

Sustainable Tourism in Istria (Croatia)

Cultural routes and territorial identity as drivers for long-lasting local development

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1. Introduction and object of the research

This chapter intends to focalise on the Croatian Region of Istria (EU NUTS₃-HR036), which is located in the peninsula at the head of the Adriatic Sea. The coast is articulated, dotted with small historic towns (Umag, Poreč, Rovinj and Pula) with Roman remains, as well as architectural sites dating from the Byzantine and Venetian dominions. The landscape of the whole territory is scenic. The rolling hills inland are covered with vegetation and scattered with villages. Because of the nature of its soils, from west to east the area is divided up into “red Istria” (limestone), “grey Istria” (sandstone/marl), and “white Istria” (calcareous/dolomitic).

Known as “the land of a thousand islands”, Croatia is characterised by the presence of several Special Protected Zones, natural parks, elements of historical/cultural heritage, religious sites (some devoted to pilgrimages), historic towns and villages, UNESCO sites, and natural and local food products. This set of attractions – together with the precious intangible heritage – plays an important role in the achievement of the objectives of the *Strategy for Croatian Tourism Development*. One of the instruments for this purpose is the implementation of multi-thematic routes, the core topic of this chapter.

Following a summary of the geographical context and some historical notes (§1), we will illustrate some tourism-related aspects (§2) and the policies that have been implemented. In §3 we describe the three thematic routes identified under the European Community project “Quality Network On Sustainable Tourism (QNeST)”, which cover parts of the area in question. These often interweave and are complemented by the rich and detailed information for tourists to be found in public portals and private websites (§4).

2. The geographical and socio-economic context of Istria County

Istria is a triangular peninsula that points downwards in the northern part of the Adriatic Sea between the Gulf of Trieste (Italy) the Kvarner Gulf (Croatia).

The base of the triangle lies to the north and the area narrows towards the south, with fringes stretching down as far as Cape Kamenjak in the homonymous nature reserve. It includes to the north the part of Istria that is in Slovenia and the small portion of Istria that is Italian. 89% is made up of Croatian Istria (2,822 sq. km.). Here, in Istria County – the third level of administrative division in local government – one finds the 3 *Routes* developed within the ambit of the QNeST Project and dealt with in greater detail in section no. 3 (figure 3).

We will now dwell on certain morphological (Sestini 1963, pp. 43-45) and settlement-related aspects. The coast has a Mediterranean climate and twists and turns for almost 450 km (excluding the islands). It is very articulated and varied, with frequent bays (with sandy, pebbly or stony beaches), sometimes with high, linear stretches or with rugged cliffs. The promontories and small peninsulas are undulating or steep. Facing the coast, there are islands, islets and rocky outcrops.

Along the coastline, there are notable inlets where the sea penetrates inland. In the western sector, two are perpendicular to the coast itself:

- the first lies further north and constitutes the Mirna Valley [the river is navigable for a few kilometers, and, in the past, it was important for transporting lumber from inland Istria to Venice (De Luca 2011, p. 45; Baissero 2019)];
- the second inlet is central. It constitutes the 12 km-long Lim Channel, which is prolonged into the hinterland as an erosional valley (the Draga or Kanfanar Valley) (Rossit 2015, p. 315). In south-eastern Istria, on the other hand, one finds an incision running from north to south: this is the Rasa Valley, which ends in the long homonymous Channel.

The hinterland, from west to east, is made up of a karstic plateau (on average, between 100 and 300 metres above sea level), largely covered in Mediterranean scrub and punctuated with white dry-stone walls. It is at times flat, or

with little valleys with frequent rises and a few spurs in which, over the centuries, hundreds of small, ancient stone settlements, hamlets and little towns have located themselves (Farina 1989; Lago *et al.* 1987).

