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Entrepreneurship in Croatia's Small Hotel Market

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

University of Zagreb

Faculty of Economics and Business

Class : Entrepreneurship

Menthor : prof.dr.sc. Marko Kolaković

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Zagreb, 2024.

STATEMENT ON THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare and confirm by my signature that the undergraduate paper is the sole result of my own autonomous work based on my research and relies on the published literature, as shown in the listed notes and bibliography.

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1. Introduction

In the first part of an undergraduate thesis I will start with an introduction into a whole topic of “Entrepreneurship in Croatia’s Small Hotel Market” by briefly going through background and context of the thesis then move one to the problem statement and research objectives, finally I will finish my introduction with a brief explanation of the structure of my undergraduate thesis.

1.1. Background and Context:

Croatia, positioned in the heart of Europe with its stunning Adriatic coastline, enchanting medieval towns, and rich cultural heritage, has emerged as a beacon for travelers seeking a combination of natural beauty and historical charm. The country's tourism sector, a cornerstone of its economy, has witnessed exponential growth in recent years, drawing visitors from around the globe to explore its diverse attractions and experience its unique hospitality.

Within the tapestry of Croatia's tourism industry, small hotels stand out as intimate retreats that offer a personalized and authentic stay experience. These boutique accommodations, often family-owned or operated by passionate entrepreneurs, serve as hidden gems that provide a glimpse into Croatia's warm hospitality and local traditions. Nestled amidst historic city centers, picturesque coastal villages, or tranquil countryside settings, these small hotels offer a sanctuary for travelers seeking a touch of luxury and a taste of local culture.

The significance of small hotels in Croatia extends beyond providing lodging; they serve as ambassadors of Croatian hospitality, showcasing the country's warmth, authenticity, and attention to detail. With a focus on personalized service and unique experiences, these establishments cater to discerning travelers who value authenticity and seek to immerse themselves in the local culture.

As Croatia's tourism landscape evolves and competition intensifies, entrepreneurs in the small hotel sector face a myriad of challenges and opportunities. From navigating regulatory requirements and adapting to changing consumer preferences to differentiating their offerings in a

crowded market, these entrepreneurs must navigate a complex terrain to carve out their niche and thrive in a competitive environment.

Against this backdrop, exploring the dynamics of entrepreneurship in Croatia's small hotel market becomes not only an academic pursuit but a practical necessity for aspiring and existing hoteliers. By understanding the context, challenges, and opportunities inherent in this vibrant sector, entrepreneurs can uncover insights that will empower them to make informed decisions, innovate in their offerings, and build sustainable businesses that contribute to Croatia's tourism landscape.

1.2. Problem Statement:

Within the idyllic landscape of Croatia's tourism industry, entrepreneurs in the small hotel sector grapple with a host of challenges and opportunities that shape their entrepreneurial journey. As the demand for unique travel experiences and personalized accommodations continues to grow, small hotel owners face the daunting task of navigating a competitive market while addressing the evolving needs and preferences of discerning travelers.

One of the primary challenges facing entrepreneurs in the Croatian small hotel sector is the intensifying competition within the hospitality industry. With an infl of new entrants, from boutique hotels to vacation rentals and online booking platforms, small hotel owners must differentiate their offerings and create compelling value propositions to attract and retain guests in a saturated market. Standing out amidst a sea of options requires a strategic approach to branding, marketing, and guest experience management that resonates with the target audience.

Moreover, the regulatory environment in Croatia presents a complex landscape for small hotel entrepreneurs to navigate. From licensing requirements and zoning regulations to tax obligations and compliance standards, entrepreneurs must stay abreast of legal frameworks and ensure that their operations align with regulatory mandates. Failure to comply with regulatory requirements can not only result in financial penalties but also tarnish the reputation of the hotel and erode guest trust.

In addition to competition and regulatory challenges, entrepreneurs in the small hotel sector must grapple with the dynamic nature of consumer preferences and market trends. As travelers increasingly seek unique and authentic experiences, small hotel owners must innovate their offerings, embrace sustainability practices, and leverage technology to enhance guest satisfaction and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape. Understanding and adapting to shifting consumer behaviors and preferences is essential for entrepreneurs to stay relevant and meet the expectations of modern travelers.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative for entrepreneurs in the Croatian small hotel sector to proactively identify and address key issues that impact their business growth and sustainability. By acknowledging the complexities of the industry, exploring innovative solutions, and embracing a customer-centric approach, entrepreneurs can position themselves for success and unlock the full potential of their small hotel ventures in the vibrant tourism market of Croatia.

1.3. Research Objectives:

In the middle of the dynamic landscape of entrepreneurship in Croatia's small hotel market, this research endeavors to unravel the multifaceted factors that underpin the success and sustainability of small hotel ventures. By delineating clear research objectives, this study aims to shed light on the intricacies of the industry, provide actionable insights for entrepreneurs, and contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding hospitality entrepreneurship in Croatia.

The primary objective of this research is to dig into the variety of the small hotel sector in Croatia and understand the factors that drive success and innovation in this competitive landscape. By conducting a comprehensive analysis, the study seeks to identify the key determinants of performance and resilience among small hotel entrepreneurs, offering valuable insights that can inform strategic decision-making and operational practices within the industry.

Furthermore, this research aims to explore the impact of market dynamics, consumer preferences, and regulatory frameworks on the entrepreneurial endeavors of small hotel owners in Croatia. By examining the interplay of these external factors and their influence on business operations, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that entrepreneurs encounter in the pursuit of sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

Another critical research objective is to assess the effectiveness of entrepreneurial strategies and best practices employed by small hotel owners in Croatia. By analyzing successful case studies, innovative approaches, and lessons learned from industry leaders, this study aims to distill actionable recommendations and practical insights that can empower entrepreneurs to enhance their business performance, differentiate their offerings, and adapt to evolving market trends.

Moreover, this research endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on entrepreneurship in the Croatian hospitality sector by synthesizing findings, highlighting trends, and proposing strategic recommendations for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and aspiring entrepreneurs. By fostering dialogue and knowledge exchange, the study aims to catalyze positive change, foster innovation, and create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures the growth and success of small hotel ventures in Croatia.

In conclusion, the research objectives outlined in this study serve as guiding principles to illuminate the complexities, challenges, and opportunities inherent in entrepreneurship within Croatia's small hotel market. By pursuing these objectives with rigor and purpose, this research aims to empower entrepreneurs, enrich academic discourse, and drive positive transformation within the vibrant landscape of Croatian hospitality entrepreneurship.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis:

Structured to provide a comprehensive exploration of entrepreneurship in Croatia's small hotel market, this thesis is meticulously organized into distinct sections that delve into various facets of

the industry. By delineating the structure of the thesis, this study aims to offer a roadmap for readers, guiding them through a journey of discovery, analysis, and reflection on the entrepreneurial dynamics shaping the small hotel sector in Croatia.

The thesis begins with an immersive introduction that sets the stage by providing a detailed background and context of Croatia's tourism industry, emphasizing the significance of small hotels within this vibrant ecosystem. By grounding the study in the historical and cultural context of the country, the introduction aims to provide a holistic understanding of the entrepreneurial landscape that small hotel owners navigate in Croatia.

Following the introduction, the thesis transitions to an in-depth industry analysis that offers a panoramic view of entrepreneurship in the Croatian hospitality industry. Through the lens of statistics, market trends, competitor analysis, and regulatory insights, this section aims to provide readers with a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges that define the small hotel sector in Croatia.

