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THE ROLE OF CROATIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CREATING A RECOGNIZABLE TOURIST BRAND – RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to understand branding and the role of cultural heritage in the recognition of a tourist brand and its impact on perception among tourists. By analysing the concept of destination branding and the role of culture in this process, the paper highlights the importance of cultural heritage as a key resource in forming the identity of a tourist destination. 200 respondents in the Republic of Croatia participated in the research conducted via a questionnaire in August and September 2024. The research questions related to the influence of Croatian cultural heritage on the perception of the tourist brand, its use in tourism promotion, determining the differences in perception between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and is there a potential for developing recognition and how? In accordance with the theoretical and methodological approach, the following hypotheses were set: H1: Tourists recognize Croatian cultural heritage as a tourism brand; H2: Tangible cultural heritage is more recognizable than intangible cultural heritage as a tourism brand; H3: Promotional activities of cultural heritage influence the development of a tourism brand. The collected data were processed using the SPSS software tool. The research results showed a high degree of recognition of Croatian cultural heritage, especially tangible heritage, which includes historical buildings and sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Intangible heritage, although less well known, has significant potential for development and can contribute to the diversification of the tourist offer with promotional activities and integration into the tourist offer with an emphasis on authentic experiences and participation in cultural events, which confirmed all three hypotheses. One of the recommendations highlighted the need for an integrated marketing approach in promoting intangible heritage and integration into the tourist offer.*

Keywords: *branding, cultural heritage, marketing, promotional activities*

JEL classification: *M31, M39*

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage represents a significant part of the national identity of every country, including the Republic of Croatia. It consists of tangible and intangible assets that bear witness to the history, tradition, art and culture of a particular area. The role of cultural heritage in modern society is reflected not only in the preservation of the past, but also in its ability to contribute to the development of the community, especially through education, cultural identity and tourism. The development of the concept of cultural heritage is becoming increasingly important in the context of globalization and rapid social change, as it represents a key link between the past and the present. According to the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, heritage includes monuments, groups of buildings and sites that have historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value (UNESCO, 1972). The main components of cultural heritage are: monuments, groups of buildings and sites. Heritage inherited from the past is unique and irreplaceable and is left to future generations who are responsible for its preservation. The role of cultural heritage as an active agent of social transformation is increasingly recognized (Richards, Cultural tourism: A review of recent research and trends, 2018.) as a means of sustainable social and economic development and an important element of tourism motivation. Cultural destinations must learn how to maintain, develop and use their distinctiveness, while maintaining authenticity and a local sense of identity. This is the only way for tourism assets to be culturally and economically sustainable (Bitusikova, 2021.) The concept of heritage has expanded beyond material assets to include intangible heritage and natural landscapes. Cultural heritage includes aspects of the past that society recognizes as important cultural values, representing the way of life of a community through customs, places, practices, artistic expressions and values (Dumbović Bilušić, 2013.)Croatia's cultural heritage is divided into two main groups: natural and cultural sites and intangible cultural heritage. Intangible heritage includes various values, such as traditional skills, technologies, performing arts, religious rituals and oral traditions. Material assets are inextricably linked to intangible aspects, and the aim of protecting both is to preserve all their elements. The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia maintains a database that includes all forms of cultural heritage, where cultural assets are classified according to type or level of importance. Heritage protection has become a topic of national legislation and international agreements, including various conventions and charters. Cultural heritage plays a significant role in the development of tourism, especially in destinations rich in historical and cultural heritage such as Croatia. Cultural heritage management in the context of tourism requires a careful balance between preserving authenticity and commercialization. Economic valuation of culture should enable its high-quality protection and revitalization, sustainability and further development of all forms of tangible and intangible culture that participate in the tourism offer of a particular tourist destination (Geić, 2011.) Cultural heritage protection is a key aspect of sustainable development, but it differs from the concept of sustainable development in the protection of natural resources. The preservation of intangible heritage is important for promoting cultural diversity and human creativity, and it also plays a significant role in international and national development (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012.) Destination branding has become crucial in the modern tourism market, and culture plays a significant role in creating a recognizable identity. Culture,

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whether tangible or intangible, contributes to building a destination's image and enables it to attract tourists through authentic and unique experiences.