Given the nature and orientation of the rocks, superficial and underground karstic phenomena are common (Bognar 1996), producing valleys, chasms, sinkholes and caves like the marble caves at Brtonigla; those at Baredine (Nova Vas), Pazin, Festini (Žminj); and Romuald's Cave (Lim Channel). In appearance, the part further inland is verdant; this is made up of scrubland and more or less continuous woodland, interrupted by plots of cultivated land with red soil due to the ferrous residues from the decomposition of the calcareous rocks (Merlak 2019).

Far from the coast, the climate is of a mild, continental type. The countryside in the centre/south is punctuated with *casite*, small stone buildings used in the past for sheltering tools and farmers/shepherds (Lago 1994). Given their interest from the point of view of cultural heritage, the *Casite Park* has been created at Vodnjan, with the restoration of 200 buildings, some of which can now be visited.

The altitude, on the other hand, is quite considerable to the northeast – in Čićarija and in the Učka mountain range (almost 1,400 m). This last feature, lying just behind Opatija, is a nature park and has stunning floristic characteristics (Tomasi 2012).

Istria County is composed administratively of 10 *townships* (Buje, Buzet, Labin, Novigrad, Pazin, Poreč, Pula, Rovinj, Umag and Vodnjan) and 31 municipal areas. The towns, except for (56,540 inhabitants in 2015) are all small, and the municipalities – though small demographically – generally have between 1,000 and 6,000 inhabitants.

The salient characteristic of Istria's settlement structure, though, is that it is further subdivided into hundreds of small hamlets, usually of around 100-200 inhabitants (*naselje*). In the old part, the residential areas of the municipal centres – both on the coast and in the hinterland – are compact, built of stone and generally surrounded by walls, with little cobbled streets and squares, the seat of the local government, a castle, noble coats of arms and especially those of the Venetian domination, with the Lion of St. Mark, and with – a recurring iconic feature – water tanks, as well as churches of varying size with – separate, to one side – towering *campanili* (belfries).

Though it is a territory that is relatively limited in size (it is indeed only a Province), the Croatian part of Istria has a very complex history and has, over the centuries, been subjected to invasions, construction and destruction. Various dominions have ruled over either the whole of the area or parts of it. There have been many and varied immigrations – from the Veneto, from Germany and from the Balkans – and emigrations too, ending up with the real exodus after the Second World War that depopulated many of the settlements. Different traces of all of the above remain in the monuments, the buildings, the demography, idioms and traditions.

There are many cultural assets and protected cultural centres present in Croatia. The Ministry for Culture and Media has produced a *Register of cultural assets in the Republic of Croatia* (Cevolin 2019, p. 427), also in digital form and available on a geoportal.

Some of these sites are on the 3 QNeST routes, as will be illustrated below (figure 4).



Figure 1. Casite, Park Kažuna.

3. Economic activities: tourism and agriculture

3.1. *Tourism: the policies*

Croatia is nowadays defined as “a rising star” of tourism (Dwyer *et. al.* 2017, p. 1). In 2019, with revenues of 10,097 million euros, the tourism sector was one of the pillars of the Croatian economy (ICE-Zagreb Office 2019, p. 7). It represents 10.4% of the Croatian GDP and 13.3% of the country’s employment (Dwyer *et. al.* 2017, p. 2). This could be considered as one of the results of the *Strategy for Croatian Tourism Development to 2020* (Ministry of Tourism 2013). This plan aimed to diversify the tourist offer by improving the sustainable management and attractiveness of thematic tourist routes and de-seasonalizing tourist flows (ICE – Zagreb Office 2015, table of p. 14-15). Besides, Croatia has been involved (and still is) in several EU projects (Ilic 2017) and the development plans of individual strategic towns are being worked on.

3.2. *The evolution of tourism in recent decades*

Croatia is in seventh place in Europe with 84.1 million tourist presences of non-residents according to the Eurostat figures for 2019, approximately a third of which are represented by Istria County. For confirmation of the importance of tourism in Istria, see the data provided by the *Istrian Tourist Board* in tables 1 and 2.