Subsequently, the thesis delves into the realm of business planning for entrepreneurs in small hotels, offering strategic guidance on identifying niche markets, selecting optimal locations, developing unique value propositions, and navigating financial planning and funding considerations. By exploring these critical aspects of business planning, this section equips entrepreneurs with the tools and insights needed to formulate robust strategies for success.

The operational management section of the thesis focuses on the intricacies of running a small hotel in Croatia, addressing key aspects such as establishing operational procedures, human resource management, technology integration, quality control, and compliance with legal requirements. By delving into these operational imperatives, this section aims to empower entrepreneurs to streamline their operations, enhance guest experiences, and ensure compliance with industry standards.

Moreover, the thesis includes an in-depth analysis of a small family hotel, Villa Laurel in Lovran, offering a real-world case study that illuminates the challenges, strategies, and successes of a small

hotel in Croatia. By examining the geographical position, hotel overview, and business strategy of Villa Laurel, this section provides readers with a practical lens through which to contextualize the theoretical insights discussed throughout the thesis.

Concluding the thesis are sections dedicated to exploring the challenges and future trends for entrepreneurs in the small hotel market, offering recommendations for addressing common challenges, managing risks, embracing emerging trends, advocating for policy changes, and providing strategic guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs. By summarizing key findings and insights, the conclusion aims to distill actionable recommendations that can inform and inspire entrepreneurs operating in Croatia's dynamic small hotel sector.

In essence, the structured framework of this thesis aims to offer a comprehensive and insightful exploration of entrepreneurship in Croatia's small hotel market, providing a rich tapestry of knowledge, analysis, and practical guidance for entrepreneurs, academics, industry practitioners, and policymakers invested in the sustainable growth and success of small hotel ventures in Croatia.

2. Industry Analysis

In the industry analysis section of the undergraduate thesis on "Entrepreneurship in Croatia's Small Hotel Market," I will delve into the dynamic landscape of the Croatian hospitality industry. By exploring market trends, consumer preferences, competitor analysis, regulatory environment, and SWOT analysis, we gain valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges that define the small hotel sector in Croatia.

2.1. Overview of Entrepreneurship in the Croatian Hospitality Industry

Tourism holds significant economic importance for the Republic of Croatia, contributing approximately 15% to the country's GDP. Within this vital sector, small family-run hotels have emerged as a noteworthy segment, offering a unique and intimate experience to tourists. These hotels not only enhance the overall tourism offering but also introduce a new dynamic to the Croatian hospitality industry.

The concept of small family hotels in Croatia is relatively recent, driven by the demand for comfort and the personalized atmosphere that such establishments provide. These hotels offer authenticity and local charm, reflecting the cultural and regional characteristics through their interior design, cuisine, and recreational activities. This approach has positioned small family hotels as distinctive "hotels with a big soul," attracting tourists seeking a more intimate and genuine experience.

As of the latest data, around 200 small family hotels operate in Croatia, with the majority being established in the past decade. Specifically, 90% of these hotels have been opened within the last ten years, with two-thirds established in the last five years, largely due to supportive programs like the Ministry of Tourism's "Poticaj za uspjeh" (Incentive for Success). These initiatives have facilitated the growth of small hotels, which now account for approximately 12% of the total hotel bed capacity in Croatia.

The Association of Small and Family Hotels (OMH), founded in 2004, plays an Important role in this sector. It acts as a cluster, connecting local producers and suppliers with hotel investors to create multiplier effects from tourism investments. The association has been instrumental in launching significant projects such as financing programs for small hoteliers, creating promotional catalogs distributed internationally, and securing favorable terms with major suppliers. These efforts have provided members with competitive advantages, including better rebates and annual bonuses based on sales volume.

The potential for further development in this segment is substantial, with a growing demand for small family hotels. Currently, small family hotels constitute about 10% of the total hotel bed capacity compared to larger hotel systems. The association aims to increase this share to 50% within the next seven to ten years, aspiring to match the levels seen in Italy and Austria, where small hotels represent 70% of the hotel market. It is estimated that out of 50,000 household renters, 2,000 are ready to transform into small hotels, with a goal of building at least 60,000 new beds in the coming years.

Small family hotels in Croatia are heavily focused on service quality, often rivaling the best in Europe. They are recognized for their exceptional gastronomic offerings, comparable to those in France. The Ministry of Tourism's initiatives to certify restaurants that offer healthy food options further support this high standard. Approximately half of these hotels operate year-round, while

the other half function seasonally for about eight months. Advocates for small hotels suggest that Croatia should follow the models of Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and France, where small and family hotels form the backbone of the tourism accommodation market. Despite often offering higher quality than similar hotels in these countries, Croatian small hotels are still 20-30% cheaper, attracting a significant number of foreign tourists from Western Europe, Scandinavia, and the USA.

2.2. Market Trends, Consumer Preferences and Success Factors: Analysis of current trends and how they influence the market.

The hospitality industry in Croatia has experienced significant evolution in recent years, with small entrepreneurship playing an important role in shaping the market landscape.

One prominent trend is the increasing demand for personalized and authentic experiences. Tourists today seek more than just accommodation; they desire a unique and immersive experience that reflects the local culture and lifestyle. This shift has propelled small family-run hotels into the spotlight, as they are well-positioned to offer such personalized services and authentic local experiences. These hotels often emphasize local cuisine, traditional decor, and personalized guest interactions, which cater to the growing consumer preference for authenticity.

Another trend is the rise of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism. There is a growing awareness and concern for environmental sustainability among travelers, leading them to prefer accommodations that adopt eco-friendly practices. Small hotels in Croatia have responded to this trend by incorporating sustainable practices such as energy-efficient systems, waste reduction programs, and the use of locally sourced products. This not only attracts environmentally conscious tourists but also enhances the hotel's reputation and marketability.

Consumer preferences in the Croatian hospitality market are increasingly leaning towards quality, uniqueness, and value for money. The article by Ivanovic, Rot, and Pretula highlights that modern travelers prioritize high-quality service and amenities. They are willing to pay a premium for accommodations that offer superior comfort, exceptional service, and unique experiences. This

preference for quality over quantity has encouraged small hotels to focus on enhancing their service standards and offering distinctive, high-value experiences.

Furthermore, the preference for digital conveniences cannot be overlooked. In today's digital age, consumers expect seamless online booking experiences, free Wi-Fi, and digital concierge services. Small hotels that embrace technology to improve customer service and streamline operations are likely to attract more guests and foster customer loyalty.

Several success factors have been identified for small family-run hotels in Croatia, according to the study by Ivanovic, Rot, and Pretula. One of the primary success factors is the ability to offer a personalized guest experience. The intimate scale of small hotels allows for a higher degree of personalized service, which can significantly enhance guest satisfaction and lead to repeat business.

Location is another critical success factor. Hotels situated in picturesque, culturally rich, or strategically significant locations tend to attract more guests. Small hotels that leverage their unique geographical positions to offer distinctive experiences, such as local tours or cultural events, can differentiate themselves from larger, impersonal hotel chains.

Effective marketing strategies also play a vital role in the success of small hotels. Utilizing digital marketing channels, social media, and online travel platforms can significantly increase visibility and attract a broader customer base. Word-of-mouth recommendations and positive online reviews are powerful tools that can drive bookings and build a positive reputation.

Lastly, maintaining high standards of cleanliness and comfort is essential. Guests expect clean, comfortable, and well-maintained accommodations. Small hotels that consistently meet or exceed these expectations can build strong customer loyalty and enjoy sustained success.