Taking into account the importance of Croatian cultural heritage and its role in the recognition and promotion of Croatian tourism, the aim of this paper is to identify key factors that contribute to the branding of Croatian cultural heritage in the tourism context and to identify potentials for further development. The main contribution of this paper is reflected in a deeper understanding of the role of cultural heritage in the Croatian tourism sector and the importance of branding. The paper also identifies key factors motivating tourists to visit cultural heritage and analyses the ways in which they are informed about the cultural heritage they visit. The research conducted on the perceptions and preferences of respondents can be useful in forming a destination brand and creating policies, strategies and programs that will improve the promotion of Croatia's cultural heritage and encourage its tourism development with an emphasis on sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - BRANDING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN BRANDING

Cultural heritage is the stored identity of an individual and a community and emerges as a sense of curiosity and desire among tourists to experience it for themselves. The experience of positive value will determine current and future tourism outcomes, where high positive feedback contributes to the sustainability of tourism (Richards, 2021.) The process of heritage preservation is based on collective memory, whereby it is preserved so that it is preserved from oblivion and so that future generations can experience and appreciate it (Jelinčić, 2009.)The inherited culture of a community (tangible and intangible cultural heritage) should provide the community with a competitive advantage and uniqueness, which distinguishes it from all other communities. Inherited culture becomes transformed into new products for exchange in the growing global tourism market. Cultural resources, unlike natural ones, are limited and subject to decay. Once destroyed, cultural heritage can hardly be restored in its original form because it loses its authenticity and historical value. Even when cultural resources can be restored, they lose some of their original value because they are no longer authentic. It is therefore essential that protection measures are based on conservation principles that relate to the degree of value of cultural assets and their cultural significance. Sustainable use can prevent or minimize damage and enable the long-term preservation of the value of cultural assets. Cultural heritage, such as settlements and landscapes, can be most effectively protected through strategic and development programs, integrated into spatial and urban development plans (McKercher & du Cros, 2021.)

Seven Croatian properties have been inscribed on the Representative list of intangible heritage: the Feast of St. Blaise, the Procession of the Cross on the Island of Hvar, the annual spring procession of the Queen (Ljelje) from Gorjani, the annual carnival procession of bell ringers from the Kastav area, lacemaking, the art of making traditional wooden children's toys from the Croatian Zagorje area, and the two-part close-interval singing of Istria and the Croatian Littoral. At the session of the same committee held in Nairobi in 2010, the following were inscribed on the UNESCO list: Sinj's alka, the art of making licitar from northern Croatia, and Ojkanje from the Dal-

matian Zagora. The natural and cultural properties that have been selected to be on the UNESCO world heritage list as protected at the global level are: the Historic Complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace; the Old Town of Dubrovnik; the Plitvice Lakes National Park; the Euphrasian Basilica Complex; the historic town of Trogir; the Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik; the Stari Grad Field of Hvar; Stećci; The defense system of the Republic of Venice; Beech forests and native beech forests of the Carpathians.

The cultural function of tourism, which encompasses culture, art and history, is a key motive for many tourists when choosing a destination. People's growing desire to discover and learn about cultural values stimulates new patterns of tourist demand, which results in increasingly frequent trips to destinations rich in cultural content (Bartoluci, 2013.). Natural attractions and cultural and historical heritage are particularly attractive, because their uniqueness and value significantly contribute to the creation of a recognizable image of the destination. In addition to the preservation and promotion of existing cultural assets, an important aspect of the development of a tourist destination is the construction of new tourist attractions that attract visitors. Promotional activities and branding of the destination play a significant role in building the image and creating a recognizable identity, which affects the attraction of tourists through unique experiences and perception of the destination. Unlike consumer products, destinations are a more complex product and therefore represent a significant challenge for destination marketing experts (Balakrishnan, 2009.)Like the branding of products and services, in the branding of a destination, the name of the destination alone is not enough for its differentiation (Mihevc, 2015.) Sirgy and Su (2000.) identified two dimensions similar to those defined in the product branding literature: a functional (practical) dimension consisting of more tangible elements and an emotional (symbolic) function consisting of intangible elements. The creation of a positive image is linked to various elements of the offer such as history and heritage, the character of the local population, celebrities or the status of the capital city (Anholt, 2009.)Destinations use digital tools to showcase their cultural heritage and connect with tourists seeking authentic experiences (Sigala, 2015.) Modern tourists are experienced, informed, heterogeneous, spontaneous, unpredictable, independent, individuals who are looking for new experiences and other contents instead of just a passive vacation (Albert, Bandarin, & Pereira Roders, 2021.) Cultural assets cannot become tourist attractive by themselves, but with a planned strategy, cultural heritage can become a brand (Pančić Kombol, 2000.)