In 2019, foreign tourists came from 75 countries and from every continent; the internal Croatian component was also well represented. The two tables only refer to those countries from which there were more than 50,000 arrivals; all the others are grouped together. The neighbouring countries – Austria, Slovenia and Italy – play an important role, even if the highest value is represented by Germany (23% of arrivals and 30% of overnights). Domestic tourism is in fifth place. Also quite significant are the countries of Central Europe, Holland, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and France.

In the two tables it is possible to make a temporal comparison for the period 2019-2009. We also provide the figures for 2020, to document the major decrease caused by the SARS-COV-2 pandemic.

Tables 3 and 4 show the distribution by municipality (arrivals and overnights) for the period 2009-2019. These are all coastal municipalities.

Table 1. *Istria County: tourist arrivals in the years 2020, 2019 and 2009. Source: Istria Tourist Board.*

Country	2020		2019		2009	
	Arrivals	%	Arrivals	%	Arrivals	%
Austria	152,800	8.14	654,667	14.20	336,657	12.36
Croatia	182,804	9.74	313,216	6.79	171,147	6.28
Czech Republic	97,608	5.20	152,319	3.30	98,009	3.60
France	13,274	0.71	64,478	1.40	55,144	2.02
Germany	601,905	32.07	1,059,908	22.99	580,774	21.32
Hungary	40,927	2.18	129,062	2.80	55,143	2.02
Italy	98,559	5.25	462,910	10.04	432,538	15.88
Netherlands	32,595	1.74	171,155	3.71	149,376	5.48
Poland	80,528	4.29	130,279	2.83	53,462	1.96
Slovakia	21,094	1.12	68,601	1.49	32,433	1.19
Slovenia	352,327	18.77	605,923	13.14	403,215	14.80
Switzerland	28,746	1.53	67,303	1.46	34,073	1.25
UK	15,272	0.81	146,201	3.17	42,310	1.55
Others	158,560	8.45	583,777	12.66	279,889	10.27
<i>Tot.</i>	<i>1,876,999</i>	<i>100.00</i>	<i>4,609,799</i>	<i>100.00</i>	<i>2,724,169</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Table 2. *Istria County: tourist overnights in the years 2020, 2019 and 2009. Source: Istria Tourist Board.*

Country	2020		2019		2009	
	Overnights	%	Overnights	%	Overnights	%
Austria	958,040	7.09	3,483,770	12.13	1,995,205	10.67
Croatia	809,441	5.99	1,202,043	4.19	868,855	4.65
Czech Republic	610,475	4.52	974,503	3.39	636,918	3.41
France	66,222	0.49	271,334	0.95	261,282	1.4
Germany	5,224,540	38.66	8,694,612	30.28	5,258,943	28.12
Hungary	225,084	1.67	654,064	2.28	301,037	1.61
Italy	614,052	4.54	2,269,964	7.91	2,224,571	11.89
Netherlands	298,838	2.21	1,520,712	5.30	1,652,535	8.84
Poland	549,151	4.06	878,515	3.06	385,055	2.06
Slovakia	128,409	0.95	407,445	1.42	204,781	1.09
Slovenia	2,562,692	18.96	3,621,754	12.62	2,423,831	12.96
Switzerland	194,205	1.44	389,031	1.36	213,436	1.14
UK	101,532	0.75	943,701	3.29	304,529	1.63
Other	1,172,003	8.67	3,398,108	11.84	1,972,796	10.55
<i>Tot.</i>	<i>13,514,684</i>	<i>100.00</i>	<i>28,709,556</i>	<i>100.02</i>	<i>18,703,774</i>	<i>100.02</i>

Table 3. Tourist arrivals by municipality: 2020, 2019 and 2009. Source: Istria Tourist Board.