The Croatian hospitality market is influenced by trends towards personalized, authentic, and sustainable tourism. Consumer preferences are shifting towards quality, uniqueness, and digital conveniences, while success factors for small family-run hotels include personalized service, strategic location, effective marketing, and high standards of cleanliness and comfort. These elements collectively shape the competitive landscape and define the pathways to success for entrepreneurs in the small hotel sector.

2.3. Competitor Analysis: The Competition within the Small Hotel Sector in Croatia

The competitive landscape of the small hotel sector in Croatia is intricate and varied, characterized by a wide array of competitors striving to capture the attention of tourists seeking unique and personalized experiences.

Family-run boutique hotels are a significant segment within the small hotel market. These establishments often distinguish themselves through personalized service and a homely atmosphere. They leverage their smaller scale to offer tailored experiences that cater to individual guest preferences, which is a strong competitive advantage over larger, more impersonal hotel chains.

Agrotourism has gained popularity in Croatia, with establishments offering guests a blend of agricultural and tourism experiences. These competitors provide unique, hands-on experiences such as participation in farming activities, which appeal to tourists looking for an authentic and educational stay. This niche market allows agrotourism establishments to stand out in the crowded hospitality sector.

Despite the focus on small establishments, large hotel chains remain formidable competitors due to their extensive resources, brand recognition, and ability to offer a wide range of amenities. However, their standardized approach often lacks the personal touch that small, family-run hotels can provide. This distinction can be crucial for attracting tourists who prioritize unique and intimate experiences.

Independent B&Bs are another competitive force in the small hotel sector. These establishments typically offer a cozy, home-like environment and personalized service. However, they may not always match the professional standards and comprehensive amenities of family-run hotels, which can be a competitive disadvantage.

2.4. Regulatory Environment in Croatia: laws and regulations affecting small hotel operations

Regulatory Environment in Croatia: Laws and Regulations Affecting Small Hotel Operations

The regulatory environment in Croatia plays a crucial role in shaping the operational landscape for small hotels. The country, being a transitional economy, is subject to an evolving legal framework that aims to align with European Union standards.

Small hotels in Croatia must navigate a comprehensive licensing system that includes obtaining permits for construction, safety, and hygiene. The process ensures that establishments meet the required standards to provide quality services to tourists.

Taxation is another significant aspect affecting small hotel operations. Croatia imposes a Value Added Tax (VAT) on hospitality services, and small hotels must comply with these tax obligations to avoid penalties. Understanding the nuances of tax regulations can help small hotels optimize their financial management.

Labor laws in Croatia mandate fair employment practices, including minimum wage requirements, working hours, and employee benefits. Small hotels must adhere to these regulations to maintain legal compliance and foster a supportive work environment for their staff.

Environmental sustainability is increasingly becoming a focal point in regulatory practices. Small hotels are encouraged to implement eco-friendly practices and may benefit from government incentives for sustainable operations. Compliance with environmental laws not only enhances the hotel's reputation but also contributes to long-term operational efficiency. Consumer protection laws are designed to protect the interests of tourists. These regulations require small hotels to provide accurate information about their services, ensure the safety and security of their guests, and handle complaints effectively. Adherence to consumer protection laws is needed for maintaining customer trust and loyalty.

The regulatory environment, while ensuring standardization and quality, can also pose challenges for small hotels. The complexity and cost of compliance may strain resources, particularly for new or smaller establishments. However, those who effectively navigate these regulations can leverage them to enhance their competitiveness in the market.

In conclusion, understanding and adapting to the regulatory environment is vital for the success of small hotels in Croatia. By staying informed and compliant, small hotel operators can not only avoid legal pitfalls but also capitalize on opportunities to improve their service quality and market position.

2.5. SWOT Analysis: SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of entrepreneurship in hospitality sector

The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify the strengths and weaknesses that affect the entrepreneurial landscape in the hospitality sector. This analysis is important for understanding the competitive position of small hotels in Croatia.

Strengths:

Strategic Location: Many Croatian small hotels benefit from their strategic locations along the Adriatic coast, which attracts a significant number of tourists each year.

Personalized Services: Small hotels often excel in providing personalized and high-quality customer services, which can lead to higher guest satisfaction and repeat visits.

Cultural and Historical Appeal: Croatia's rich cultural heritage and historical sites act as strong selling points for small hotels, adding unique value to their offerings.

Flexibility and Agility: Small hotels typically have the advantage of being more flexible and agile in adapting to market changes and customer preferences compared to larger chains.

Weaknesses:

Limited Financial Resources: Small hotels often face financial constraints, which can limit their ability to invest in marketing, technology, and infrastructure improvements.

Lack of Brand Recognition: Compared to larger hotel chains, small hotels may struggle with lower brand visibility and recognition in the international market.

Dependence on Seasonal Tourism: Many small hotels are highly dependent on seasonal tourism, which can lead to fluctuating revenues and financial instability during off-peak seasons.

Regulatory Compliance: Navigating the complex regulatory environment can be challenging for small hotel operators, requiring significant time and resources.

Opportunities:

Growth in Eco-Tourism: There is a growing trend towards eco-tourism and sustainable travel. Small hotels that adopt eco-friendly practices can attract environmentally conscious travelers.

Digital Marketing and Online Presence: Leveraging digital marketing and enhancing online presence can help small hotels reach a broader audience and increase direct bookings.

Strategic Partnerships: Forming partnerships with local businesses, tour operators, and online travel agencies can enhance market reach and service offerings.

Government Incentives: Small hotels can benefit from various government programs and incentives aimed at promoting tourism and supporting small businesses in the hospitality sector.

Threats:

Economic Instability: Economic fluctuations and uncertainties can significantly impact tourism demand and the financial health of small hotels.

Intense Competition: The hospitality sector in Croatia is highly competitive, with numerous small hotels and international chains vying for market share.

Changing Consumer Preferences: Rapid changes in consumer preferences, such as the increasing demand for unique experiences and digital convenience, require continuous adaptation.

Global Health Crises: Events like the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the vulnerability of the hospitality sector to global health crises, which can lead to travel restrictions and a sharp decline in tourist arrivals.

In conclusion, a SWOT analysis reveals that while small hotels in Croatia have several strengths and opportunities to leverage, they must also navigate significant weaknesses and threats. By

strategically addressing these factors, small hotel entrepreneurs can enhance their competitive position and drive sustainable growth in the dynamic hospitality sector.

3. Business Planning for Entrepreneurs in Small Hotels

In the chapter of an undergraduate thesis the focus shifts to essential strategies for navigating the competitive landscape of the Croatian hospitality industry. This section delves into the critical aspects of identifying niche markets, selecting optimal locations, developing unique value propositions, and navigating financial planning and funding sources. By offering practical guidance tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs in the small hotel sector, this chapter aims to empower aspiring hoteliers in Croatia to make informed decisions and build sustainable businesses.

3.1. Identifying a Niche Market: Entrepreneurial strategies for finding and targeting a specific market segment

In Croatia's dynamic economic environment, identifying and targeting a niche market can provide entrepreneurs with a competitive edge. There are specific strategies that Croatian entrepreneurs can utilize to discover and cater to niche markets within the country.

Local Market Research:

Conducting localized market research is vital for Croatian entrepreneurs. This involves analyzing domestic market trends, consumer behaviors, and identifying gaps within the local industry. Utilizing tools such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups specific to the Croatian context can reveal valuable insights into niche segments that are often overlooked.

Cultural and Regional Factors:

Understanding Croatia's cultural and regional diversity is crucial in identifying niche markets. Entrepreneurs should consider the unique cultural preferences, traditions, and regional

characteristics that can influence consumer behavior. This approach helps in defining a niche market that is culturally and regionally relevant.

