective tourists. A great number of facilities have been included in the specialized catalogue of the Istrian County Tourist Board, the fact that confirmed updating and involvement of the Istrian County Tourist Board in the promotional activities. As far as the price is concerned, it is not a surprise that all the owners of agrotourist facilities use leaflets in the first place. Leaflets are relatively inexpensive means of promotion. The second place as the most frequent promotional means is occupied by catalogues of domestic travel agencies. This leads to a conclusion that native tourists are becoming more and more interested in this type of tourism, but also the very travel agencies are also aware of such an offer. Foreign magazines high position found in the answers can be interpreted first of all as the success of the Regional Tourist Organization to attract and organize visits by foreign journalists. According to the table 1. it can be concluded that the higher is the price of promotional means, the lower is their utilization by the owners of agritourist facilities. Thus the last place is occupied by the answers like: national daily newspapers, TV and radio in the country, printed specialized tourist guidebooks and TV and radio in foreign country.

By comparing the results of agritourism research in 2007 and rural tourism research in 2004, only slight variations are found out concerning the use of promotional means by

the tourist offer of rural Istria. It is arrived at a conclusion that the owners of facilities in agritourism and other types of rural tourism are directed to the less expensive promotional means and the Internet as the market modern communication medium. Importance of the Internet in promoting agritourism has been confirmed by a similar research carried on in Italy. According to that research the Internet represents a very important means of orientation and gathering information, it is three times more important for the tourist choice of facilities in agritourism than for the ordinary tourists (Information from the Internet 16.9% agritourists, 5.7% other tourists (Cambi, 2006, Research sample included 2500 Italian residents who were on holidays during the summer in 2006.)).

In order to prove hypotheses regarding obstacles owners of facilities have in active promotions towards the tourists, a few questions were put to them and first one is running: "How much money do you spend a year for the promotional activities?" Results follow in the table 3.

*Table 3. Amount of funds spent by the owners of facilities of agritourism and rural tourism for the promotional activities in one year*

Spent financial funds	Agritourism 2007. (%)	R. tourism 2004. (%)
Less than 3000 kunas	57	60,87
From 3001 to 7000 kunas	0	23,19
From 7001 to 11000 kunas	29	8,70
From 11001 to 15000 kunas	14	2,90
15001 and more kunas	0	4,35

*Source: Research of the authors, 2007. and Velenik, R. „ The Promotion and selling channels in the Istrian rural tourism“, Master's thesis, Opatija, 2006.*

Table 3. leads to a conclusion that one of more important limiting factors for the promotion of agritourist facilities is lack of funds the owners invest yearly in promotional activities. Polled owners in 57% cases were spending for promotional activities less than 3000 kunas in one year. Almost identical amount of funds was spent for promotion in 2004 which makes us to conclude that costs of promotion is less important element of doing business and that the owners of agritourist facilities have not yet recognized it and in their activities they have been relying in general on the Regional Tourist Board activities.

The research was carried out wishing also to establish the level of cooperation of the owners of agritourist facilities for the purpose of promotion. The question whether there was cooperation with other owners of facilities in Istrian agrotourism for promotional purposes, 64% of respondents gave a negative answer. On the level of rural tourism in 2004 high percentage of 71% of respondents gave a negative reply to the same question. On the basis of these data it is concluded that the owners of facilities of agrotourism in Istria have been oriented to individual work and thus have lost the advantages of cooperation in joint and coordinated marketing activities. Importance of cooperation has been emphasized by many eminent research workers of rural tourism in the world and it is necessary to mention Page, Getz, Roberts and Hall (Page and Getz, wrote about the importance of cooperation). Not only for the reduced expenses in promotion and appearance on the market, cooperation is also important because of expressively fragmented offer of agrotourism facilities in wider rural area in Istria.

Owners of facilities of agrotourism in Istria are not in the habit of promoting their own offer to special groups. 71% of respondents gave a negative answer to that question.

During research in 2004 90% of respondents answered that they had not carried out promotion to the special groups. These results lead to the conclusion that the owners of facilities of agrotourism are not at all acquainted sufficiently with marketing and the method of market segmentation, and their promotion and other marketing activities are focused on the whole tourist market. Contrary to Istria, in Europe and the world, where agritourism appeared earlier, promotion of the facilities of agrotourism has been focused to special groups (schools, associations of invalid persons, nature lovers, art colonies etc.).

