

# The Challenges of Quality Management of A Regional Competence Centre in Agritourism

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KONFERENCIJA  
ZA RAZVOJ  
RURALNOG  
TURIZMA



#RRT2023



# Zbornik radova

4. međunarodna znanstveno-stručna konferencija  
za razvoj ruralnog turizma RRT 2023 pod nazivom

*Holistički pristup razvoju studijskih programa  
menadžmenta i turizma*





Grad Sveta Nedelja



Grad Jastrebarsko



Grad Samobor



TURISTIČKA ZAJEDNICA  
BJELOVARSKO-BILOGORSKE ŽUPANIJE



Grad Sisak



Grad Popovača



Općina Sveti Juraj na Bregu



Općina Križ





**#RRT2023**

## **ZBORNİK RADOVA**

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KONFERENCIJA ZA RAZVOJ RURALNOG TURIZMA  
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## **Predgovor**

Zbornik radova rezultat je objedinjavanja odabranih sažetaka radova pripremljenih za četvrtu međunarodnu znanstveno-stručnu konferenciju za razvoj ruralnog turizma „Holistički pristup razvoju studijskih programa menadžmenta i turizma“ održanu 23. i 24. studenog 2023. godine na Ekonomskom fakultetu u Zagrebu. Cilj konferencije bio je potaknuti konstruktivnu raspravu i doći do što jasnije slike sadašnjeg stanja te ponuditi rješenja za nastavak razvoja ruralnog turizma i ruralnih područja Hrvatske i susjednih zemalja, s naglaskom na nužnu potrebu što kvalitetnijeg uključivanja holističkog koncepta u razvoj studijskih programa.

S ciljem ostvarivanja dugoročnog i održivog razvoja ruralnih područja kvalitetna i primjenjiva edukacija svih dionika u tom procesu mora imati ključnu ulogu. Zbornik radova RRT 2023 konferencije predstavlja odraz znanja, stručnosti, truda i volje sudionika konferencije i njihovog doprinosa ovoj važnoj temi ruralnog razvoja, osobito u okviru Hrvatske i zemalja regije. S obzirom na važnost ruralnog turizma u cjelokupnoj turističkoj ponudi, nužno je zauzeti sveobuhvatan, holistički pristup za poticanje njegovog rasta i održivog razvoja s ciljem razvoja zajednice, iskorištavanja potencijala regija, istovremeno njegujući njihov jedinstveni karakter. Iz svega navedenog nameće se potreba što aktivnijeg uključivanja akademske zajednice i visokoobrazovnih institucija u procese razvoja ruralnog turizma kroz razvoj studijskih programa obrazovanja temeljenih na stvarnom iskustvu u realnom sektoru.

Zbornik radova predstavlja odraz znanja, stručnosti, truda i volje sudionika konferencije i njihovog doprinosa ovoj važnoj temi ruralnog razvoja, osobito u okviru Hrvatske i zemalja regije. Održivi i odgovorni ruralni turizam potiče razvoj ruralnih područja i postepeno postaje pokretač razvoja gospodarstva, osobito u vrijeme ubrzanog rasta primjene suvremenih tehnologija. S ciljem ostvarivanja dugoročnog i održivog razvoja ruralnih područja kvalitetna i cjelovita edukacija putem studijskih programa visokoobrazovnih institucija u tom procesu mora imati ključnu ulogu.

Zahvaljujemo svima koji su doprinijeli ovoj konferenciji te izdavanju ovog Zbornika. Svi radovi s konferencije prošli su kroz dvostruku anonimnu međunarodnu recenziju. Nadamo se da će rezultati rada konferencije potaknuti sudionike na buduću suradnju i doprinos te da ćemo zajedničkim naporima, znanjem, znanstvenom i stručnom izvrsnošću i ostalim resursima doprinijeti održivom i odgovornom razvoju ruralnih područja.

*doc. dr. sc. Marko Jurakić*  
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## **Preface**

The Conference Proceedings are the result of collecting selected abstracts of papers prepared for the fourth international scientific-professional conference for rural tourism development "*Holistic approach to the development of management and tourism study programs*" held on November 23 and 24, 2023 at the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb. The goal of the conference was to encourage constructive discussion and to get a clearer picture of the current situation and to offer solutions for the continued development of rural tourism and rural areas in Croatia and neighboring countries, with an emphasis on the necessary need to include the holistic concept in the development of study programs as much as possible.