Tailored Value Proposition:

Developing a value proposition tailored to the Croatian market is essential. Entrepreneurs need to highlight what makes their product or service unique and how it addresses the specific needs and preferences of the niche market. This includes emphasizing local production, cultural relevance, and any unique benefits that resonate with Croatian consumers.

Leveraging Digital Platforms:

Digital platforms offer significant opportunities for targeting niche markets in Croatia. Entrepreneurs can use social media, local online forums, and e-commerce platforms to reach specific market segments effectively. Digital marketing strategies, including targeted advertising and content marketing, can help in building a significant online presence within the niche.

Collaboration with Local Partners:

Forming strategic partnerships with local businesses, influencers, and community organizations can enhance the reach and credibility of entrepreneurial ventures targeting a niche market. These collaborations can provide valuable insights, resources, and access to established customer bases within the niche.

Case Studies and Success Stories:

Analyzing successful case studies of niche market ventures within Croatia can provide practical insights and inspiration. Learning from the experiences of other Croatian entrepreneurs who have successfully identified and targeted niche markets can offer valuable lessons and strategies.

In conclusion, identifying and targeting a niche market in Croatia requires a deep understanding of local market dynamics, cultural nuances, and strategic use of digital platforms. By adopting these entrepreneurial strategies, Croatian entrepreneurs can uncover unique market opportunities and build successful ventures within their chosen niche.

3.2. Location Analysis and Site Selection in Croatia: Criteria for choosing a suitable location for entrepreneurs

Choosing the right location is a critical decision for entrepreneurs, especially in a diverse country like Croatia. This thesis explores the criteria that entrepreneurs should consider when selecting a site for their business operations in Croatia.

Market accessibility is a crucial factor in site selection. Entrepreneurs need to evaluate the proximity to target customers, suppliers, and distribution channels. Locations with high foot traffic, such as city centers or tourist hotspots, can offer better market access and visibility.

Analyzing economic and demographic factors is essential for understanding the potential customer base. Entrepreneurs should consider population density, income levels, and spending patterns in different regions of Croatia. Areas with growing populations and higher disposable incomes may offer more lucrative opportunities.

Cost considerations, including rental prices, property taxes, and utility costs, play a significant role in site selection. Entrepreneurs should balance the benefits of a prime location with the associated costs to ensure financial viability.

The availability of infrastructure, such as transportation networks, utilities, and communication systems, is vital for business operations. Locations with well-developed infrastructure can facilitate smoother business processes and enhance customer convenience.

Understanding the local legal and regulatory environment is important for site selection. Entrepreneurs should ensure that their chosen location complies with zoning laws, business licensing requirements, and other regulatory standards specific to Croatia.

Analyzing the competitive landscape helps entrepreneurs identify areas with high competition and those with unmet demand. A thorough competitive analysis can guide entrepreneurs in choosing a location where they can differentiate themselves and capture market share.

Quality of life factors, such as healthcare, education, safety, and recreational facilities, can influence the attractiveness of a location for both entrepreneurs and their employees. High-quality living conditions can enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

3.3. Developing a Unique Value Proposition: How to create a distinctive offering that appeals to customers.

A unique value proposition (UVP) is essential for differentiating a business in a competitive market. This part of the thesis will discuss strategies that Croatian entrepreneurs can use to develop a compelling UVP that resonates with their target audience.

The foundation of a strong UVP lies in understanding customer needs and preferences. Entrepreneurs should conduct market research to gather insights into what their target customers value the most. This can involve surveys, interviews, and analyzing customer feedback.

A UVP should clearly articulate the unique features and benefits of the product or service. Entrepreneurs need to identify what sets their offering apart from competitors and how it addresses specific pain points of their customers.

For Croatian entrepreneurs, emphasizing local and cultural relevance can strengthen the UVP. This can include showcasing local craftsmanship, using locally sourced materials, or aligning the product with Croatian traditions and values.

Effective communication is key to conveying the UVP to customers. Entrepreneurs should use clear and brief language to highlight the unique benefits of their offering. Visual elements, such as logos and taglines, can also reinforce the UVP.

Maintaining consistency in the UVP across all marketing channels ensures that customers receive a unified message. This includes the business website, social media, advertising campaigns, and customer interactions.

Incorporating customer testimonials and case studies can enhance the credibility of the UVP. Real-life examples of satisfied customers can demonstrate the value and effectiveness of the product or service.

Developing a UVP is not a one-time task. Entrepreneurs should continuously gather feedback and monitor market trends to refine and improve their UVP. Staying responsive to changing customer needs can help maintain the relevance and appeal of the UVP.

3.4. Financial Planning and Funding Sources: Financial planning steps and potential entrepreneurial funding options

Financial planning is a crucial aspect of entrepreneurship in the small hotel market in Croatia. Effective financial planning involves a series of steps that help entrepreneurs manage their resources, estimate future financial needs, and make informed decisions to ensure the long-term success of their businesses.

Financial Planning Steps:

a. Setting Financial Goals: Entrepreneurs in Croatia's small hotel market need to establish clear financial goals that line up with their business objectives. These goals may include revenue targets, return on investment (ROI) expectations and profit margins.

b. Budgeting: Creating a detailed budget is essential for managing expenses and allocating resources efficiently. Entrepreneurs should consider all costs associated with running a small hotel, such as operating expenses, marketing costs, and staff salaries.

c. Cash Flow Management: Monitoring cash flow is critical for ensuring the financial stability of a small hotel business. Entrepreneurs should track income and expenses regularly to maintain sufficient liquidity and address any cash flow challenges promptly.

d. Risk Management: Identifying and mitigating financial risks is an integral part of financial planning. Entrepreneurs should assess potential risks, such as economic downturns or unexpected expenses, and develop strategies to minimize their impact on the business.

e. Financial Forecasting: Conducting financial forecasting helps entrepreneurs anticipate future financial performance and make informed decisions. By analyzing market trends and business data, entrepreneurs can create realistic financial projections to guide their strategic planning.

Potential Entrepreneurial Funding Options:

a. Bank Loans: Entrepreneurs in Croatia can explore traditional bank loans as a source of funding for their small hotel businesses. Banks offer various loan products adjusted to the needs of entrepreneurs, such as term loans, lines of credit, and equipment financing.

b. Government Grants and Subsidies: The Croatian government provides grants and subsidies to support small businesses in various industries, including tourism and hospitality. Entrepreneurs can research available programs and apply for funding that aligns with their business goals.

c. Venture Capital and Angel Investors: Entrepreneurs seeking external investment can consider venture capital firms and angel investors as funding sources. These investors provide capital in exchange for equity in the business and often offer strategic guidance and networking opportunities.

d. Crowdfunding: Crowdfunding platforms enable entrepreneurs to raise funds from a large group of individual investors or donors. Entrepreneurs can launch crowdfunding campaigns to finance specific projects, renovations, or marketing initiatives for their small hotel businesses.

In conclusion, effective financial planning and access to diverse funding sources are essential for entrepreneurial success in Croatia's small hotel market. By following strategic financial planning steps and exploring various funding options, entrepreneurs can position their businesses for sustainable growth and competitiveness in the dynamic hospitality industry.

3.5. Entrepreneurial marketing Strategies Tailored to the Croatian Market: Effective marketing tactics and channels. implement this summary into this topic

Entrepreneurial marketing strategies tailored to the Croatian market focus on leveraging effective tactics and channels to reach and engage target audiences in a dynamic and competitive tourism landscape. These strategies are essential for hotels in Croatia to adapt to local market dynamics, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and differentiate themselves from competitors.