To a question regarding attendance at educational courses on marketing, the owners of agritourist facilities mostly gave an affirmative answer. 57% of the respondents attended at the courses on marketing. Education mostly consisted of shorter workshops and presentation of marketing possibilities in agrotourism. Although various educational measures have been carried out during the whole year by various subjects in Istria (associations, regional authorities and others), the facility owners have still a great interest in education on marketing. To the same question in 2004 the facility owners in rural tourism of Istria gave a negative answer in 78% of the cases. The said makes us to conclude that considerable efforts were made by the local authorities with the objective of developing tourism in the rural areas. In addition to education on marketing, the facility owners were able to get instructions on gastronomy, interior and exterior decoration, informatics, use of web pages etc.

The last two questions of the field research were about cooperation with travel agencies and tour operators. Those questions were put because of important role of tour operators and travel agencies in promoting agritourism. Namely, catalogues and the Internet pages of intermediaries represent significant means of promotion for the facility owners in agritourism.

To the question: "How many tourist agencies you cooperated with to fill your capacities during the last year?" the facility owners in agrotourism gave an answer that they mostly cooperated with more than two agencies (43%). During the research carried out in 2004 the owners of facilities of rural tourism, where the owners of facilities of agritourism were also included, mostly cooperated with one tourist agency (37%). The reasons of changes in the analyzed periods have been found in active role of the Regional Tourist Organization and recognition of tourist tendencies by the intermediaries. It is known that contemporary tourists look for a preserved environment, activities out of doors, recreation and health, and it is just possible to find all this in the facilities of agrotourism.

To the question about the most frequent manner of booking accommodation in general, the respondents had more possibilities to choose as their answer. Results of the research are shown in the table 4.

*Table 4. The most frequent manner of booking accommodation in general*

Manner of booking of accommodation	Agritourism 2007. (%)	R. tourism 2004. (%)
The direct contact with the tourist "eyes to eyes"	43	57,97
Through the influence of the tourist agency in the country	21	11,59
Through the influence of the tourist agency abroad	0	24,64
Other (Internet, telephone, fax)	64	5,8

*Source: Research of the authors, 2007. and Velenik, R. „ The Promotion and selling channels in the Istrian rural tourism“, Master's thesis, Opatija, 2006.*

More than half of the respondents, 64% exactly, gave an answer showing that in general the most frequent manner of booking accommodation is contact with tourists on the Internet (e-mail), telephone and fax. This figure has confirmed importance of the Internet in agrotourism as it was more discussed in the preceding part of this paper. Direct contact with tourists in the facilities of agritourism represents another most important manner of booking accommodation and this leads to the conclusion that the tourists look for information about the facilities on the Internet and by asking friends, and they make their final decision where to stay on arrival on the spot. Another possibility is that the tourists who found their stay pleasant and were satisfied with the offer made arrangements with the owner of the facility for their future visits. Although the owners cooperated with more intermediaries, the importance of intermediaries in filling up the facilities is still insufficient. This leads to the conclusion that offer should be focused not only to demand, but also to the business partners in order to realize long term and positive results. It is especially important because of the fact that Istrian agrotourism has not yet been sufficiently recognized on the European tourist market and, therefore, cooperation with tourist agencies and tour operators is indispensable. Namely, intermediaries can have influence on recognition of Istrian agrotourism on the market, and they have a great marketing knowledge that places them in better position than the individual offers have.

## **Possible strategies of communication with market**

Promotion in tourism includes a process of communication between a tourist supplier and a user – tourist. Offer communication on the market is possible to realize directly, by means of personal selling, using post, telephone, electronic mail, fax, “one person telling another” advertising or, indirectly by means of mass media. Senecic emphasizes that promotion of tourism “includes activities aiming to draw tourists – buyers to a certain area (country) and persuade them to buy a determine product and service in the place of tourist staying and during travels.” (Senecic 1998). Prospective tourists often form an idea of tourist destination through promotion. On the basis of an idea launched by a tourist destination or organization, tourists make decision to buy a tourist product. Strategy is necessary in marketing in the same way as in many other business activities. Senecic and Vukonic have written about the strategy: “... strategy can be defined as ability and skill to engage all resources in order to realize the objectives planned.” (Senecic and Vukonic 1997) Marketing strategy includes various ways in which someone wishes to realize targets set out in advance. Strategy coordinates and directs operation of all marketing activities to objective realization.