With the goal of achieving long-term and sustainable development of rural areas, quality and applicable education of all stakeholders in this process must play a key role. The proceedings of the RRT 2023 conference are a reflection of the knowledge, expertise, effort and will of the conference participants and their contribution to this important topic of rural development, especially within Croatia and the countries of the region. Given the importance of rural tourism in the entire tourist offer, it is necessary to take a comprehensive, holistic approach to encourage its growth and sustainable development with the aim of community development, exploiting the potential of regions, while nurturing their unique character. From all of the above, there is a need for more active involvement of the academic community and higher education institutions in the development of rural tourism through the development of educational study programs based on real experience in the real sector.

The Conference Proceedings are reflection of the knowledge, expertise, effort and will of the conference participants and their contribution to this important topic of rural development, especially within Croatia and the countries of the region. Sustainable and responsible rural tourism encourages the development of rural areas and gradually becomes the driver of economic development, especially in times of accelerated growth in the application of modern technologies. With the goal of achieving long-term and sustainable development of rural areas, quality and comprehensive education through study programs of higher education institutions must play a key role in that process.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this conference and the publication of this Proceedings.

All papers from the conference went through a double anonymous international review. We hope that the results of the conference will encourage the participants for future cooperation and contribution, and that with joint efforts, knowledge, scientific and professional excellence and other resources, we will contribute to the sustainable and responsible development of rural areas.

*Assist. prof. Marko Jurakić, Ph.D.*

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*Izvorni znanstveni rad*

## **19. THE CHALLENGES OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF A REGIONAL COMPETENCE CENTRE IN AGRITOURISM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Pannonian Regional Competence Centre, known as Panonika, is designed to serve as a center of excellence for vocational education and training in the agricultural and tourism sectors. In addition to its primary function of providing vocational education, which includes work-based learning, training, and other activities, Panonika also engages in initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of vocational education and adapting it to the evolving needs of the economy and the labor market. One of its key undertakings involves offering training programs for individuals who will be involved in the management and decision-making processes within the Centre. To determine the knowledge requirements essential for effective business management, a research study was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This approach was chosen due to the depth of insight provided by the qualitative methodology and the necessity to generalize the results as required for this project. The research included case studies to address specific scenarios and Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) to gather survey data. This paper presents only the most significant findings from this research.

**Keywords:** management; regional development; regional competence center; potentials; education; agritourism

**JEL:** Q22, Q13, M210

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The School of Agriculture and Food is taking a pioneering step in the evolution of vocational education within the Republic of Croatia. With the initiation of the Pannonian Regional Competence Centre, we are laying the foundation for cutting-edge vocational education in the agricultural sector. This transformative initiative, generously funded by the European Union, is not

only focused on providing high-quality vocational training but also ensures this education is grounded in real-world application, aligning closely with the needs of our modern economy. An integral component of this project is the development of leaders within the Centre, ensuring they are equipped with the right tools and knowledge for effective decision-making. Our in-depth research, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, delves into the essentials of proficient management in this context. In this paper, we will be sharing the most significant findings from our research, offering insights into the future of vocational training in agriculture and tourism.

## **2. REGIONAL COMPETENCE CENTRE AS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

Human capital has long been recognized as the linchpin for ensuring organizational efficiency and profitability (Voronin et al., 2007). However, a pervasive issue in many enterprises is that human capital often assumes a secondary role, hindering the realization of an organization's full potential. Thus, the foundation for effective management and production activities within an organization lies in a robust personnel policy that aligns with contemporary technical requirements.

This shift in focus towards human capital extends to the realm of higher education. Competences, as underscored by Sáez-López et al. (2021), have assumed growing importance as an integral curricular element. They play a pivotal role in facilitating the transfer of knowledge across a broad spectrum of academic and professional contexts. This adjustment is in sync with the transformative impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the disruptive onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of ICT and the pandemic has necessitated a fundamental change in our way of life and education. Traditional tutorials have given way to online education, compelling both students and teachers to enhance their digital competencies (Zhao et al., 2021). While information acquisition remains consistent whether in a physical classroom or online, students often express a preference for traditional settings for practical and laboratory classes. In these settings, guided by a teacher and working within a group, students feel they can master their skills more effectively (Ilhomovna, 2021).