According to (Baker, 2007.) the process of marking a tourist destination with a market brand includes seven stages related to: assessment and monitoring, analysis and benefits, architecture and alignment, articulation, activation, adoption and maintenance. The assessment and monitoring phase is carried out by evaluating internal stakeholders, strengths and resources, performance, communication and marketing monitoring, external stakeholders, competitors, customers, experiences and trends. The creation of a realistic picture of the dimensions of the tourist destination is carried out in the second phase, which aims to highlight how the destination will be recognizable and positioned. In the architecture and coordination phase, the connections of the destination with individual localities, parts and experiences within the destination (sub-brand) are determined, and then a visual and verbal identity is created in the articulation phase. The instruments of integrated marketing communication aimed at increasing demand are determined in the activation phase. The importance of advoca-

cy, passion and support of individuals towards a destination in order to build loyalty and increase visitor numbers is defined in the adoption phase. Brand management and leadership, communicating the brand message, experience management and monitoring and evaluation are shaped in the final phase of adoption and maintenance. According to Loulanski (2006.), until cultural heritage becomes a brand, it does not enter the primary area of interest of tourists. The planned Cultural Heritage Strategy creates a brand that aims to motivate potential tourists to visit certain destinations as much as possible (Richards, 2021). Meskell (2020.) points out that in addition to cultural goods, accompanying tourist facilities such as accommodation, local public transport, souvenir shops, restaurants, bars and the like are still needed. Including cultural sector in the tourist offer is also of a great importance for the prosperity of this sector, concerning the chronic lack of financial resources intended for the maintenance of cultural heritage and the development of cultural creativity (Lončarić, Stanić, & Vretenar Cobović, 2024.)

Although a tourist destination has an attractive and interesting cultural heritage, but does not have a certain infrastructure in terms of developed accommodation capacities and public infrastructure, this is not enough for the development of a certain destination, because if visitors do not have a place to stay, buy souvenirs, have lunch, etc., the offer of a tourist destination is incomplete and failed (Zekan, Weismayer, Gunter, Schuh, & Sedlacek, 2022.) Therefore, the planned strategy does not only refer to the design and presentation of cultural heritage, but also to the development of the entire infrastructure that the destination should provide to meet the needs and demands of tourists. It is not enough to promote only the existing ones, but new tourist attractions based on the existing cultural heritage should be developed, such as street performances on historical themes, music and film festivals, cultural events, etc. (Vrtiprah, 2006.) In order to promote a destination through cultural heritage, specific cultural assets must be emphasized as the main symbols or products of that place. Promoting cultural elements within tourism initiatives can help preserve cultural values, while simultaneously creating a sustainable tourism product. Sustainable cultural tourism not only reduces the negative effects of tourism on local communities, but also promotes their long-term benefits (Timothy, 2011.)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey on a sample of 200 respondents (N=200) was conducted in the period from August 19 to September 9, 2024 in the Republic of Croatia (Gedžić, 2024.). The survey questionnaire was created based on the results of a literature review and previous research, as well as research questions related to the influence of Croatian cultural heritage on the perception of the tourist brand, its use in tourism promotion, determining differences in perception between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and whether there is potential for developing recognition and in what way? The questionnaire was structured in several parts. The first part contained demographic questions related to: age, gender, education and place of residence. The second part was aimed at researching the tourist habits of the respondents regarding the frequency of travel, motivation for visiting cultural destinations and the type of cultural content that attracts those most. The third part concerned the level of familiarity with Croatia's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, where respondents assessed their level of familiarity

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with various cultural assets, as well as their importance in the context of Croatia's tourism branding. The last part of the questionnaire included questions on the perception of promotional activities related to cultural heritage, such as assessing the quality of promotional materials, visual attractiveness and availability of information, and their effectiveness in attracting tourists. The questionnaire was available in two forms: paper questionnaires distributed to tourists at cultural sites and digital questionnaires sent via email and social networks, with the aim of including a wider range of respondents. A five-point Likert scale was used, with respondents expressing their degree of agreement or disagreement with statements about various aspects of cultural heritage from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated complete disagreement and 5 – complete agreement with the stated statement. Data collected through the questionnaire were processed using the SPSS software tool.