Promotional strategy should result from the general market strategy. Promotional strategy includes: pushing strategy, pulling strategy, and combined strategy. Pushing strategy attempts to “push” product by aid of a channel of distribution and sale to consumers. In tourism that refers primarily to tour operators and tourist agencies, however, professional associations and various clubs may be included in this group, too. Use of this strategy aims at encouraging the intermediaries to “order and keep product, and to promote it to the end users.” (Kotler 2001). Attracting strategy attempts to induce demand by mass communication. This strategy is applied when appearing on strong competitive markets, when applying new channels of sale and similar. Objective

of this strategy is to encourage end users to demand certain products from the intermediaries and thus animate the intermediaries to order those products with the suppliers. Attracting strategy requires use of considerable finance resources. Under the present conditions the tourist companies and destinations use most frequently the combined strategy.

Besides mentioned strategies, large attention was dedicated to National Tourist Organization because it recognizes agrotourism as component part of the Croatian tourist product and their central web site [www.croatia.hr](http://www.croatia.hr) promotes agrotourism offer with the help of banners and links. The promotion of agrotourism structures through the Internet is very important, therefore it is necessarily that owners gain additional education about communication with the market via e-mail because the use of newsletter which does not require large costs and can accomplish the success. Banners and links are necessary to take a stand on the web site of regional tourist organization and others attractive commercial web sites of pleasure-trips (the [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com), [www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com), [www.fodors.com](http://www.fodors.com) etc.).

In our research we noticed there is no sufficient cooperation's of joint bidding leaders of agrotourism in the Istria. Advantage of cooperation of regional tourist board and agrotourism owners and the creation of clusters of agrotourism would increase the effects of promotion, with the same level of investment. Not knowing of marketing by owners of facilities were then of the minor significance. Through clusters and tourist organisations promotion is better regardless the marketing education of owners. According to the analysis of the status of promotion in agrotourism in 2007, the results of research carried out in the facilities of agrotourism in Istria, show that the National Tourist Organization – NTO has not recognized and promoted the offer of agrotourism as such, but it does it individually under other names, that the owners of facilities invest relatively small amount of money in promotion, that cooperation of the owners of facilities is still insufficient, and that the intermediaries are not sufficiently engaged in promotion. Consequently, optimal strategy of promotion is the one aimed both to the intermediaries and tourists. Promotion aiming to the tourist and intermediaries (tour operators and tourist agencies, professional associations and various clubs) leads to a conclusion that the basic strategy of promotion of agritourism in Istria is the combined pushing and polling strategy.

Without reducing the role of promotion aimed to tourists, the role of intermediaries is particularly important for the agritourism in Istria and Croatia because of the fact that Istrian and Croatian agrotourism has not yet been adequately recognized in wider tourist generating areas of Europe, where in that segment of offer dominate destinations in Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia. In that respect the owners of facilities of agrotourism together with the Regional Tourist Board and specialized associations should coordinate their actions in attracting tour operators and tourist agencies. It is necessary to act proactively towards the tour operators and tourist agencies, so that the suppliers of offers in agrotourism are engaged in these activities (Velenik and Boškovic 2006):

- individual creation of destination image to draw the attention of intermediaries;
- presenting organizations and tourist associations as collective bodies which facilitate negotiations with the whole range of rural tourism products providers;
- offering intermediaries exemptions or privileges for bringing tourists to rural areas;
- inviting office holders in tourist agencies and tour operators responsible for the product to visit the destination;

- examining and studying tour operators and tourist agencies catalogues in order to adapt rural tourism products to the kind of products intermediaries commercialize;
- establishing direct contacts with tour operators and tourist agencies in nearby towns and planning participation at specialized fairs;
- creating materials that can present the area: maps, photographs, lists of natural and cultural attractions, catalogues of accommodation facilities, quality brochures, newspapers;
- creating a list of tour operators who are willing to include rural tourism in their offer.