Learning, as articulated by Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), is the result of intricate interactions among the learner, their environment, and their behaviours. This interaction forms a triad in which the factors need not necessarily coincide in time. Within this framework, personal factors, especially self-efficacy, play a pivotal role. In the context of the agricultural sector, it is imperative to establish an effective and contemporary system of education and training (Ilyashenko, 2021). This is essential to prepare specialists for work in this sector and to address various challenges stemming from the unique nature of agriculture and state economic policies.

One of the critical challenges affecting organizations within the agro-industrial complex is the severe shortage of innovative staff possessing universal competences, including decision-making, final outcome management, and teamwork abilities (Shumakova et al., 2020). The enhancement of the educational system is necessary to equip the digital economy with these competences, requiring state support for information and consulting services throughout ongoing processes and the transition to a digital economy.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recently made inroads into the agricultural sector, aiming to address challenges like soil management, diseases, data requirements, and productivity, as discussed by Kumar and Kumarswamy (2021). Yet, while Precision Agriculture (PA) technologies hold promise, it is essential to understand and prepare for the challenges they bring. To translate these challenges into economic prosperity, entrepreneurship and well-designed policies are needed.

Educators must innovate in the agricultural education curriculum to equip the workforce for PA opportunities. As PA information technologies expand, they demand an integration of precision technologies, information systems, and decision-making processes in agricultural production management (Wang and Wood, 2021). This necessitates the adaptation of agriculture education to meet emerging demands. Furthermore, extension and outreach services are essential to increase technology awareness among small and medium-sized farms.

The development and commercialization of technology are crucial, but engaging small and medium-sized farms is equally vital for technology diffusion and improvement. To facilitate these changes, competence centers have emerged as instruments to construct cluster organization forms for various branches of the region's economy (Bison, 2007). These centers facilitate the integration of knowledge and resources to address the evolving demands of education and agriculture in the modern era.

### **3. BENCHMARKING OF SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL COMPETENCE CENTRE- EU AND ASIA EXAMPLES**

Portugal, with its rich cultural history, diverse landscapes, and enviable climate, has long been a haven for tourists. Yet, alongside its vibrant tourism industry, agriculture remains a cornerstone of the nation's economy, particularly in the Alentejo region. Situated in this heartland is the Évora Regional Competence Centre (ERCC), a pioneering initiative that seeks to merge the realms of tourism and agriculture. Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1986, represents a microcosm of Portuguese history, art, and architecture. The surrounding Alentejo region, often termed the "breadbasket of Portugal," has historically been a major contributor to the country's agricultural output (Santos, 2012). Recognizing the region's dual potential, the Portuguese government, in collaboration with the European Union, established Evora in 2015. Its primary mandate was to foster innovative strategies that intertwined tourism and agriculture, ensuring the sustainable growth of both sectors.

Key Initiatives of Evora Centre are:

- **Agro-Tourism Workshops:** The Evora introduced immersive workshops for tourists, providing hands-on experiences such as wine-making, olive harvesting, and traditional cheese production.
- **Local Produce Showcases:** Capitalizing on the farm-to-table trend, several pop-up markets and annual fairs were organized, spotlighting Alentejo's agricultural produce and introducing tourists to indigenous crops and foods.
- **Educational Programs:** The Evora established partnerships with universities, offering courses in sustainable agriculture, rural development, and tourism management, ensuring the next generation was equipped with the skills needed to carry forward the centre's vision (Silva, Fernandes, 2017).
- **Rural Tourism Development:** By offering incentives to local farmers, the Evora facilitated the conversion of rustic farmhouses into boutique lodgings, ensuring that tourists could experience rural life authentically.
- Since its inception, the Evora has made significant strides:

- **Economic Boost:** The Alentejo region has seen a surge in tourism, with a notable increase in the number of tourists opting for agritourism packages
- **Preservation of Culture:** The initiatives have ensured that traditional agricultural practices and local gastronomy have been preserved and showcased to a global audience. (Portuguese National Statistics Institute, 2019).
- **Sustainable Growth:** With an emphasis on eco-friendly practices and sustainable development, the ERCC's efforts have also led to a more environmentally conscious approach to both tourism and agriculture in the region.

As the Evora continues to evolve, there are plans to expand its model to other regions in Portugal and potentially serve as a blueprint for similar initiatives across the European Union. The Évora Regional Competence Centre stands as a testament to the possibilities that arise when tourism and agriculture are harmoniously integrated. It not only bolsters economic prospects but also ensures the preservation and celebration of a region's cultural and agricultural heritage.