Municipality	2020		2019		2009	
	Arrivals	%	Arrivals	%	Arrivals	%
Bale	27,596	1,47	55,726	1,21	23,271	0,85
Brtonigla	34,855	1,86	76,132	1,65	37,779	1,39
Fažana	67,615	3,60	144,439	3,13	91,008	3,34
Funtana	99,107	5,28	237,206	5,15	171,073	6,28
Labin	71,231	3,79	245,272	5,32	180,227	6,62
Medulin	195,667	10,42	426,221	9,25	258,195	9,48
Novigrad	104,327	5,56	230,296	5,00	140,222	5,15
Poreč	203,953	10,87	589,120	12,78	391,235	14,36
Pula	149,184	7,95	445,623	9,67	214,023	7,86
Rovinj	294,562	15,69	721,060	15,64	364,048	13,36
Tar-Vabrica	90,082	4,80	256,373	5,56	181,226	6,65
Umag	183,328	9,77	505,155	10,96	355,098	13,04
Vodnjan	43,454	2,32	57,366	1,24	32,800	1,20
Vrsar	87,087	4,64	221,560	4,81	156,073	5,73
Others	224,951	11,98	398,250	8,64	127,889	4,69
Tot.	1,876,999	100,00	4,609,799	100,00	2,724,169	100,00

Table 4. Tourist overnights by municipality: 2020, 2019 and 2009. Source: Istria Tourist Board.

Municipality	2020		2019		2009	
	Overnights	%	Overnights	%	Overnights	%
Bale	193,112	1,43	362,458	1,26	139,633	0,75
Brtonigla	320,748	2,37	627,770	2,19	342,884	1,83
Fažana	520,586	3,85	1,055,382	3,68	822,197	4,40
Funtana	743,193	5,58	1,721,331	6,00	1,354,601	7,24
Labin	453,250	3,35	1,440,277	5,02	1,166,995	6,24
Medulin	1,448,537	10,72	2,765,651	9,63	1,842,136	9,85
Novigrad	641,074	4,74	1,331,891	4,64	838,732	4,48
Poreč	1,388,144	10,27	3,485,233	12,14	2,641,670	14,12
Pula	855,878	6,33	2,174,652	7,57	1,056,050	5,65
Rovinj	1,846,127	13,66	4,011,658	13,97	2,596,044	13,88
Tar-Vabrica	804,826	5,96	1,973,775	6,87	1,471,278	7,87
Umag	1,273,200	9,42	2,724,542	9,79	2,039,082	10,90
Vodnjan	532,307	3,94	684,474	2,38	296,559	1,59
Vrsar	712,854	5,27	1,634,030	5,69	1,270,621	6,79
Others	1,780,848	13,18	2,716,432	9,46	825,292	4,41
Tot.	13,514,684	100,07	28,709,556	100,29	18,703,774	100,00

The coast is used to a large extent for seaside tourism, whose attraction is based on the “3s” model – *sun-sea-sand* – especially for the mass market (Ilić 2017, p. 192; Rossit 2015; Albolino 2014). This is concentrated on the west coast, between Umag and Pola (Gosar 2014, p. 170; Kranjčević, Hajdiniac 2019), and also stretches as far as Medulin in the extreme south (tables 3 and 4). To gauge its importance, we provide the example of the municipality of Novigrad in 2017: resident population 4,345; tourist arrivals 222,774; arrivals/inhabitants: 51.6 (Brščić *et al.* 2020, p. 150).

Since the end of the 20th century, in particular, the coast – both in the west and the south – has been to a large degree given over to tourist developments: the coastal residential areas have expanded with neighbourhoods for the tourists. Other areas have been developed from scratch with hotels, resorts, holiday camps, and non-hotel accommodation (especially apartment rentals in private houses).

All kinds of services have been created: hotels suitable for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), sports facilities – both aquatic and on land – even with local specialisation; for example, Umag has around 60 tennis courts. There have been conversions of previous state mega-buildings into smaller units, with foreign investments from Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy (Gosar 2014).

Campsites are also frequent (Brščić *et al.* 2020): from luxurious ones like the Camping Park Umag (with a great variety of types of accommodation, from the numerous “mobile homes” to glamping) to small family-run campsites (both on the coast and in the hinterland).