In accordance with the theoretical-methodological approach, the following hypotheses were set:

H1: Tourists recognize Croatian cultural heritage as a tourism brand.

H2: Tangible cultural heritage is more recognizable than intangible cultural heritage as a tourism brand.

H3: Promotional activities of cultural heritage influence the development of a tourism brand.

The results of the conducted research were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented graphically and in tables, followed by an interpretation of the results and a discussion. After analysing the results, the conclusions of the work and limitations of the research were presented.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The conducted research involved 200 respondents, of whom 47.5% were women, 45% were men. Two respondents (1%) identified themselves as "Other", indicating the presence of gender diversity within the sample. 6.5% of respondents did not disclose their gender, which may indicate the need for greater sensitivity in issues related to gender identity. The age structure of respondents shows a higher representation of younger groups, with the largest number of respondents coming from the age group of 25 to 34 (30%), while the second largest segment of respondents is between the ages of 18 and 24 (22.5%). These results indicate that younger adults, especially those aged 18 to 34, represent a significant share of the tourist population interested in Croatia's cultural heritage. Older age groups are less represented; for example, only 5% of respondents are 65 and older. In terms of place of residence, the vast majority of respondents (97.5%) live in Croatia, while only 2.5% come from outside the country. This result indicates that the majority of respondents are domestic, which may suggest that the results reflect the perceptions of domestic tourists' more than foreign tourists. The results show that the majority of respondents have occasional tourist habits, with 42.5% of respondents traveling between two and four times a year. Furthermore, 17.5% of respondents travel very often, more than five times a year, while 30% of respondents travel rarely, one to two times a year. Only 10% of respondents stated that they never or very rarely travel. The research also reveals that for 41.5% of respondents, visiting cultural heritage is the sole reason for their arrival at a tourist destination. The remaining 58.5% of respondents stated that visiting cultural heritage is not the sole reason for

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their arrival, which means that cultural heritage may be only one factor in the broader tourist experience. Respondents rated their level of familiarity with the tangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia on a Likert scale (1 = "I have never heard of it", and 5 = I am familiar with the following and have visited the following), and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' familiarity with the intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia

Intangible cultural heritage	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard deviation
Collectively						3,82	
1. Lacemaking in Croatia	12	22	38	55	73	3.78	1,22
2. The close interval duet of Istria and the Croatian Littoral	15	25	40	60	60	363	1,24
3. The Feast of St. Blaise, the patron saint of Dubrovnik	7	12	22	55	104	4,19	1,07
4. Annual spring procession of the Queen or Ljelja from Gorjani	30	35	40	50	45	3.,23	1,37
5. Annual carnival procession of bell ringers from the Kastav region	10	25	45	60	60	368	1,17
6. Procession for the Cross on the island of Hvar	10	20	35	60	75	3,75	1,17
7. The art of making traditional wooden children's toys from the Zagorje region	8	18	35	65	74	3,88	1,12
8. Sinjska alka, a knight's tournament in Sinj	4	10	20	50	116	4.,33	0,98
9. Medićarski crafts in the area of Northern Croatia	12	22	35	60	71	3,83	1,21
10. Bećarac - vocal-instrumental tune from the areas of Slavonia, Baranja	8	16	32	65	79	3,95	1,11
11. Nijemo kolo from the area of Dalmatian Zagora	10	20	30	55	85	3,93	1,19
12. Klapa singing	5	10	20	50	115	4,35	1,00
13. Mediterranean food on the Croatian Adriatic, islands and hinterland	12	15	25	50	98	4,04	1,21
14. Međimurje popevka, a traditional tune of Međimurje	10	20	32	60	78	3,93	1,18
15. The art of dry-stone wall construction	7	12	25	50	106	4,18	1,09
16. The art of falconry	22	35	40	50	53	3,39	1,33
17. Tripunda festivities and the Kolo of St. Tripuna	25	30	40	45	60	3,43	1,38
18. Lipizzaner Breeding Traditions	20	30	40	50	60	3,50	1,32
19. Transhumance - Seasonal Migration of Livestock	18	25	35	45	77	3,69	1,33

