

Toni Popović

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia

e-mail: tpopovic1@ffst.hr

The Potential of Traditional Holiday Homes in Promoting Cultural Authenticity and Sustainable Development

Traditional holiday homes represent a recognizable form of rural tourism in Croatia. Such an offer is based on renovated or newly built structures that incorporate elements of vernacular architecture dating from the 18th to the mid-20th century. Within this tourism segment, tradition is not approached as a fixed legacy, but as a flexible and evolving element of social life that actively shapes contemporary experiences and local development.

This study explores the presence of traditional elements in the offer of holiday homes across rural areas of Split-Dalmatia County. Conducted in 2023, the research combines a content analysis of 328 online accommodation listings with structured interviews involving 16 property owners. Findings show that traditional holiday homes are relatively evenly distributed across island, coastal, and inland areas, highlighting their potential for balanced regional development. However, the use of traditional features is often pragmatic rather than systematic. While the elements used are generally traditional, they tend to be those that are easier to source, build, or maintain – often at the expense of complete historical authenticity.

Design choices are largely based on collective memory, which has become fragmented over time, particularly under the influence of socialist modernisation that historically opposed traditional rural lifestyles. The research also reveals limited engagement of local actors with professional literature on vernacular heritage and rural tourism, as well as a weak integration of rural practices, such as agriculture, craftsmanship, hunting, fishing, and local festivities, into the tourist offer. This disconnect undermines cultural authenticity, which remains a crucial foundation for rural tourism and a vital asset in the face of growing destination competition. Ironically, high occupancy rates and excellent guest reviews may obscure this loss of identity, delaying its recognition.

Keywords: tradition, holiday homes, authenticity, development, Split-Dalmatia County