By the sea, numerous little harbours and marinas have been created for pleasure boating (Favro, Glamuzina 2005). Nowadays, one can find out about all these aspects via internet and, with all the types of communication and illustration available, it is easy to take a “real” virtual trip to the area.

3.3. Agriculture

Near the coast (but also widely inland) viticulture is practised [3,200 hectares of vineyards and 20 million litres of wine in total (Rihelj 2018)], and 109 wineries are to be found that are much frequented by tourists (Pitacco 2014 for the history of vine-growing in Istria; Pičuljan *et al.* 2019; Ilak Peršurić *et al.*

2016). There are also 5 Wine Roads (Ruzić 2008, p. 12; Albolino 2014, p. 427). The wine-producing companies are exhaustively publicised on the web and are geolocalised. Tourists prefer to drink wines obtained from indigenous grape varieties such as Istrian Malvasia (Istarska malvazija) and Terran (Oliva *et al.* 2012; Ilak Peršurić, Tezak 2011). Olive-growing is also widespread, with 141 producers of oil and 7 Olive Oil Roads. Istria participates in the Olive Oil Itinerary of the Council of Europe (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-routes-of-the-olive-tree>) and Pola has an Olive Oil Museum (<https://oleumhistriae.com/en/home/>).

The area in the northwest (Umag, Buje, Brtonigla and Novigrad) is the one with the greatest specialisation in both of these crops <https://www.coloursofistria.com/en/destinations/map-istria/winemakers#TopPage>.

Given the shape of the peninsula, the hinterland is quick and easy to reach (10-30 km in the northern section, much less in the south), allowing for tourism and hiking in the countryside to be very mobile (Ruzić, Demoja 2017). Numerous other types of special interest tourism are available: cultural tourism (Grzinić, Vodeb 2015); bicycle touring (Bait *et al.* 2019) and motorbike tourism; food and wine tourism, linked to typical local products (truffles in particular); various other kinds in which this phenomenon expresses itself (Rakitovac, Maružin 2017; Žužić 2014).

One type of tourism that is very common everywhere in Istria is bicycle touring, which takes advantage of a plethora of minor roads. Detailed cartographies of routes and tracks of varying difficulty are available on internet. Especially worth mentioning is the “Parenzana” cycling trail because it constitutes an example of recuperation and reuse of the tortuous layout of the former railway (123 km) (figure 2). With its narrow gauge and continuous rises and falls, this had been built during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and left abandoned in 1935 when Istria was under the dominion of Italy (cartography in Bertarelli 1934, inserted between p. 336 and p. 337; Rakitovac, Maružin 2017).

For the importance of bicycle touring see also the route of EuroVelo 8 – Mediterranean Cycle Route in Croatia (which will run along the entire coast of Istria, as part of the cycling itinerary through all the European Mediterranean countries).

4. The QNeST routes

The complexity of the territory of Istria County lends itself to the identification of three multi-themed routes (figure 3). Two of these lie in the northern zone of the region:

1. the *Cultural-Natural Route*, from Poreč winding North-East to Motovun and then North-West to Grožnjan;
2. and the *North Istria Route*, from the Učka Nature Park to Hum, Roč and on to Vižinada;
3. the third is in the southern zone: the *South Istria Route*, from Cape Kamenjak to Pula and the Church of St. Blase [via the Punta Cristo Fortress and the Brijuni National Park (figure 4)].

With its plethora of very differently themed resources, Istria can capture the interest of the tourist with attractions that appeal to a whole range of potential needs and desires: cultural, religious, artistic, musical (figure 5), or related to sports (figure 2, POI 13), food and wine, or cures and wellness. These attractions become the basis – or have the potential to do so – for strategies for developing tourism (and eco-sustainable tourism), to increase Croatia's competitiveness in this sphere (DESK Structural Funds ICE-Zagreb Office 2015).

In this respect, one may consider – for example – the project for promoting the Brijuni Islands and their coastlines, with cooperation between the Region of Istria and the Republic of Croatia (www.brijunirivijera.hr). This National Park is one of the points of interest of the *South Istria R.* (POI 4; figure 2).

