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FACTORS OF TOURISTS' PERCEIVED SAFETY IN THE POST COVID PERIOD: THE CASE OF OPATIJA RIVIERA

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Jasmina Okičić
Vedran Milošević

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Abstract

Purpose – The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus left a significant negative mark on the world economy, and tourism industry. It has also significantly affected the perception and behavior of tourists when it comes to the safety of a tourist destination. To continue to record a positive recovery trend, destinations must undertake scientific and professional research, and based on the results consider and develop new development strategies for the development of tourism in the post-pandemic period. The perception of risk in tourists is changing, which ultimately has an impact on their future behavior when choosing a holiday destination. Opatija Riviera is a destination with a rich and long tourist tradition, which until before the pandemic was perceived as safe, as evidenced by the continuous growth of tourist turnover. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of monitoring whether and to what extent tourists perceive Opatija Riviera as a safe tourist destination and based on the findings to offer developmental guidelines for the post-pandemic period.

Methodology – Data collection was conducted during June and July 2022, using an online survey questionnaire. 152 respondents agreed to participate in research. The basic measurement instrument was based on the Tourists' Perceived Safety at Destinations (TPSD) scale developed by Xie et al. (2020b), i.e. initial items (25) proposed by these authors. To extract the dimensions of perceived tourist safety, the authors primarily used exploratory factor analysis.

Findings – by using the exploratory factor analysis the following factors were identified: perception of safety of human elements (PSH), safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE), safety of natural environments (PSNE), perceived safety of social environments (PSSE) and safety of management elements (PSM). The results for PSH, PSFE, PSNE and PSSE have proven to be satisfactory in terms of how tourists perceive them as safe and reliable, which is not the case with the PSM. The findings for PSM indicate the need for additional investments aimed towards improvement of protection of tourist's safety (safety of the construction, safety of information and visibility of warning sign about security in Opatija Riviera).

Originality of the research – this research contributes to the theory by presenting relevant literature content in safety perception in tourism. The empirical contribution derives from the fact that no similar research was conducted on Opatija Riviera until now. Its findings set the basis for future empirical research that will be conducted in the post-COVID period in Opatija Riviera, based on which it will be possible to plan further developmental activities aimed towards improving tourist's safety during their stay.

Key words perceived safety, post COVID-19 period, factor analysis, Opatija Riviera

INTRODUCTION

A significant attention has been paid to the safety in tourism in the last couple of decades, due to the nature of its services, respectively their intangibility and provision of experiences (Wang, 2014). Safety and security of a destination are the factors of extreme relevance which tourists take into consideration within their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination, and especially when thinking of visiting a destination that is somewhat or completely unknown to them. Tourism safety research is interconnected with the literature which investigates risks in tourism (Zou & Yu, 2022). Risks in tourism became particularly interesting for tourism researchers after the occurrence of the attack that occurred on 9th November of 2001 in the United States of America, outbreak of SARS, the bomb attack in Bali, Asian tsunami incidents, etc. Crises like these left a tremendous impact on tourism industry, which resulted in the increasing necessity of reviewing the back in the day existing literature which covered risks in tourism (Yang & Nair, 2014). This is confirmed by the most recent pandemic caused by COVID-19 virus which left tremendous mark on world economy, and tourism industry due to the lockdown. The impact reflected not just on business, but also on tourist's safety perceptions of destinations and traveling in general. Once again tourism showed extremely strong level of sensitivity in stimulations from its surroundings (Alkier, 2021; Çınar & Şener, 2021; Perić et al., 2021). After ending the lockdown and reopening the state borders, tourists continued to show significant interest in traveling. Despite their interest, they are still facing various dangers and risks during their travel to and staying in destinations, which is influencing their perception about destination's safety (Perić et al., 2021). As a tourist destination with a long and rich tourist tradition, Opatija Riviera (Cerović et al., 2014; Alkier et al. 2020; Alkier et al., 2019) was considered as safe in the pre-pandemic period, which is witnessed with a constant interest of tourists who choose to spend their holiday there. Tourists are constantly changing their attitudes about their risk perception in a destination, which is why it is necessary to monitor these changes through undertaking appropriate scientific and professional research. Based on these findings, tourism stakeholders will be able to detect in which direction to go, what to improve, and how to change disadvantages to advantages in terms of safety. In this paper the focus is placed on Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination, considering that the research results represent the results of a scientific project which investigates safety in tourism of Opatija Riviera. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of monitoring whether and to what extent tourists perceive the Opatija Riviera as a safe tourist destination and based on the findings to offer developmental guidelines for the post-pandemic period. Accordingly, the research questions are defined as follows: Do visitors perceive Opatija Riviera as a safe destination? What are the factors of tourists' perceived safety in the post COVID-19 period in case of Opatija Riviera?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Safety and security in tourism destinations