Source: author's processing based on research results

The mean value for overall familiarity with intangible cultural heritage is 3.82, which shows that respondents are, on average, relatively well acquainted with the cultural heritage of Croatia and that they have a certain level of awareness of cultural heritage, with an emphasis on being familiar with or even having personally attended cultural events and manifestations. The standard deviation of 1.20 indicates relatively

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uniform results, but there are variations among individual heritage elements, suggesting that some forms of intangible cultural heritage have greater recognition than others. When looking at individual elements of intangible cultural heritage, the highest mean value 4.35 was recorded for klapa singing. This indicates a high level of familiarity and recognition of this cultural asset among respondents, which is expected, given its popularity and frequent promotion within the framework of tourist activities. The standard deviation of 1.00 confirms that the perception of klapa singing is quite uniform among respondents, with small deviations. The Sinjska alka also has a high level of recognition, with a mean value of 4.33. This traditional knightly tournament from Sinj is one of the most famous symbols of Croatian cultural heritage, as confirmed by the relatively low standard deviation of 0.98, suggesting that most respondents have a similar level of familiarity with this event. The Festa of St. Blaise from Dubrovnik also has a high mean value (4.19), indicating a strong connection of this event with identity and cultural heritage, especially in southern Croatia. The relatively low standard deviation (1.07) further indicates a homogeneous level of awareness of this event among respondents. On the other hand, the Art of Falconry (mean value 3.39) and the Tripundan Festival and the St. Tripun Circle (3.43) show lower levels of recognition compared to other heritage elements. The standard deviations for these two elements are higher (1.33 and 1.38), indicating greater variability in perception, i.e. that some respondents are not sufficiently familiar with these forms of intangible heritage. Transhumance - seasonal migration of livestock also shows a lower level of recognition (mean value 3.69), with a standard deviation of 1.33, indicating that some respondents have limited awareness of this tradition, while some are familiar with it. Based on the data obtained, it is evident that the intangible cultural heritage of Croatia is generally well recognized among tourists and the local population, but there is some variability in the level of familiarity with individual elements. Traditional events and manifestations that have strong media promotion and tourist visibility achieve a high level of awareness and recognition. On the other hand, lesser-known heritage elements could benefit from additional promotional activities to increase awareness of their cultural significance. These results can serve as a basis for formulating strategies for the promotion of cultural goods, with the aim of more evenly distributing attention to different forms of intangible cultural heritage. Then, respondents assessed their level of familiarity with the tangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia on a Likert scale, and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' familiarity with the tangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia

Tangible cultural heritage	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard deviation
Collectively						4,08	
1. Split Historic Complex and Diocletian's Palace	2	8	12	55	123	4,45	0,85
2. Dubrovnik Old Town	1	5	8	45	141	4,60	0,73
3. Plitvice Lakes National Park	3	10	12	50	125	4,42	0,92
4. Euphrasian Basilica Complex in the Historic Center of Poreč	5	10	20	55	110	4,28	1,00

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5. Historic City of Trogir	5	12	25	50	108	4,22	1,04
6. Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik	6	15	30	50	99	4,11	1,10
7. Stari Grad Field, Hvar	8	20	35	50	87	3,94	1,17
8. Stećci	20	30	40	45	65	3,53	1,34
9. 16th and 17th Century Venetian Republic Defense Systems in Zadar and Šibenik	15	25	38	50	72	3,70	1,28
10. Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe	18	30	40	45	67	3,57	1,33