In the past these were islands where the élite spent their leisure time or went for cures; at the same time, they enjoyed a political/diplomatic role because of the residence of Tito. Today they are «a mature destination for special interest tourism which demonstrates the need to reinvent itself» (Urošević 2020).

Remaining in the southern part of the region, another park touched by the route is Cape Kamenjak (POI 1): a Natura 2000 protected zone near Premantura, about ten kilometres from Pula, this is an interesting floristic site, particularly for orchids, with an indented coastline and uninhabited islands (Ljubičić *et al.* 2020; Vuković *et al.* 2011). It includes two Marine Reserves whose seabeds have complex ecosystems (<https://www.croaziainfo.it/kamenjak.html>).



Figure 2. Parenzana Cycling Trail.

The other two routes are also involved with nature-based tourism due to two sites: the Učka Nature Park on the *North Istria R.* (POI 17) and the Baredine Cave on the *Cultural Natural R. of Istria* (POI 9).

The former covers 160 km² and has been a protected area since 1999. It welcomes visitors with two didactic trails: “Plas” and “Vela Draga” (www.pp-ucka.hr). Travelling along them, one can admire the bluebells – an endemic plant of the Učka mountain range – and rare birds such as golden eagles, European vultures and grey griffons.

The latter (the Baredine Cave) is a natural geomorphological monument that has been protected since 1986. The habitat of the small endemic amphibian *proteo istriano*, it is situated on the western side of the Istrian peninsula. Open to visitors since 1995, Baredine offers a principal attraction – the cave with its 300 metres of walkways – accompanied by a varied complementary offering aimed at appealing to tourists of different ages: a park with a botanical trail; a site for speleological climbing; the tractor exhibition and shop; an opportunity to taste local products (olive oil, wine, *supa* and Istrian *prosciutto* – ham).

This dense offering of protected areas is matched by a rich variety of settlements and villages. Here we take into consideration:

- On the northern route: the mediaeval village of Roč (a district of Buzet) (POI 15), the site of the Small Glagolitic Academy, and the tiny hamlet of Hum (POI 16). These two villages are connected by a memorial path – the Aleja Glagoljaša – with sculptures and plaques written in the Glagolitic alphabet (Selvelli 2015).

- On the *Cultural Natural Route*: Grožnjan (POI 11), the artists' town – rendered lively by academies and summer workshops – and Motovun (POI 10), a little town with Romanesque /Gothic architecture situated in the valley of the Mirna River and known also for the protected area of Motovuska šuma [the last alluvial forest in the Mediterranean (natura-historica.hr)].