Security represents a concept which is connected not just with tourism, but with the functioning of the entire world. This does not only represent the result of the multiple safety incidents that occurred over the last few decades, but also the changes in world countries foreign policies, and wars that also resulted from it. Safety problems like these did not only affect the tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination, but also the socio-political confidence which further on influenced the wider environment in which tourism operates and is being developed, and in which tourist destinations are being perceived. Tourism is unavoidably connected with the safety concept because tourist's behaviour and tourist destinations are deeply affected by how safety is perceived, and how safety, security and risk are managed (Hall et al., 2004). In order to be able to deal with tourism safety problems appropriately, it is necessary to be able to adjust timely to various factors from the environment (i.e. terrorist attacks, crime, political instability, pandemics, etc.) to preserve the highest possible level of safety of a tourist destination and decrease the negative implications on tourists as much as possible (Pyo, 2003). Today safety and security represent a vital component which not only influences tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination; it also improves the life quality of domestic population and tourist's stay in a destination. To achieve success, destination stakeholders need to make efforts in enabling safe and appropriate surroundings for its visitors and stimulate the coexistence with the domestic population. Efforts of tourist officials need to be coordinated with the government officials, the media, non-governmental organizations, as well as with the interested groups of citizens (Alkier et al., 2016; UNWTO, 1996). All the undertaken efforts need to be accompanied by appropriate marketing activities, especially promotion, considering that this has a significant influence on a tourist's decision-making process. Also, it is necessary to monitor if tourists perceive their holiday destination as safe. The following sub-chapter will present in more details the relevance of measuring tourist's safety perception during their stay in a destination.

1.2. Perception of safety in tourist destinations

Tourism safety perception includes all the subjective feelings and perceptions that tourists feel about the safety of a tourist destination, while being influenced by various external information as well as their own personal factors (Wang, 2012). Tourists can perceive destinations in a positive or a negative way (He et al., 2019). When measuring safety perception of tourist destinations, researchers tend to focus both on social environment of destinations, and on tourism elements and types of safety problems that tourists experience during their stay in a destination. Currently, focus is mostly placed on: 1) how tourists perceive overall safety of a destination, respectively they are asked to precisely state do they consider a particular destination to be safe or unsafe, or to state if the destination analysed is safer in relation to another destination, and 2) asking the respondents how they perceive destination safety when discussing particular hazards like terrorism,

natural disasters, problems concerning public health, provision of tourism services, etc. (Li et al., 2019; George, 2010; Yang and Xie, 2019; Chen et al., 2009; Wang and Zheng, 2015; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Xie et al., 2020b; Zou, 2015; Ding & Wu, 2022; Ma et al., 2020; Scholarly Community Encyclopedia, n.d.). Due to the sensitivity of tourism industry, safety in tourism, and especially safety perception became the focus of numerous researches, considering that every safety incident that occurs in a tourist destination result in changes how tourists perceive the safety of a destination, which ultimately influences their travel decisions (choosing a certain holiday destination, or revisiting it in the future). If sensing a feeling of unsafety, tourists may end up cancelling a booked trip, avoid affected destinations completely, or if they are already staying in the affected destination, they may decide to move to a safer place or completely evacuate and return home (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Mair et al. 2016). Determining tourism safety perception became a necessity of a tourist destination success; to achieve and maintain a competitive position on the tourist market, a continuous quantitative assessment of safety of a destination must be conducted, and improvements introduced in accordance with the findings (Cui et al., 2016). Safety perception in a destination was observed from various angles prior the pandemic development, i.e. perception of destination safety (Xie et al., 2020b; Chan, 2021), observing the influence of risk perception on tourist's buying behaviour with a particular attention on decision when choosing a holiday destination (Karl & Schmude, 2017; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Henthorne et al., 2013), future revisiting intention (Hasan et al., 2017), the influence of perceived tourism safety on formation of a destination image (Fang et al., 2020; Ding & Wu, 2022; Perpiña et al., 2017). After the WHO (2020) declared a pandemic on world level, researchers focused their research on topics connected with COVID-19.