In the context of the Croatian hotel industry, entrepreneurial marketing strategies encompass a range of innovative and proactive approaches aimed at driving business growth and enhancing market presence. By tailoring marketing tactics to the specific characteristics of the Croatian market, hotels can create unique value propositions that resonate with local and international travelers.

One effective marketing tactic tailored to the Croatian market is the utilization of geo-targeted advertising and promotions. By understanding the preferences and behaviors of Croatian consumers, hotels can tailor their advertising campaigns to specific regions, cities, or demographics within the country. This targeted approach allows hotels to maximize the impact of their marketing efforts and connect with audiences on a personal and relevant level.

Moreover, entrepreneurial marketing strategies in the Croatian market emphasize the importance of leveraging digital channels and technology to engage with tech-savvy consumers. With the increasing reliance on digital platforms for travel research and bookings, hotels need to maintain a strong online presence through responsive websites, social media engagement, and online booking capabilities. By optimizing their digital channels, hotels can effectively reach and influence potential guests throughout the travel planning process.

In addition to digital channels, effective entrepreneurial marketing strategies in the Croatian market also involve harnessing the power of strategic partnerships and collaborations. By aligning with local businesses, tourism associations, and travel influencers, hotels can extend their reach, access new customer segments, and create compelling marketing campaigns that resonate with target audiences. Collaborative marketing initiatives not only enhance brand visibility but also leverage shared resources and expertise to drive mutual business growth.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial marketing strategies in the Croatian market emphasize the value of experiential marketing and storytelling to create authentic connections with customers. By showcasing the unique culture, heritage, and natural beauty of Croatia through immersive experiences, hotels can differentiate themselves from competitors and appeal to travelers seeking authentic and memorable stays. Through compelling narratives and guest-centric initiatives, hotels can forge emotional connections with guests and foster long-term loyalty.

In conclusion, entrepreneurial marketing strategies tailored to the Croatian market are essential for hotels to navigate the complexities of the local tourism landscape, attract discerning travelers, and drive sustainable business growth. By implementing effective marketing tactics and channels that resonate with Croatian consumers, hotels can strengthen their market position, enhance brand relevance, and capitalize on the diverse opportunities in this vibrant and evolving market.

4. Operational Management for Entrepreneurs in Small Hotels

In the Operational Management section of the undergraduate thesis on Entrepreneurship in Croatia's Small Hotel Market, the focus shifts to the intrinsic processes of running a small hotel effectively. Key aspects such as establishing operational procedures, human resource management, technology integration, quality control, and customer service are explored in detail. By delving into these operational imperatives, the thesis aims to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary insights and strategies to streamline their operations, enhance guest experiences, and ensure compliance with industry standards within the vibrant Croatian hospitality sector.

4.1. Establishing Operational Procedures: The creation of standard operating procedures

Establishing operational procedures is a critical component for the successful management of small hotels in Croatia. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) serve as a set of step-by-step instructions produced by an organization as a tool to help workers carry out routine operations. SOPs aim to achieve efficiency, boost performance, and quality output, while reducing miscommunication and failure to follow with industry regulations. In the context of Croatian small hotels, SOPs are particularly vital due to the unique regulatory environment and the specific demands of the Croatian tourism market.

Importance of SOPs in Croatian Small Hotels:

Consistency and Quality: SOPs ensure that every staff member performs their duties in a consistent manner, which is essential for maintaining high standards of service and operational quality. Consistency is crucial for creating a reliable customer experience, which is vital in Croatia's competitive tourism sector.

Training and Onboarding: Well-documented procedures streamline the training process for new employees. They provide a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, reducing the

learning curve and enabling new hires to become productive more quickly. This is particularly important in Croatia, where seasonal employment is common, and rapid training is necessary.

Operational Efficiency: SOPs help identify the most efficient ways to perform tasks, eliminating unnecessary steps and reducing the time and resources required to complete tasks. This efficiency is essential in a market where operational costs can be high due to seasonal fluctuations in demand.

Compliance and Risk Management: By adhering to standardized procedures, small hotels can ensure compliance with Croatian laws and regulations, such as those pertaining to health and safety, labor laws, and tourism standards. This also aids in minimizing risks associated with non-compliance and operational errors.

Steps to Create Effective SOPs for Croatian Small Hotels:

Begin by identifying the core processes that need standardization within the context of operating a small hotel in Croatia. This could include front desk operations, housekeeping, maintenance, food and beverage services, and customer service procedures.

Engage Croatian Staff in Development: Involve local employees who are directly engaged in the processes to contribute their insights and practical knowledge. This ensures that the SOPs are realistic and practical, taking into account the unique aspects of Croatian hospitality culture.

Document the Procedures: Clearly document each step of the process, using simple and concise language. Include details such as the purpose of the procedure, the scope, the responsible personnel, and the step-by-step instructions. Ensure that the documentation is available in both Croatian and other relevant languages to accommodate a diverse workforce.

Visual Aids and Checklists: Incorporate visual aids like flowcharts, diagrams, and checklists to make the procedures easier to follow. These tools can help clarify complex processes and ensure that no steps are overlooked, which is particularly useful in a busy tourist season.

Review and Test: Before finalizing the SOPs, review and test them with experienced staff and management to ensure they are comprehensive and practical.

By establishing and adhering to well-crafted SOPs, small hotels in Croatia can enhance their operational efficiency, provide consistent and high-quality service, and ensure compliance with

local regulations, ultimately contributing to their long-term success in the competitive Croatian tourism market.

4.2. Human Resource Management: Recruitment, training, and retention strategies.

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a crucial aspect of successful hotel operations, especially for small hotels in Croatia. Effective HRM strategies ensure that the right personnel are hired, adequately trained, and retained, which is essential for delivering high-quality service and maintaining operational efficiency. This section will explore recruitment, training, and retention strategies tailored to the unique context of the Croatian small hotel market.

Recruitment Strategies:

Understanding the Labor Market: The first step in effective recruitment is understanding the local labor market. In Croatia, the tourism sector is a significant part of the economy, but it also faces challenges such as seasonal labor shortages. Entrepreneurs should stay informed about labor market trends and leverage local job fairs, hospitality schools, and online job portals to find potential candidates.

Attractive Job Postings: Crafting attractive job postings that highlight the benefits of working at the hotel, such as a friendly work environment, opportunities for career growth, and competitive salaries, can help attract top talent. Emphasizing unique aspects of the location, such as proximity to tourist attractions or natural beauty, can also be appealing.

Utilizing Social Media and Networking: Social media platforms and professional networks can be effective tools for reaching a broader audience. Engaging with local hospitality groups and associations can also provide valuable connections and referrals.

Seasonal Recruitment: Given the seasonal nature of Croatian tourism, entrepreneurs should develop strategies for recruiting seasonal workers. This may include building relationships with hospitality schools and universities to recruit students for summer positions or offering incentives for returning seasonal staff.

Training Strategies:

Comprehensive Onboarding Programs: Implementing thorough onboarding programs helps new hires understand the hotel's culture, standards, and expectations. This may include orientation sessions, shadowing experienced staff, and detailed training on SOPs.

Continuous Training and Development: Continuous training programs are essential to keep staff updated on the latest industry trends, technologies, and customer service practices. Regular workshops, online courses, and cross-training opportunities can enhance employee skills and versatility.

Language Training: Given Croatia's popularity with international tourists, providing language training can be highly beneficial. Staff who can communicate in multiple languages can significantly enhance the guest experience.

Customer Service: Training programs should emphasize the importance of exceptional customer service, including handling complaints, personalizing guest interactions, and exceeding expectations. Role-playing scenarios and feedback sessions can be useful tools in this regard.