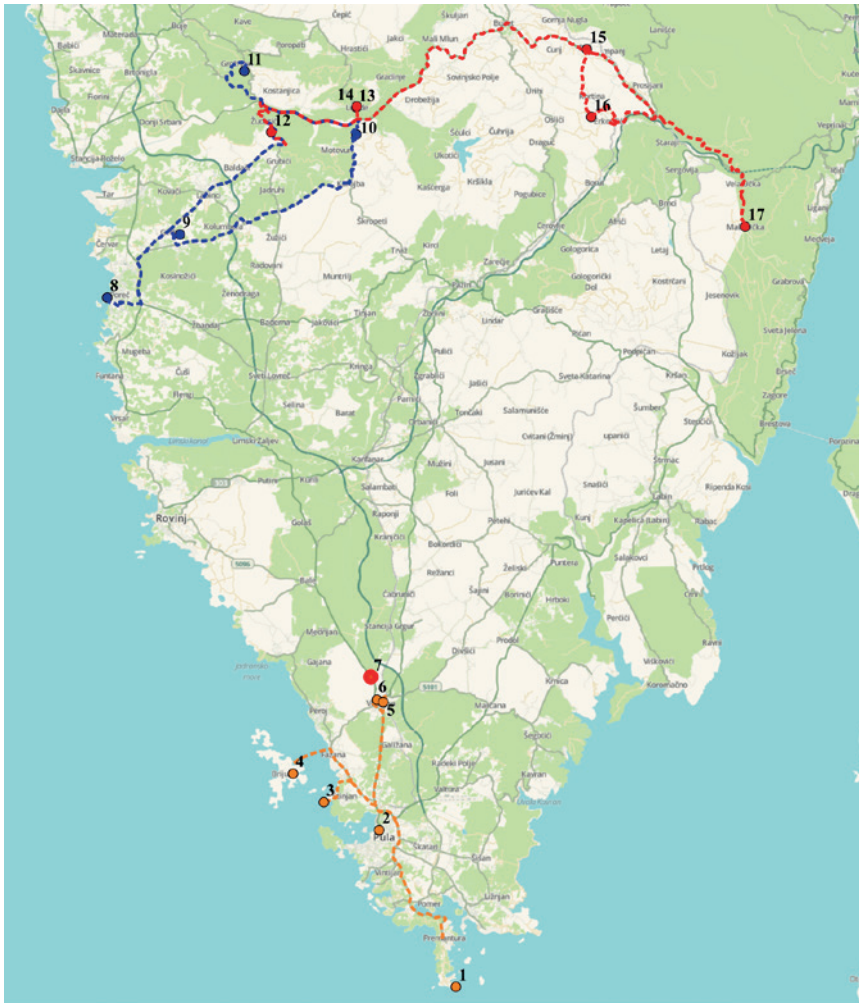


Figure 3. The 3 QNeST routes in Istria County: in orange the South Istria R., in blue the Cultural Natural R. and in red the North R. (see the text for the POIs). Source: Raffaella Gabriella Rizzo, 2021.

Both sites are destinations for festival tourism (musical/film), with annual events that allow for immersion in culture “as part of a new paradigm of cultural heritage” (Cerin Otočan 2020): the international *Jazz is back BP* Festival (Grožnjan), the brainchild of jazz maestro Boško Petrovič, and the *Motovun Film Festival* (which attracts around 20,000 spectators every year) (figure 5).

The towns, villages and other small centres are also custodians of heritage that bear witness to the peninsula’s artistic/religious riches.

This aspect is sufficiently important for Istria to become a destination for religious tourism. Examples on the *Cultural Natural Route* are the Church of St. Blaze (POI 6) and the episcopal complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the old town centre of Poreč (POI 8). This has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997. It consists of a group of outstanding religious monuments, with classical and Byzantine elements [the EX.PO AUS project (IPA Adriatic CBC Programme 2007-2013)]. On the *South R.*, we draw attention to two sites of great historical/architectural significance: the Punta Christo Fortress (POI 3) and the amphitheatre of Pula (POI 2).



Figure 4. *Brijuni National Park.*

Both in the centres and the rural zones, it is important to insert points of interest that represent the local food and wine products and traditions (§ 2.3). In this regard, we suggest on the routes POIs 5, 7, 12 (Chiavalon Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Arman wines and the Babos winery) and 14 (Zigante truffles).

5. Information and promotion/marketing on the web

With regard to information about Istria, the *Istria Tourist Board* (www.istra.hr) is very active. This site deals with the entire County, with its logo and a thematic menu: *Sun & Sea, Green Istria, Culture, Gourmet, Sports & Outdoor, Health and Wellness*.

Within the portal, the menu is well articulated, offering an extremely rich variety of material, resulting partly from EU projects. Moreover, the information is made available on a more detailed territorial scale by the *Central Istria Tourist Board*, as well as by the individual municipal tourist boards. These either group together the tourist boards of associated municipalities with the principal local tour companies, or they represent single municipalities.