When observing how health risk perception influences avoiding travelling internationally during the pandemic, Chua et al. (2021) examined how negative affect, health risk perception, perception of uncertainty and mental wellbeing influence formation of travel attitudes as well as time behaviour avoidance of travelling to global destinations that were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. A negative effect was determined due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19 which influenced health risk perception which consequently caused mental wellbeing and perception of uncertainty. Furthermore, mental wellbeing foresaw the tourist's attitudes towards travelling internationally and behaviour of temporary avoidance, while perception of uncertainty influenced short-term avoiding of travelling. These results managed to provide an insight into the mechanism of thinking and perception of tourists who tend to avoid travelling in the period of global health crises as well as its implications on destinations that rely on tourism to develop strategies aimed towards tourism recovery and how to cope better and more successfully with the effects of pandemic.

Focus was also placed on travel risk perception and travel behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. Neuburger & Egger's research (2020) observed the connections of how tourists perceive COVID-19, travel risks as well as travel behaviour on the example of tourists who visited the DACH region which consists of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Their results have shown a significant increase in tourist's risk perception, risk perception of COVID-19 and their travel behaviour in a very short period. The study

managed to provide relevant information, respectively insight into tourist attitudes which are of significant relevance for the destinations and tourist organisations, which is important for formation of adequate communication strategies which will contribute to the tourism industry's business success in post-COVID period. Also, the results indicated that a stronger focus should be on revitalization and support of domestic tourism with a goal of recovering first from COVID-19. Perić et al. (2021) observed how risk perception of tourists influences their intention of travelling during the pandemic period caused by COVID-19. Particular attention was placed on respondent's socio-demographic characteristics, and with the principal component analysis the authors determined five categories of perceived risk that have a significant influence on tourist's travelling intention in the pandemic period: the health risk, the psychological risk, the financial risk, the destination risk, and the travel risk. The results of their research have shown that health risks, psychological risks, financial risks, and destination risks have a negative effect on tourist's travel intentions in the pandemic period. Also, results have shown from destination perspective that travel risk has a negative effect on traveling abroad, and health risk (although with a borderline significance) was the predictor of traveling abroad in the pandemic period. When observing socio-demographic variables, only monthly income has proven to be a significant predictor of traveling abroad. Alkier et al. (2022) focused in their research on examining how tourists perceive risk in two different periods of pandemic crisis. Focus was placed on travel, destination, health, and psychological and finally financial risks. Their results indicated risk perception being higher in the first period, except for health and psychological risk which were higher in the second period. Also, the control variables that were observed were gender, age, monthly income, level of education, travel intention and crisis period. Results also determined that tourist's perception of travel risk and health and psychological risk were severely influenced by tourist's level of education and travel intention. Destination risk perception was influenced by intention to travel. This research has managed to contribute tremendously by enabling a better understanding how tourists perceive travel in pandemic crisis period. These findings can be significant and help for destination management when rethinking how to decrease risk perception and develop future developmental strategies for post pandemic period. Zhan et al. (2022) focused their research on travel risk perception among domestic tourists travelling to a destination affected by COVID-19 (Wuhan). They formed a risk perception scale based on dimensions of health, financial, and social performance. The results indicated significant influence of occupation and place of residence on all the observed items, while gender, age, education, and income had independently influenced on some of the items observed. Also, it has been determined that the respondents showed a significant interest for prevention and control of the illness, losses occurred in the pandemic period as well as the previous experiences when visiting Wuhan. Dramićanin & Perić (2021) further on focused on determining how tourists perceive risks during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to travel intention, and the host destination. The risks that they observed were travel risk, destination risk, health risk, financial risk. Two models were applied when observing the differences among the previously stated risks and travel intention and destination host. The result for the second model has shown a strong influence of travel destination on the linear combination of risk factors, as well as strong differences among the respondents with the tendency of travelling abroad and the perceived health, destination, and travel risk. Konak (2022) focused in her study on