Source: author's processing based on research results

The overall mean value for overall awareness of tangible cultural heritage is 4.08, indicating a high level of familiarity of respondents with this segment of cultural heritage. The standard deviation of 1.09 suggests relatively uniform results, with minor variations in the level of awareness among respondents. The highest mean value was recorded for the Old Town of Dubrovnik (4.60), indicating an exceptionally high level of recognition and awareness of this world-famous cultural destination. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.73 indicates a homogeneous perception among respondents, with small deviations. This result can be attributed to the global recognition of Dubrovnik as a tourist destination, but also to its frequent presence in promotional materials and the media. High mean values are also recorded for the Historic Complex of Split and Diocletian's Palace (4.45) and the Plitvice Lakes National Park (4.42), indicating a similar level of recognition as for Dubrovnik. The standard deviations of 0.85 and 0.92 show low variability among respondents, meaning that their perceptions of these landmarks are fairly uniform. Given that both sites are UNESCO World Heritage Sites and are part of Croatia's key tourist attractions, these results are not surprising. The Euphrasian Basilica Complex in Poreč records a mean value of 4.28, which also indicates a high level of recognition, while the standard deviation of 1.00 is slightly higher compared to other destinations, which may indicate greater differences in the level of familiarity among respondents. The mean value for the Historic Town of Trogir is 4.22, indicating a solid level of familiarity, while the standard deviation of 1.04 indicates moderate differences in perception among respondents. On the other hand, Stećci (mean value 3.53) and the Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe (3.57) record lower levels of recognition compared to other sites. Higher standard deviations (1.34 and 1.33) indicate greater variations in the level of awareness among respondents. These results suggest that these elements of tangible heritage are less exposed or not as well integrated into tourism offers and promotion as other sites. From these results, we can conclude that Croatia's tangible cultural heritage is generally highly recognized among respondents, especially those sites that are best known and most promoted on the domestic and international markets. Although most sites record high mean values of awareness, some elements of tangible heritage, such as tombstones and beech forests, have lower levels of awareness among respondents, which indicates the need to strengthen promotional activities. Furthermore, respondents rated the frequency of using information sources when planning visits to cultural sites. A scale was also present where 1 represented "Never" and 5 "Always"

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Table 3. Sources of information when planning visits to cultural sites in the Republic of Croatia

Source of information	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard deviation
Collective						3,70	
1. Internet	1	2	8	30	159	4,72	0,63
2. Travel guides	10	25	55	60	50	3,58	1,14
3. Recommendations from friends and family	5	10	40	90	55	3,90	0,94
4. Social networks	7	18	40	55	80	3,92	1,13
5. Media (TV, newspapers)	15	25	45	70	45	3,53	1,18
6. Brochures and flyers	20	30	50	60	40	3,35	1,24
7. Hotel or accommodation information	25	45	60	40	30	3,03	1,23
8. Travel shows and documentaries	12	25	60	75	28	3,41	1,06
9. Travel apps and websites	5	10	25	60	100	4,20	1,00
10. Local travel agencies	18	35	45	55	47	3,39	1,26

Source: author's processing based on research results

The pooled mean for frequency of use of information sources is 3.70, indicating that respondents on average frequently use available information sources. The standard deviation of 1.10 suggests moderate variability. The Internet is the most frequently used information source with a very high mean of 4.72. The low standard deviation of 0.63 indicates homogeneous use of the Internet among respondents, which is expected given the wide availability and convenience of digital information. This data highlights the importance of digital presence and online promotional activities in modern tourism. Recommendations from friends and family and social networks are also important sources of information, with mean values of 3.90 and 3.92. This suggests that respondents often use social networks and recommendations as reliable sources of information about cultural attractions. The standard deviations of 0.94 and 1.13 indicate that there are minor deviations in the frequency of use of these sources, with certain respondents relying more on recommendations from their acquaintances or social networks compared to others. Tourist guides and media (TV, newspapers) have slightly lower mean values of 3.58 and 3.53. These results show that respondents occasionally use these sources of information, but not as often as the Internet or social networks. Standard deviations of 1.14 and 1.18 indicate slightly greater variability in the use of these sources. This may mean that while some tourists prefer traditional media and guides, others find them outdated or less useful compared to digital sources of information. Brochures and leaflets, as well as information from hotels or accommodation, show lower mean values (3.35 and 3.03), which means that respondents use them less often compared to other sources. The high standard deviations (1.24 and 1.23) indicate considerable variability in the use of these sources of information. Travel apps and websites are popular sources of information with a mean value of 4.20 which indicates the increasing importance of mobile and online travel applications in modern travel planning. The standard deviation of 1.00 indicates a relatively uniform

use among respondents, confirming that tourism apps have become widely accepted among different demographic groups. Local tourist agencies, with an average value of 3.39, are used slightly less than other sources. The standard deviation of 1.26 indicates greater variability in the use of these sources. Digital sources of information, such as the Internet, social networks and tourism apps, are the most frequently used tools when planning visits to cultural sites in Croatia. Traditional sources of information, such as brochures, guides and media, still have their role, but are less used compared to digital platforms. These data highlight the importance of digital promotion and presence on online platforms for tourist destinations and cultural sites. Furthermore, respondents rated the quality of elements of promotion of Croatian cultural heritage, where 1 represented "Very bad" and 5 "Very good" (Table 4).