Retention Strategies:

A positive work environment where employees feel valued and respected is crucial for retention. This includes fostering a supportive team culture, recognizing and rewarding good performance, and providing regular feedback.

Offering competitive salaries and benefits is essential to retain top talent. Benefits might include health insurance, meal allowances, accommodation for staff, and performance bonuses.

Providing clear paths for career development and advancement can motivate employees to stay with the hotel. This could involve offering leadership training programs, promoting from within, and supporting further education and professional development.

Ensuring that employees have a healthy work-life balance is particularly important in the hospitality industry, where long hours can be common. Flexible scheduling, adequate time off, and recreational activities can help maintain employee well-being and job satisfaction.

Employee Engagement and Feedback: Regularly engaging with employees and seeking their feedback on various aspects of their job can help identify areas for improvement and make staff

feel heard and valued. Employee satisfaction surveys and open-door policies are effective tools for this purpose.

By implementing these tailored recruitment, training, and retention strategies, small hotel entrepreneurs in Croatia can build a skilled, motivated, and loyal workforce. This, in turn, contributes to delivering exceptional guest experiences, maintaining high operational standards, and achieving long-term business success in the competitive Croatian tourism market.

4.3. Technology and Automation in Small Hotels: How technology can improve efficiency and service quality.

Technology and automation have become integral to the operations of small hotels, significantly enhancing efficiency and service quality. In Croatia, small and family-owned hotels (SFH) increasingly recognize the importance of technological innovations as a backbone of many process improvements. These advancements not only streamline operations but also enhance guest satisfaction and revenue growth. This section explores how various technological solutions can be leveraged to improve the efficiency and service quality of small hotels in Croatia.

Smart Mobile Technologies and Internet of Things (IoT):

Operational Efficiency: Smart mobile technologies and IoT devices enable hotels to automate many routine tasks, reducing the need for manual intervention. For example, IoT sensors can monitor room occupancy and automatically adjust lighting and temperature, optimizing energy consumption without compromising guest comfort.

Guest Experience: IoT technologies allow guests to control their room environment using their smartphones or voice commands. This includes adjusting lighting, heating, and entertainment systems, providing a personalized and convenient experience that enhances guest satisfaction.

Cloud Computing and Big Data Technologies:

Data Management: Cloud computing allows small hotels to store and manage vast amounts of data without significant investment in physical infrastructure. This data can be used to gain insights into customer preferences and operational efficiencies.

Revenue Management: Big data analytics can process information from various sources to optimize pricing strategies and improve revenue management. By analyzing booking patterns, market demand, and competitor pricing, small hotels can make informed decisions to maximize occupancy and profitability.

Smart Devices and Social Media Tools:

Streamlined Operations: Smart devices such as tablets and smartphones can be used by staff to manage daily operations more efficiently. For instance, housekeeping can update room statuses in real-time, and maintenance staff can receive instant alerts about issues that need immediate attention.

Enhanced Communication: Social media tools and smart apps facilitate better communication between the hotel and its guests. Guests can use these platforms to make reservations, request services, and provide feedback. This real-time interaction helps hotels respond quickly to guest needs and improve service quality.

Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR):

Marketing and Sales: VR and AR technologies can be used to create immersive experiences for potential guests. Virtual tours of the hotel and its amenities can help attract more bookings by allowing guests to explore the property from the comfort of their homes.

Training and Development: VR can also be used for staff training, providing realistic scenarios for employees to practice their skills. This can lead to better prepared and more confident staff, ultimately improving the quality of service provided.

Voice Control Technology:

Guest Convenience: Voice control technology allows guests to use their voice to control various aspects of their room, such as lighting, temperature, and entertainment systems. This hands-free experience adds a layer of convenience and modernity to the guest stay.

Operational Efficiency: Voice-controlled systems can also be integrated with hotel management software to streamline operations. For instance, guests can request room service or housekeeping through voice commands, which are then automatically relayed to the appropriate departments.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robots:

Customer Service: AI-powered chatbots and robots can handle routine customer service inquiries, provide information about hotel services, and even assist with check-ins and check-outs. This not only improves efficiency but also ensures that human staff can focus on more complex and personalized guest interactions.

By effectively integrating these technological solutions, small hotels in Croatia can significantly enhance their operational efficiency and service quality. This, in turn, can lead to improved guest satisfaction, higher occupancy rates, and increased profitability, ensuring long-term success in the competitive Croatian tourism market.

4.4. Quality Control and Customer Service: The importance of maintaining high standards

In the dynamic landscape of entrepreneurship, particularly within Croatia, the emphasis on quality control and customer service is paramount. As Croatian startups and established businesses strive to compete on both local and global stages, maintaining high standards in these areas is not just a business strategy but a necessity for sustainable growth and success.

Quality control serves as the backbone of any successful enterprise. In Croatia, where the market is burgeoning with innovative startups, ensuring product and service excellence is crucial.

Entrepreneurs must focus on developing robust quality control processes that align with international standards. This involves implementing stringent checks at every stage of production or service delivery, from sourcing raw materials to the final customer interaction.

For Croatian businesses, maintaining high-quality standards can significantly enhance their reputation, attract foreign investment, and facilitate entry into international markets. By prioritizing quality control, entrepreneurs can reduce waste, minimize costs, and improve efficiency, which in turn increases competitiveness. Furthermore, a commitment to quality fosters trust and loyalty among customers, creating a strong and enduring brand image.

In the Croatian entrepreneurial ecosystem, customer service acts as a key differentiator. With consumers having access to a plethora of options, exceptional customer service can set a business apart. Croatian entrepreneurs must focus on building customer-centric cultures within their organizations, emphasizing respect, responsiveness, and personalization in their customer interactions.

Effective customer service involves not only resolving issues but also anticipating customer needs and exceeding expectations. For Croatian businesses, leveraging technology such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems can enhance service delivery and provide valuable insights into consumer behavior. By fostering a positive customer experience, businesses can cultivate a loyal customer base and encourage word-of-mouth marketing, which is particularly powerful in the close-knit Croatian market.

The synergy between quality control and customer service is particularly significant in entrepreneurship. In Croatia, where businesses often rely on community and network-based growth, the integration of these two elements can drive substantial success. High-quality products and services naturally lead to satisfied customers, and when paired with outstanding customer service, they create a compelling value proposition.

Entrepreneurs in Croatia must recognize that maintaining high standards in quality and service is a continuous process. It requires ongoing investment in employee training, process improvements, and customer feedback mechanisms. By doing so, businesses can adapt to changing market demands and continuously enhance their offerings.

5. Analysis of a Small Family Hotel Villa Laurel in Lovran

In the analysis of the small family hotel Villa Laurel in Lovran, the focus is on showcasing the strategic positioning of the hotel in the picturesque town of Lovran on the Istrian Peninsula in Croatia. The hotel's unique blend of historic charm and modern amenities, along with its emphasis on personalized service and local authenticity, sets the stage for a detailed examination of its business strategies and operational dynamics. Through an in-depth exploration, this undergraduate thesis aims to uncover the entrepreneurial strategies and success factors that contribute to Villa Laurel's competitive edge in the vibrant Croatian hospitality market.

5.1. Overview of the geographical position

Villa Laurel is located in the small town of Lovran, located on the eastern coast of the Istrian Peninsula in Croatia. This area is renowned for its breathtaking views of the Adriatic Sea, mild Mediterranean climate, and lush greenery, making it a prime destination for tourists seeking natural beauty and tranquility. Lovran's strategic position along the Opatija Riviera places it near major hubs like Rijeka and the cultural attractions of Opatija, offering guests a blend of relaxation and exploration. This geographical advantage is pivotal for Villa Laurel, as it attracts both domestic and international visitors looking for a serene yet accessible getaway.