examining the effects of how tourist's perception of hygiene-safety and travel concerns influence Turkish residents' intention to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her findings managed to determine that tourist's perception of safety connected to hygiene increases their travel anxiety which is related to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. She also determined that the travel anxiety of the respondents about the pandemic had a negative effect on their intention to travel. Xie et al. (2020b) emphasized in their research that not a lot of attention was given to conceptualization and development of a scale intended for measuring how tourists perceive safety in tourist destinations. The focus of their research was to determine the dimensions for tourist perceived safety and develop a scale based on the safety system theory. The authors conducted research in three stages. In the first stage they aimed towards identifying the dimensions and initial items after a thorough literature and blog content analysis. In the second stage they conducted an explanatory analysis to determine and validate the preliminary items. And finally, in the third stage they empirically managed to confirm a five-dimension scale (human elements, facilities and equipment, natural environment, social environment and management elements) for tourist perceived safety which contains a total of 20 items.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data source and sample

Using the purposive sampling technique, data collection was carried out from June to July 2022, yielding a sample of 152 valid respondents. Table 1 provides a short overview of the sample's basic features.

Table 1: Sample description

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	35	23.0
Female	117	77.0
Total	152	100.0
Age category		
18-24	7	4.6
25-34	36	23.7
35-44	63	41.4
45-64	46	30.3
Total	152	100.00
Marital status		
Unmarried/single	33	21.7
Married	34	22.4
Separated/Divorced	8	5.3
Domestic partnership	77	50.7
Total	152	100.0

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Education		
High School Degree or less	2	1.3
Undergraduate	16	10.5
Graduate and above	134	88.2
Total	152	100.0
Household income (in Euros)		
up 500.00	7	4.6
501.00 to 1,000	40	26.3
1,001 to 1,500	43	28.3
1,501 to 2,000	46	30.3
2,001 to 2,500	12	7.9
2,501 to 3,000	4	2.6
Total	152	100.0
Employment status		
Employed full time	124	81.6
Employed part time	26	17.1
Student	2	1.3
Total	152	100

Source: Author's research

Within the sample and according to the country of origin, respondents were mainly from Serbia (40.8%), followed by Slovenia (32.2%), Croatia (11.80), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.20%), Germany (2.6%), North Macedonia (2.0%), Austria (1.30%), Italy (0.7%), Spain (0.7%), Portugal (0.7%). The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire with closed questions, divided into several sections. The first section addressed the tourists' perceived safety at destination. The second section considers specific socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

2.2. Variables and methods

The basic measurement instrument was based on the Tourists' Perceived Safety at Destinations (TPSD) scale developed by Xie et al. (2020b), i.e., initial item pool with content validity which contains 25 items, where each item was anchored on a Likert five-point scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) based on travel experiences. In order to extract factors of tourists' perceived safety at Opatija Riviera we use exploratory factor analysis.

3. RESULTS

The results from the Table 2 present the mean and standard deviation for the variables used in this research.