Table 4. Quality assessment of elements of promotion of Croatian cultural heritage

Promotional element	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard deviation
Total						3,88	
1. Informativeness	5	15	40	80	60	3,88	1,00
2. Visual appeal	8	20	35	75	62	3,82	1,10
3. Availability of information	10	18	50	70	52	3,68	110
4. Accuracy and timeliness of data	7	12	40	80	61	3,88	1,.02
5. Creativity and originality	5	20	45	75	55	3,78	1,04
6. Accessibility of language (clarity and comprehensibility)	3	18	40	85	54	3,85	0,97
7. Quality of photos and video materials	5	15	35	90	55	3,88	0,98
8. Usability of information for visitors	8	20	40	80	52	3,74	1,07
9. Ability to attract attention and retain interest	10	25	35	70	60	3,73	116
10. Adaptation to different target group	12	20	45	65	58	3.69	1,16

Source: author's processing based on research results

The overall mean value for the quality of the elements of the promotion of Croatian cultural heritage is 3.88, which means that on average, respondents rated the promotion of cultural heritage between "good" and "very good". The standard deviation of 1.00 indicates moderate variability in perceptions, suggesting that most respondents share similar views on the quality of promotional activities, although there are minor deviations. The results presented in Table 4 show that the general perception of the quality of the promotion of Croatian cultural heritage is positive, but there are certain elements that can be improved. The in formativeness and accuracy of the data were rated highly, but visual appeal, creativity and adaptation to different target groups may be key areas for improvement. Overall, the promotion of Croatian cultural heritage fulfils its purpose well, but additional investments in visual and creative aspects, as well as better adaptation of content to different groups of tourists, can significantly contribute to strengthening its influence on the market.

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RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

When interpreting the research, the limitations of the research should be taken into account, given that the research included 200 respondents who completed a survey questionnaire. The research was conducted once and during the summer months (seasonality of the research). In order for the research to be representative, it is necessary to increase the sample of respondents, and conduct the research in more and longer time series so that certain changes can be correlated and further examined and analysed using more complex statistical methods. This research can be the basis for future repeated research using appropriate variables and appropriate statistical methods.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage (intangible and tangible) is a resource that contributes to the development of a unique and recognizable tourist identity. In the theoretical part, the importance of sustainable heritage management is emphasized in order to preserve authenticity, while at the same time it is used as a means of increasing tourist interest and attracting visitors. The theoretical part also highlighted the challenges in branding cultural assets, especially when it comes to balancing commercialization and preservation. In addition, the need for an integrated approach involving local communities, tourism stakeholders and the media was emphasized in order to ensure the long-term sustainability and visibility of cultural heritage. Successful branding of cultural heritage can significantly increase the attractiveness of a destination, but it requires strategically thought-out activities in the promotion, protection and management of cultural resources. The research part of the work brings important insights into the perception of Croatian cultural heritage among tourists, and the results show that tourists recognize cultural heritage as an important aspect of the tourist brand. When asked about the recognition of cultural heritage (IP1), the research results confirm that tourists perceive Croatian cultural heritage as a key element of the country's tourist identity. UNESCO's material goods were especially positively evaluated, which confirms the hypothesis H1 that tourists recognize Croatian cultural heritage as a tourist brand. Furthermore, in response to the question about the use of cultural heritage in tourism promotion (IP2), the research results show that promotional activities, such as cultural events and marketing, have a positive impact on the perception of Croatia as a destination rich in cultural heritage. This supports hypothesis H3, which speaks about the impact of promotional activities on the development of the tourism brand. Differences in the perception of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (IP3) have proven to be significant. Tangible heritage, especially which is on the UNESCO list, is more recognizable and popular among tourists than intangible heritage. This confirms hypothesis H2, which suggests that tangible cultural heritage is more recognizable as a tourism brand compared to intangible. The last research question (IP4) on the potential for further development of the recognisability of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia shows that there is significant potential for development, especially through better integration of intangible cultural goods into the tourism offer. Tourists express interest in authentic experiences and participation in cultural events, which opens up space for further development of branding strategies that will more strongly include intangible heritage. Cultural heritage is a key resource for the development of Croatia's tourism brand. Further investment in promotion is needed to realize the full potential of intangible

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assets, and to establish sustainable strategies that balance the preservation of heritage and its use for tourism purposes.

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