

4. konferenca z mednarodno udeležbo
Konferenca VIVUS – s področja kmetijstva, naravovarstva, hortikulture in floristike ter živilstva in prehrane
»Z znanjem in izkušnjami v nove podjetniške priložnosti«
20. in 21. april 2016, Biotehniški center Naklo, Strahinj 99, Naklo, Slovenija

4th Conference with International Participation

Conference VIVUS – on Agriculture, Environmentalism, Horticulture and Floristics, Food Production and Processing and Nutrition

»With Knowledge and Experience to New Entrepreneurial Opportunities«

20th and 21st April 2016, Biotechnical Centre Naklo, Strahinj 99, Naklo, Slovenia

The Development of a Sustainable Agritourism Study Program through the Croatian Qualifications Framework

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Abstract

Agriculture and tourism are strategic sectors of the Croatian economy. Synergic interaction of these sectors might contribute to the uniform and sustainable development of Croatian regions.

The goal of this project is to design possible directions for the development of both sectors. The aims of the project are: i) to investigate key stakeholders in agritourism and to analyze the market, ii) to create an occupation standard for the engineer of sustainable agritourism, iii) to create a qualification standard for the bachelor of sustainable agritourism, and iv) to design a professional sustainable agritourism study program through the Croatian Qualifications Framework.

The methodology includes scientific research methods for analyzing the market, and the attitudes and perceptions of all parties involved. A cycle of generic and professional knowledge and skills training for teachers has been carried out to empower and enable them to participate in the development of the new study program.

Through the implementation of the professional study, the project will influence the development of economic activities in rural areas, increase employment and self-employment of graduates and expand and diversify activities of the existing family farms and agritourisms.

Key words: sustainability, agritourism, study program, occupation, qualification, rural tourism

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1 Introduction

The Development of a Sustainable Agritourism Study Program through the Croatian Qualifications Framework” is financed by the European Union Social Fund within the scope of the program Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013. It is part of the program goal “Improving Quality in Higher Education through the Croatian Qualifications Framework.” The lead partner is the Polytechnic of Rijeka and the project partners are the town of Pazin and the local action group “Central Istria”. The Project started in June, 2015. The estimated duration of the project is 15 months, that is, until September, 2016. The entire budget of the project is round 235,000,00 Eur (HRK 1,779,415.20), and 95% percent of that are non-refundable funds, and 5% are funds from the applicant, that is, the lead partner.

The project team consists of 14 members, 2 of which are the representatives of the project partners. The other members of the team are employees of the Polytechnic of Rijeka. Within the project, two project associates were employed for the duration of the project.

The Project is based on an interdisciplinary approach, that is, connecting the two sectors – tourism and agriculture. The aimed groups on the project are high school and college students, teachers and agriculturists.

The Project anticipates the development of professional standards with appropriate analytic background, development of qualification standards and the new study program Sustainable Agritourism, and a cycle of professional training for teachers.

2 Methodology

Investigation of the agricultural and tourism sector include interviewing, organising discussions, round tables and focus groups to collect necessary information on the key tasks and competences for a new qualification "engineer of sustainable agritourism". In addition, data is also collected on the study trips to agritourisms in Istria, Italy and Austria, and at a faculty of tourism in Greece. To prepare professors for a curriculum development as well as for a new study in which the student will be placed in the center, an educational cycle for teacher is carried out, which includes workshops in English, presentations in English and a workshop for motivation and accountability.

3 Project elements

The Project includes the following elements and accompanying activities:

- *element 1* - creating a professional standard, qualification standards and an analytical background (creating questionnaires, administering questionnaires to the aimed groups, examining and analyzing statistically the collected data, organizing round tables);
- *element 2* - the development of the new study program Sustainable Agritourism (visting family farms in Istra (Croatia), Italy and Austria, visiting institutions of higher education where the study program of agritourism is carried out, creating a study program based on learning outcomes);
- *element 3* - professional training for teachers (an English language workshop, a workshop on making presentations and presenting in the English language, motivational training and accountability workshop);
- *element 4* – managing a project (coordinating the planned activities, supervision and control, regular monthly meetings with the partners);
- *element 5* – promoting and increasing visibility (creating a visual identity of the project, using written and electronic media, participating in professional and scientific conferences in Croatia and abroad).

4 Activities of the first nine months

In the first nine months of the Project several activities have been carried out and these are described hereafter.

The round table “Development and perspective of the Family Farms and Agritourisms – Possibilities and Challenges” has been held (Picture 1). The aims of the round table were informing the participants about the implementation and Project goals, administering questionnaires to participants and the discussion on key activities, competencies and possibilities of development in agritourism, as well as challenges during the expansion of the existing activities to agritourism.

The round table have attended 34 participants, of which there were 16 representatives of family farms and agritourisms and 19 representatives of other stakeholders and interest groups as well as representative of the Institute for Agriculture and Tourism in Poreč, High school Mate Balote, Poreč, Agency for rural development of Istria Ltd, representatives of local communities (City of Pazin) and associations (LAG Central Istria)



Figure 1: 1. round table "Development and Expansion of the Activities of Family Farms and Agritourisms - Possibilities and Challenges
Source: Polytechnic of Rijeka, 2015.

In addition, the questionnaires were administered to the aimed groups on the Project, that is, high school and college students, teachers and family farms. The aim of administering the questionnaires was to explore the market and find out about the attitudes of the aimed groups about the agritourism sector. Also, for the purpose of creating the professional standard “professional bachelor – engineer of sustainable agriculture” the information has been collected according to the methodology of “the Hrvatski zavod za zapošljavanje” (in English: the Croatian Employment Service) about key activities and competencies in agritourism.

Besides, three workshops were held whose purpose was to upgrade teachers’ competencies, and the development, and application of the competency-based approach, which is student-centered. This activity is in conformance with EQF for Lifelong Learning (2008) and CROQF (2013). The cycle of training comprised of the two five-day English language workshops with the emphasis on conversation, making presentations and presenting, and one two-day workshop on motivational and accountability

training. Twenty-two to twenty-five people, who will participate in the development of a new curriculum of the study program Sustainable Agritourism, participated in the workshops.

Furthermore, six Project team meetings were held (two in Pazin and four in Rijeka), a logotype was created (figure 2), a website (figure 3), a facebook account and a banner. In addition, the Project has been presented in daily newspapers and a local television.



Figure 2. Logotype of the new professional study program Sustainable agritourism
Source: Polytechnic of Rijeka, 2015.

Also, two activities are in progress, and these are preparing papers in order to participate in the international conference where the first results of administering questionnaire will be presented, and the organization of the second round table dubbed “The Possibilities of Associating and Defining Key Activities in the Area of Agritourism”.



Figure 3. Web site: www.sodapazin.com
Source: Polytechnic of Rijeka, 2015

5 Conclusion

The sustainability of the project is mirrored in the improvement of the competencies of teaching staff, and in the development of the new study program Sustainable Agritourism, which includes the principles of ecological agricultural production, sustainable development, and knowledge and skills in agritourism. These ideas come out of scientifically-based results of a market survey.

The study program will be conformed with the guidelines from the European and Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF, 2013) and the strategy Europe 2020, and will contribute to increasing the quality of higher education.

By achieving the project goals, progress and development will be ensured with a greater possibility of employment and self-employment in Croatia and our region also because the agriculture and tourism are strategic sectors of the Croatian economy

6 Literature

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