Table 2: Scales used, variables, respondent means, and standard deviations

Item	Label	Mean	SD
Tour guides can take care of my safety at Opatija Riviera	PSH1	2.86	1.09
Tourism practitioners from Opatija Riviera have a professional safety ability	PSH2	4.06	0.61
Tourism practitioners from Opatija Riviera can provide service safely	PSH3	4.11	0.59
Local people are friendly	PSH4	4.35	0.52
The people I met during the tour in Opatija Riviera show friendliness to me	PSH5	4.30	0.52
Opatija Riviera's facility is reliable in performance	PSFE1	4.18	0.48
Opatija Riviera's facility looks safe and secure	PSFE2	4.39	0.49
Opatija Riviera's facility feels convenient to use	PSFE3	4.16	0.46
Opatija Riviera's facility is used without failure	PSFE4	3.87	0.68
I didn't encounter any danger when using the Opatija Riviera's facilities	PSFE5	4.37	0.54
The quality of the natural environment of Opatija Riviera is favoured by tourists.	PSNE1	4.82	0.39
The Opatija Riviera's natural environment is clean and tidy	PSNE2	4.58	0.65
There are no safety hazards in the natural environment of the Opatija Riviera	PSNE3	4.75	0.54
The Opatija Riviera is less prone to natural disasters	PSNE4	4.77	0.48
There is no need to worry about extreme natural conditions at the Opatija Riviera, such as weather.	PSNE5	4.77	0.47
I rarely encounter overcrowded and messy conditions at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE1	3.74	0.99
I rarely encounter forced consumption at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE2	4.68	0.78
I rarely encounter fraud and theft at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE3	4.71	0.76
I rarely encounter violence at the Opatija Riviera, such as fighting	PSSE4	4.76	0.73
I rarely encounter public security problems at the Opatija Riviera	PSSE5	4.76	0.73
I can see warning sign about security at the Opatija Riviera	PSM1	2.38	1.18
I can receive the safety information provided by the Opatija Riviera.	PSM2	3.74	0.72
The security work of the Opatija Riviera is very effective.	PSM3	3.99	0.44
The safety construction of the Opatija Riviera is good	PSM4	3.84	0.54
Amounts of resources are invested by the Opatija Riviera to protect tourists' safety	PSM5	3.97	0.44

Source: Authors' research based on Xie et al. (2020b)

When observing the factors for *perceived safety of human elements (PSH)*, the highest level of satisfaction was shown for friendliness of local people ($\bar{x}=4.35$ and $SD=0.52$), followed by friendliness of the people that the respondents have met during their tour in Opatija Riviera ($\bar{x}=4.30$ and $SD=0.52$), tourism practitioners having the ability to

provide their services safely ($\bar{x}=4.11$ and $SD=0.59$) and them having the professional safety abilities ($\bar{x}=4.06$ and $SD=0.61$). The lowest result was registered for the statement that tour guides can take care of tourist's safety during their stay in Opatija Riviera ($\bar{x}=2.86$ and $SD=1.09$). The results for *perceived safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE)* indicate that tourists consider facilities used for provision of tourist services to look safe and secure ($\bar{x}=4.39$ and $SD=0.49$), and they didn't encounter any danger when using these facilities ($\bar{x}=4.37$ and $SD=0.54$), which is why these two elements were marked with the highest mark. A bit lower mark was given to the reliability in performance of the facilities ($\bar{x}=4.18$ and $SD=0.48$) and feeling of convenience to use them ($\bar{x}=4.16$ and $SD=0.46$), while the lowest, average mark was given to the ability to use the facilities without a failure ($\bar{x}=3.87$ and $SD=0.68$). In terms of *perception of safety of natural environment (PSNE)*, the results can be considered satisfactory considering that all the elements were marked above 4,5. The respondents graded the statement that the quality of the natural environment is being favoured by tourists ($\bar{x}=4.82$ and $SD=0.39$) with the highest mark, after which follows Opatija Riviera being less prone to natural disasters ($\bar{x}=4.77$ and $SD=0.48$), there is no need to worry about extreme natural conditions at the Opatija Riviera, such as weather ($\bar{x}=4.77$ and $SD=0.47$), there are no safety hazards in the natural environment of the Opatija Riviera ($\bar{x}=4.75$ and $SD=0.54$), and the Opatija Riviera's natural environment is clean and tidy ($\bar{x}=4.58$ and $SD=0.65$). Results for perceived safety of social environments (PSSE) could also be considered as satisfactory. The statements about tourists rarely encountering violence in Opatija Riviera and security problems were marked the highest ($\bar{x}=4.76$ and $SD=0.73$), followed by tourists rarely encountering fraud and theft ($\bar{x}=4.71$ and $SD=0.76$), and forced consumption ($\bar{x}=4.68$ and $SD=0.78$). The lowest mark was registered for rare encountering overcrowded and messy conditions at the Opatija Riviera ($\bar{x}=3.74$ and $SD=0.99$).