In doing their business, tour operators tend to mass tourism in order to generate profit. However, agrotourism is not a kind of mass tourism since it is based on sensitive rural environment subject to degradation. Rural environment is easy to change and adapt and this fact makes sustainable development more present in rural areas. A question that needs to be answered is which channels of sale and which strategy to use in order to protect rural areas from mass "invasion" of tourists. A solution is found in the orientation of Istria's agrotourism towards specialized tour operators, non-mass response and product quality no neglects by this need of removals of significant limitations in development of agrotourism about which it was more discussed in the previous chapters.

When applying the element of promotional mix in drawing tourists to Istria and Croatia, important activities should be carried out by the Tourist Organizations, first of all the national and regional organizations. Reason for this is their great experience in promotion, organization, numerous offices, but also their remarkable financial power with regard to individual offer. Contrary to them, the owners of facilities of agrotourism should more rely on less expensive means of promotion, direct sale by using the Internet in the first place for communication and promotion. Satisfaction of tourists and offer quality should not be forgotten when drawing tourists. Satisfied tourist becomes in that respect the best promoter of agrotourist facilities.

## Conclusion

Importance of agrotourism in tourist offer has been recognized by many states in the region, first of all France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland, but not by the Croatian National Tourist Organization. Although strategic documents of tourism and agriculture development talk about agrotourism, the Croatian Tourist Board that is in charge of promoting the whole Croatian tourism, has not recognized the potentials of agrotourist offer and has not promoted accommodation in agrotourism under that name, although the term of "agrotourism" has been generally accepted by the experts, offer suppliers and tourists too. Term of "agrotourism" has been used also by the Italians, the English, the Americans and others. At the level of the Croatian aggregate tourist offer there is no catalogue dedicated to agrotourism, and neither to organized promotion of agrotourism as a new type of tourist offer in rural area. This leads to the conclusion that lack of agrotourism promotion at the national level, with other factors, slows down its development. By making the aggregate offer of agritourism at the national level and by its joint promotion, it would pass in more intensive development phase. Further, the image of Croatian rural area indispensable for tourism would be so created, while by visits of tourists to rural areas would bring benefit to the rural communities through the

employment, inflow of money, and as a consequence of that an increase in standards of rural population.

The goal of research were: comparison of the poll research of agrotourism in 2007 with similar research performed in 2004 about rural tourism of Istria, detecting which promotion tool owners use in promotion of agrotourism, to determine potential and current obstacles in the process of agrotourism promotion structures in Istria and to detect the level of cooperation between agrotourism facilities owners with mediators.

Research of number and types of promotional means in Istria leads to the conclusion that the most frequent means of promotion of agrotourism are: specialized catalogues, the Internet pages, catalogues and the Internet pages of offer made by tour operators and tourist agencies, and visits to specialized fairs. Activities and organized visits of journalists to the Istrian rural areas are also important. The above indicated means and intensity of promotional activities are insufficient for more active role of agrotourism in the whole tourist offer. In addition, the research in agrotourist offer has discovered that the tourists facility owners prefer less expensive means of promotion and promotion on the Internet, they do not cooperate among themselves in order to realize promotional activities, they do not know marketing and market segmentation sufficiently, and they do not rely on the cooperation with the intermediaries.

In order to enable Istrian and Croatian agritourism to compete successfully with other European destinations of agrotourism, it is necessary to include the national tourist organizations more actively in promoting the agrotourism. Contrary to the individual offer, the Croatian Tourist Board has a great experience, knowledge, financial means, level of organization, and many offices all over the Europe and the world. Strategy of promotion that would be suitable for the specific characteristics of agrotourism in Istria is a combination of pushing and polling strategy. The essence of the chosen strategy is focusing on the intermediaries (specialized tourist agencies and tour operators, professional associations and various clubs) and to the tourists themselves and for that purpose the owners of facilities of agritourism would use less expensive means of promotion, however, further marketing education and joint promotional actions are required too. Orientation to the intermediaries would simplify approach to the tourists, while the intermediaries with their knowledge and experience in promotion would have a positive effect on creating image of agritourism in Istria.

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