The companies that manage the individual websites reveal all the aspects on offer in the areas as a whole – conveyed by a logo – to meet the needs of users/tourists. In these cases, too, a menu with several categories is shown (destination, gastronomy, nature and campsites, sports, wellness and sea, accommodation), each with a dropdown menu. The companies involved (those who have subscribed to the portal) are listed by type (and often geolocalised) and can therefore be selected. In this way, Istria County is also present as:

- North-western Istria (Umag, Novigrad, Brtonigla, Buje and 2 companies).
- Central Istria (Pazin, Cervolje, Lupoljav, Pican, Gracisce, Caroiba, Sveti Petar, Sveti Lorenz, Tinjan). Here the 8 thematic routes are available (§1). Also, one can now consult of the cartography of cultural assets published by the Istria Tourist Board and broken down into 8 itineraries that wind their way through the whole of the province:
 1. The frescoes itinerary;
 2. The Glagolitic route;
 3. The Parenzana;

4. The itinerary of the Castles;
 5. The Venetian era trail;
 6. The “In the footprints of the dinosaurs” itinerary;
 7. The Archaeological Parks Route;
 8. The itinerary of the *casite* and the *masiere* (low dry stone walls) (<https://www.istra.hr/en/information/brochures>).
- Individual municipalities.

There is also the *Agency for the development of tourism in Istria – IRTA*, which groups together a large number of subjects in a synergistic manner. One of these, for example, is *Istria Bike*, which offers dozens of detailed, well mapped and thematically described trails (<http://www.istria-bike.com/it/multimedia>), which can also be downloaded via a QRC.

On the one hand, the management of the tourist sector in Croatia – and consequently in Istria County – seems to be largely centralised on the part of the government of the Republic itself (Master plan for the development of Istrian tourism 2015-2025). On the other, there is a multiplicity of actors (§4) who strive to convey the appropriate information to the tourist, the end user



Figure 5. *Motovun Film Festival*.

– of the resources and the routes. There are many such initiatives in Croatia; amongst them are tourism trademarks (coloursofistria.com), proposals to renew the image of given areas, sometimes using a bottom-up approach (publicity campaign for Mali Lošinj *1 visit is worth 1000 pictures*), quality projects for the destination (IQM Destination with the creation of a card: <https://iqmpass.om>), etc. The Istrian Development Agency – IDA has created, in collaboration with the Region of Istria, the IQ (Istrian Quality) trademark, registered in 2005, to highlight the quality of Istrian products (<https://ida.hr/it/bn/pianificazione-strategica/iq-qualita-istriana/>).

6. Conclusions

Because of the advent of the pandemic, it is unfortunately impossible for the moment to give any evidence of the impact of the routes proposed by QNeST.

In 2019, in fact, the relative promotion through the (especially local) media, fairs, and the creation of *ad hoc* networks between national (and foreign) tourist agencies had only just begun. In general, reflecting on the all-round concept of a (sustainable) “network”, one notes how the virtual environment of Istria County – often inserted in websites dealing with the whole of Croatia – presents itself as being rich in opportunities for getting to know the territory and its resources.

One can see that the websites are well structured, often featuring good geographical and contextual descriptions of the locations linked to (tangible or intangible heritage). These descriptions are not infrequently accompanied by cartographies, brochures or catalogues with maps of various kinds (sometimes also webGIS). Often the portals, even if they are of private subjects in the world of business, offer links to other entities, including local territorial agencies (www.baredine.com, with 8 territorial logos at the bottom). Sometimes they have been created by availing themselves of European co-financing (e.g., <https://www.adriagate.com/>).

Alongside the portals, there appears to be considerable use of social media: Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. One should also note the blogs of enthusiasts – including non-Croats – who profess their love for Croatia and promote it (e.g., OlgaK’s “About Croatia” personal blog, “Croazia Info Blog” by Branko and Nicoletta).

Within the general ferment in the tourism sector that we have sought to highlight in this chapter, there has been a debate in Croatia in the last ten years regarding the necessity for integrated and sustainable management of tourist destinations (Bosnić *et al.* 2014). Batinić in 2018 underlined the importance of creating entities that bring together the public and private sectors, like the Destination Management Organization (DMO) (Batinić 2018, p. 80).

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