The results for perceived safety of management elements (PSM) could be considered unsatisfactory, when taking into consideration their average grade. The highest mark was for the statement of security work of the Opatija Riviera being very effective ($\bar{x}=3.99$ and $SD=0.44$), followed by amounts of resources invested by the Opatija Riviera to protect tourists' safety ($\bar{x}=3.97$ and $SD=0.44$), safety construction of Opatija Riviera being good ($\bar{x}=3.84$ and $SD=0.54$), ability of tourists receiving safety information provided by Opatija Riviera ($\bar{x}=3.74$ and $SD=0.72$). The ability of tourists to see warning sign about security at the Opatija Riviera was marked the lowest ($\bar{x}=2.38$ and $SD=1.18$).

In the next step, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to explore factors of tourists' perceived safety. Initially, the factorability of the 25 items, presented in Table 3, was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above the commonly recommended value of .6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2=3109.55$, $p < .05$). The results show five factors accounting for 64.36% of the variance. Table 3 shows the rotated component matrix.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix

	Factor				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
PSSE5	.978				
PSSE3	.975				
PSSE4	.974				
PSSE2	.953				
PSNE3		.899			
PSNE4		.894			
PSNE5		.862			
PSNE1		.731			
PSNE2		.586			
PSM3			.843		
PSM4			.800		
PSM5			.795		
PSM2			.760		
PSM1			.453		
PSSE1					
PSFE1				.744	
PSFE3				.736	
PSFE5				.698	
PSFE2				.679	
PSFE4				.644	
PSH1				.460	
PSH2					.795
PSH3					.780
PSH5					.754
PSH4					.710

Source: Authors' research

Based on the items presented in Table 3, extracted factors, as already suggested by Xie et al. (2020b), associated with tourists' perceived safety at, in this case, Opatija Riviera, can be interpreted as follows: perceived safety of social environments (F1), perceived safety of natural environments (F2), perceived safety of management elements (F3), perceived safety of facility and equipment elements (F4), perceived safety of human elements (F5). Next, we tested internal consistency of the identified factors (Table 4).

Table 4: Scale statistics

Factor	Number of items	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived safety of social environments	4	18.908	2.933	.984
Perceived safety of natural environments	5	23.789	1.948	.753
Perceived safety of management elements	5	17.928	2.439	.707
Perceived safety of facility and equipment elements	6	23.816	2.480	.688
Perceived safety of human elements	4	16.822	1.753	.787

Source: Authors' research

Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability that ranges from 0 to 1, with values of 0.60 to 0.70 deemed the lower limit of acceptability (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Having that in mind it may be concluded that all scales had an acceptable level of reliability.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the relevance of monitoring how tourists perceive safety in a tourist destination on the example of Opatija Riviera as a tourist destination. The results of our research determined the same number of factors as in the study by Xie *et al.* (2020b) whose questionnaire was used for the purpose of this research. Based on the middle values, the results of this research can be compared with the results of Xie *et al.* (2020b). All our results have proven to be higher in relation to theirs results which were average (all marks were below 4). When observing the *perception of safety of human elements (PSH)*, it has been determined that tourists consider tourism practitioners having professional safety ability and that they can provide their services in a safe way (Xie *et al.*, 2020b). Also, Opatija Riviera tourists perceive their fellow travellers as well as the domestic population friendly which is relevant for their total experience during their stay, considering that positive experiences can most definitely contribute towards tourists' revisit intention in the future. A significantly lower result was registered for only one element, and that is tourist guides being capable of taking care of tourist's safety during their stay in Opatija Riviera. Facilities and equipment represent a relevant pre-condition for provision of a high quality and competitive tourist product and service, so their safety is significant. The results for *perceived safety of facilities and equipment (PSFE)* indicate that tourists perceive Opatija Riviera tourist facilities to be reliable in performance, safe and secure, convenient to use, and safe in the sense that the respondents didn't experience any danger while using them. However, improvements could be made, considering that it has been registered that the respondents did experience some failure when using them. *Safety assessment of environmental elements* is also of significant importance. In this case we observe the physical elements like climate, water resources, flora and fauna, etc. which are unique and as such represent an integral part of a tourist