5.2. Overview of the hotel

Villa Laurel is surrounded by a stunning park of century-old oaks, extending all the way to the sea, with only the 12-kilometer-long Lungomare promenade separating it. This picturesque walkway, dedicated to Emperor Franz Joseph, connects the charming towns of Volosko, Opatija, Ičići, Ika, and Lovran, offering guests breathtaking views and leisurely strolls.

Originally built in 1909 and thoughtfully renovated in 2016, the hotel combines modern furnishings with historic charm, creating an ambiance that harmonizes the best of the old and the new. Villa Laurel is a quintessential small family hotel that embodies the intimacy and personalized service typical of family-run enterprises in Croatia. With a limited number of elegantly appointed rooms, the hotel emphasizes comfort and authenticity, providing guests with an experience that reflects the charm of the region.

The hotel offers a delightful breakfast, allowing guests to start their day with a taste of local flavors and fresh ingredients and a local bar open throughout the whole day. Enough to enjoy your escape from the ordinary at Hotel Villa Laurel.

5.3. Business strategy of the hotel

Villa Laurel's business strategy is deeply rooted in the principles of entrepreneurship, focusing on innovation, personalization, and community integration to create a distinctive market presence.

Personalized Service and Guest Experience:

As a small family-owned enterprise, Villa Laurel leverages its size to provide highly personalized service. This entrepreneurial approach allows the hotel to cater to individual guest needs, creating a unique and memorable experience that fosters repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals. By cultivating strong personal connections with guests, Villa Laurel builds customer loyalty, which is crucial for long-term success.

Emphasis on Local Authenticity:

Entrepreneurship in the hospitality sector often involves differentiating through authenticity. Villa Laurel capitalizes on its location by offering experiences rooted in local culture. This includes showcasing regional cuisine, organizing cultural events, and recommending local attractions. By doing so, the hotel not only enhances its appeal but also supports the local economy, reflecting a sustainable business model that resonates with socially conscious travelers.

Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Practices:

Adopting sustainable practices is a forward-thinking entrepreneurial strategy that aligns with global trends in tourism. Villa Laurel incorporates eco-friendly initiatives, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and promoting sustainable tourism practices among guests. This commitment to sustainability not only reduces operational costs but also attracts environmentally conscious travelers, adding a competitive edge in the market.

Strategic Online Presence and Marketing:

In today's digital age, an increased online presence is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Villa Laurel actively engages with potential guests through social media, travel websites, and a user-friendly website. By leveraging digital marketing strategies, the hotel expands its reach and enhances its brand visibility. Positive guest reviews and social media engagement are vital components of its marketing strategy, driving new bookings and establishing a strong online reputation.

Community Engagement and Collaboration:

Villa Laurel embraces community-based entrepreneurship by forming partnerships with local businesses and artisans. This collaboration not only boosts the guest experience but also strengthens the hotel's ties to the local community, fostering goodwill and mutual support. By integrating local products and services into its offerings, Villa Laurel enhances its authenticity and provides guests with a comprehensive and immersive experience.

In conclusion, Villa Laurel exemplifies entrepreneurial spirit through its focus on personalized service, local integration, sustainability, and strategic marketing. By continually innovating and adapting to market trends, the hotel maintains its competitive edge and ensures sustainable growth in the vibrant tourism landscape of the Opatija Riviera.

6. Challenges and Future trends for Entrepreneurs in Small Hotel Market

In the evolving landscape of entrepreneurship within Croatia's small hotel market, entrepreneurs face a myriad of challenges and opportunities that shape their journey towards success. Navigating intense competition, regulatory complexities, and shifting consumer preferences poses significant hurdles for aspiring and existing hoteliers. Understanding these challenges and aligning with emerging trends is crucial for entrepreneurs to innovate, differentiate their offerings, and thrive in the dynamic hospitality sector of Croatia.

6.1. Common Challenges Faced by Entrepreneurs: Typical challenges for entrepreneurs such as financing, competition, and regulation.

Entrepreneurs in the small hotel market, particularly in Croatia, encounter a variety of challenges that require strategic orientation to ensure sustainability and success. These challenges are often intertwined with the unique dynamics of the Croatian tourism industry.

One of the main challenges is securing adequate financing. Small hotels often require significant capital investment for renovations, marketing, and operational costs. In Croatia, entrepreneurs may face difficulties accessing traditional financing options due to stringent lending criteria or limited financial history. To overcome this, many rely on alternative funding sources such as government grants, EU funds, or private investors. Developing a solid business plan and demonstrating potential for profitability are crucial for attracting these investments.

The competitive landscape in Croatia's hospitality sector is intense, with numerous small hotels vying for the same market segment. Entrepreneurs must differentiate their offerings through unique value propositions, such as personalized service or authentic cultural experiences. Emphasizing local heritage and integrating sustainable practices can also provide a competitive edge. Additionally, building strong relationships with local businesses and tourism boards can enhance visibility and attract more guests.

Navigating the complex regulatory environment is another significant challenge for small hotel entrepreneurs. Croatia's tourism and hospitality sector is subject to various regulations, including zoning laws, health and safety standards. Staying compliant requires continuous monitoring of legal changes and ensuring that all operational aspects adhere to national and EU standards. Entrepreneurs must allocate resources for legal advice and compliance management to avoid potential penalties or disruptions.

6.2. Risk Management and Contingency Planning: Strategies for managing risks and planning for unexpected events.

Entrepreneurship inherently involves navigating uncertainty and risk, and this is particularly true in the small hotel market in Croatia. Effective risk management and contingency planning are critical for ensuring the resilience and sustainability of small hotels. By anticipating potential challenges and preparing strategies to mitigate them, Croatian entrepreneurs can safeguard their businesses against unforeseen events and maintain operational stability.

The first step in risk management is identifying the various risks that small hotels might face. These risks can be broadly categorized into financial, operational, strategic, and external risks. **Financial Risks:** Fluctuations in tourism demand, exchange rates, and economic downturns can impact revenue streams. Additionally, unexpected expenses such as repairs or legal fees can strain financial resources.

Operational Risks: Issues such as equipment failure, staff shortages, or supply chain disruptions can impede daily operations.

Strategic Risks: Poor strategic decisions, such as incorrect market positioning or ineffective marketing campaigns, can result in lost opportunities and decreased competitiveness.

External Risks: Natural disasters, pandemics, and regulatory changes are external factors that can significantly affect hotel operations.

To manage these risks, entrepreneurs in the Croatian small hotel market can implement several strategies:

Diversification of Revenue Streams: Relying on a single source of income can be risky. Diversifying revenue streams, such as offering additional services (e.g., event hosting, guided tours) or targeting different market segments (e.g., business travelers, eco-tourists), can help stabilize income.

Financial Reserves and Insurance: Building financial reserves provides a buffer against unexpected expenses and economic downturns. Additionally, investing in comprehensive insurance coverage, including liability, property and business interruption insurance, can mitigate financial losses from unforeseen events.

Operational Flexibility: Implementing flexible operational practices, such as cross-training staff and maintaining relationships with multiple suppliers, can help manage operational risks. This flexibility ensures that the hotel can continue functioning smoothly even if certain aspects of its operations are disrupted.

Strategic Planning and Market Research: Regular strategic planning and thorough market research help entrepreneurs make informed decisions and adapt to the new market conditions. Understanding emerging trends and customer preferences enables hotels to remain competitive and relevant.