product in the majority of world tourist destinations considering that in certain cases they could be considered as attractions which contribute to attracting tourists from all over the world, and socio-cultural ones which are results of diverse activities undertaken by the people (wars, politics, etc.). As such they need to be valorised appropriately in terms of safety risks (Xie et al., 2020b). The results for *perceived safety of natural environments (PSNE)* indicate that tourists favouring Opatija Riviera's natural environment as well as perceiving it as clean and tidy, and what is most important, safe considering that tourists are aware of the absence of safety hazards in the natural environment, lower possibility of occurrence of natural disasters, as well as the fact that they don't have to worry about the extreme weather conditions. The results for *perceived safety of social environments (PSSE)* are also satisfactory, respectively, the respondents have stated that they have rarely encountered violence, public safety problems, fraud and theft, and forced consumption. The only statement that received an average mark was rare encounter with overcrowding and messy conditions which is classical when large amounts of tourists are present in a destination at the same time (Xie et al., 2020b).

Management elements includes all the policies and activities, in this case those connected with safety, that are undertaken on a destination level, and which contribute towards normal functioning of tourist activities (Xie et al., 2020a). Within this research the results for *perceived safety of management elements (PSM)* registered the lowest result, mostly the average mark below 4. It is the opinion of the respondents that security work of the Opatija Riviera is very effective, however additional resources should be invested to improve the protection of tourist's safety even higher. Also, the safety construction should be improved, as well as provision of safety information and visibility of warning sign about security in Opatija Riviera. These results are also the only ones that are in accordance with the findings of Xie et al. (2020b). The results of this research confirmed that measuring tourist's safety perception is significant for rethinking further improvements of tourist's safety during their stay in a destination. This is also confirmed by the research of Zaman et al. (2022), Zhan et al. (2022), Hasan et al. (2017), Orden-Meja et al. (2022), etc. The results indicate that Opatija Riviera is currently doing a good job in the post-COVID period, however, it is necessary to continuously be focused on improvements which will contribute for tourists to perceive a destination as safer. In this case, the authors advise that further activities could be focused on tour guides that work in the destination and their education in safety of tourists. This way they will be able to provide their services in a safer manner, and they will be perceived as more reliable as tourist service providers. Tourist facilities and equipment need to be improved in the best possible way to ensure top quality and safe experience for tourists. And finally, overcrowding, and messy conditions are something that needs to be considered as an important pre-condition of tourist's safety in the post pandemic period. Measuring tourist's safety perception represents an initial step towards rethinking where to focus in terms of tourist's improvement of safety, as well as developing awareness about the importance of safety in tourism. This is something that destination management and marketing should consider as a valuable strategy for achieving competitiveness on the tourist market. This paper has some theoretical and practical implications. In terms of the theoretical ones, the authors provided a theoretical review showing the close connection between tourism and safety, respectively tourism and tourist's safety perception during

their stay in a destination. In terms of practical implications, research results like this can be significant for destination management on where to focus, respectively to determine what are the destination's strengths and opportunities that need to be upgraded, as well as the weaknesses and threats that need to be reduced to the minimum or removed entirely, and for marketing the need to promote all the improvements. Achieving this will result in tourists recognizing and perceiving Opatija Riviera as even safer, which will result in increasing tourist arrivals and overnights, and loyalty of tourists and recommendation of Opatija Riviera as a safe holiday destination. In terms of research limitations, the authors emphasize the size of the population that participated in the survey. In the future this research will be conducted on a larger sample to increase the possibility of generalizing the results.

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