Technology Utilization: Leveraging technology for risk management can enhance operational efficiency and resilience. For example, using property management systems (PMS) for real-time monitoring of bookings and inventory, and adopting customer relationship management (CRM) systems to personalize guest experiences and predict demand patterns, can help manage risks more effectively.

While risk management focuses on minimizing risks, contingency planning involves preparing for potential crises and ensuring the business can continue operating during and after unexpected events. Key components of effective contingency planning include:

Crisis Management Plan: Developing a comprehensive crisis management plan that outlines procedures for various scenarios (e.g., natural disasters, health emergencies) is essential. This plan should include communication protocols and responsibilities, and steps for maintaining operations.

Emergency Response Training: Providing regular training for staff on emergency response procedures ensures that everyone knows how to act swiftly and effectively during a crisis. This training can include first aid, evacuation drills, and safety protocol education.

Business Continuity Plan: A business continuity plan (BCP) identifies critical functions and outlines strategies to maintain these functions during a disruption. This might involve backup suppliers, remote work arrangements, and alternative revenue sources.

Regular Reviews and Updates: Contingency plans should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect new risks and changes in the business environment. Conducting simulations and drills can test the effectiveness of the plans and identify areas for improvement.

In conclusion, effective risk management and contingency planning are vital for the success and sustainability of small hotels in Croatia. By identifying potential risks, implementing robust risk management strategies, and preparing comprehensive contingency plans, entrepreneurs can protect their businesses from unexpected events and ensure long-term resilience. This proactive approach not only mitigates risks but also enhances the reputation and reliability of the hotel, fostering trust and loyalty among guests. As the Croatian tourism industry continues to evolve, these practices will be crucial for navigating the challenges and seizing the opportunities that lie ahead.

6.3. Emerging Trends in the Croatian Hospitality Sector: Future trends that could impact small hotels.

The hospitality industry is experiencing a transformative evolution, particularly for small hotels in Croatia, as they navigate the complexities of modern market demands. A shift will be most prevalent in next branches.

Automation and Advanced Technology: The hospitality industry is witnessing a significant technological revolution, with a notable increase in hotels integrating automated systems to simplify operations, reduce human errors, and increase efficiency. Adopting advanced systems

such as cloud-based solutions and artificial intelligence can help small hotels streamline their operations and improve guest experiences.

Data-Driven Revenue Management: There is a shift towards data-driven revenue management in hotels, where analytics tools are used to convert large amounts of data into effective strategies. Understanding booking patterns, adapting to seasonal changes, and creating guest-focused experiences based on data analysis can help small hotels optimize their pricing strategies and attract a broader range of guests.

Flexible Pricing Strategies: Market dynamics in 2023 have pushed hotels towards more flexible pricing strategies, with dynamic real-time adjustments based on various factors like demand fluctuations. Small hotels can benefit from implementing pricing strategies that adapt to real-time demand, adjust prices based on local events, and respond to economic trends to attract diverse clientele and maximize revenue.

Personalized Hospitality: Guests today seek unique, personalized experiences tailored to their preferences and desires. Small hotels can enhance guest satisfaction by offering personalized room settings, customized gastronomic experiences, and leveraging data analytics to understand and meet individual guest preferences effectively.

Holistic Revenue Management: Small hotels can benefit from taking a holistic approach to revenue management, focusing not only on room revenues but also on ancillary services like food and beverage, spa services, parking, and event spaces. By optimizing revenue streams across all service offerings and providing exceptional guest experiences, small hotels can improve their overall financial performance and competitiveness in the market.

These trends suggest that small hotels in Croatia can leverage technology, data analytics, flexible pricing strategies, personalized services, and holistic revenue management to stay competitive and meet the evolving demands of the hospitality sector.

6.4. Strategic Recommendations for Aspiring Entrepreneurs: Practical advice for new entrepreneurs.

In Croatia's small hotel market, entrepreneurs can enhance their competitiveness by focusing on unique experiences that resonate with travelers. Emphasizing the local culture and environment is

essential; offering unique activities such as culinary tours, guided hikes, or cultural workshops can set a hotel apart from the competition. These experiences should be prominently featured in marketing materials to attract tourists seeking authenticity in their travels.

Another crucial aspect is the management of online reviews. Positive feedback on platforms like TripAdvisor and Google can significantly influence potential guests' decisions. Therefore, encouraging satisfied customers to leave reviews and appropriately responding to all feedback demonstrates a commitment to quality and guest satisfaction, which can build trust and entice new visitors.

In today's digital age, having a mobile-friendly website is vital. Many travelers use smartphones to book accommodations, so ensuring a seamless booking experience can lead to higher conversion rates. The design should be intuitive and accessible, allowing guests to easily navigate and complete their reservations.

Social media also plays a key role in attracting guests. By creating engaging content that highlights the hotel and its surroundings through high-quality images and compelling stories, entrepreneurs can connect with potential customers and foster a sense of community. This engagement can significantly enhance brand visibility and attract a more extensive audience.

Lastly, sustainability is becoming increasingly important to travelers. Implementing eco-friendly practices, such as reducing plastic usage, conserving energy, and sourcing local products, can appeal to environmentally conscious guests. By highlighting these initiatives in marketing efforts, hotels can attract a demographic that values sustainability, further differentiating themselves in a competitive market.

By focusing on these strategies—offering unique experiences, managing online reviews, optimizing for mobile, leveraging social media, and committing to sustainability—entrepreneurs in Croatia's small hotel market can create a compelling and attractive proposition for potential guests.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this undergraduate thesis on "Entrepreneurship in Croatia's Small Hotel Market" provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the entrepreneurial landscape within the vibrant hospitality sector of Croatia. By meticulously exploring various aspects of the industry, ranging from market trends and regulatory challenges to business strategies and operational management, the thesis offers valuable insights and practical recommendations for entrepreneurs and industry stakeholders.

The thesis underscores the critical role of entrepreneurship in shaping the small hotel market in Croatia, a country celebrated for its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and warm hospitality. Through a detailed examination of the entrepreneurial dynamics, challenges, and opportunities specific to small family-owned hotels, the thesis sheds light on the complexities faced by entrepreneurs striving to carve out their niche in a competitive and evolving market.

By emphasizing the importance of quality control, customer service excellence, technology integration, sustainability practices, and strategic marketing tailored to the unique context of the Croatian market, the thesis underscores the strategic imperatives driving success and differentiation in the small hotel sector. Through a nuanced analysis of business planning, risk management, and contingency planning strategies, entrepreneurs are equipped with the tools and frameworks needed to navigate uncertainties, mitigate risks, and drive sustainable growth in their hotel ventures.

The thesis also delves into real-world insights through the analysis of Hotel Villa Laurel in Lovran, offering a practical lens through which to contextualize theoretical concepts and strategic recommendations. By examining the geographical position, strategic business strategies, and operational approaches of Villa Laurel, the thesis provides a holistic view of entrepreneurial best practices and success factors in action within the Croatian small hotel market.

In essence, this comprehensive thesis serves as a seminal work in the field of hospitality entrepreneurship, offering a rich tapestry of knowledge, analysis, and strategic guidance for entrepreneurs, academics, industry practitioners, and policymakers invested in the sustainable

growth and success of small family-run hotels in Croatia. Through its rigorous research, nuanced analysis, and practical insights, the thesis aims to inspire entrepreneurial innovation, drive positive transformation, and foster a supportive ecosystem that nurtures the growth and prosperity of small hotels in the captivating tourism landscape of Croatia.

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