According to other author research, authors found example of succesful regional competence centre in India, which ideas also can be used for upgrading Panonika centre. Maharashtra is a land of contrasts — from its bustling cities like Mumbai and Pune to its serene villages like Ratnagiri and Satara. Known for its historical Maratha legacy, it also boasts of a fertile land producing diverse crops. (Patil, 2019). Initiated in 2020, Maharashtra competence centre was established to harness the potential of Maharashtra's agricultural sector and its untapped tourism capabilities. The Centre has a clear mission:

- Promotion of sustainable agritourism.
- Dissemination of advanced agricultural knowledge.
- Capacity building in rural areas for tourism and agriculture.
- Conservation of traditional farming practices and local heritage.

The RCC collaborates with multiple stakeholders: local NGOs: for conservation initiatives and community engagement; agricultural universities: for research and knowledge dissemination and tourism boards: for marketing and promotion of agritourism spots. (Joshi, 2021). The regional competence centre in Maharashtra serves as a pioneering model for integrating tourism and agriculture. By emphasizing sustainability, community involvement, and innovation, the centre is reshaping the future of agritourism in India, setting a benchmark for other regions, also for Croatia.

#### **4. REGIONAL COMPETENCE CENTER PANONIKA- THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

Agriculture and tourism have been declared a priority development sector in the Republic of Croatia because it plays a key role in food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation, as agriculture remains the dominant provider of jobs in rural parts of the country. Developing the competencies of agricultural workers is therefore necessary in raising agricultural productivity for the adoption of innovative agricultural processes and technologies, especially with the aim of improving and creating added value of products or services. Adequate infrastructure, modern educational programs, and educated educators are necessary for the acquisition of competencies needed by the labor market. According to the HKO Portal five Slavonian counties have an unemployment rate of 21.11%, while in the food and veterinary agriculture sector it is 28.72%.

This shows that the increased number of unemployed in all occupations in the sector is a result of the mismatch between the knowledge and competencies of students who complete their education and the needs of the economy in the region. The results of the analysis of employers' attitudes also contribute to this (HKO, 2022), which show that only one third of employers are satisfied with the level of competences of young people and that the main problem is the lack of practical knowledge needed to do a job. Therefore, the investment in the establishment of the RCC is justified, because its work will contribute to increasing the competitiveness of agriculture by providing knowledge from the agricultural sector based on modern technologies and modern methods of cultivation, processing and marketing, increasing the quality of vocational education, adult education and lifelong learning. and providing accommodation for users.

Regional competence centre Panonika (abbreviation: RCC Panonika) it will become a place to encourage innovation activities and will encourage the exchange of knowledge between the economic and scientific environment. In this way, it will raise the attractiveness of the agricultural profession by encouraging and motivating young people. In order to achieve its purpose and development goals, key partners are involved in the establishment of the Pannonian Red Cross through both tenders to ensure that its activities are in line with the needs of the local and regional social and economic environment. The purpose of the project of establishing the RCC Panonika, as well as its area of activity, ie mission and vision, are fully in line with:

- The Europe 2020 Strategy (Objectives: Increase the employment rate of the population aged 20-64; Reduce the proportion of early school leavers through the New Skills and Jobs Agenda (Eur Lex Europa, 2023),
- The Strategic Framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training (Objectives: realization of the idea of lifelong learning and mobility; increasing the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting justice, social cohesion and active citizenship; encouraging creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.
- The Program for the Development of the Vocational Education and Training System (2016-2020) (Measure 1.4 envisages the establishment of regional centers of competence in which programs of regular vocational education, vocational training and lifelong learning as well as other forms of formal and non-formal education will be implemented)
- The Strategy of Education, Science and Technology (7.1.13. staff and equip the centers in accordance with the development of technologies of the labor market needs).
- County Development Strategy of Požega-Slavonia County (Development Priority 2.1. Strengthening social activities; measure 2.1.1. Encouraging development capacities in the field of education and sports envisages the establishment of a competence center in the field of vocational schools). (Panora, 2023)

The target groups within the two calls that will establish the RCC are educators in vocational education institutions (204), students (700), employees in small and medium enterprises (120), the unemployed (570) and people with disabilities / students with difficulty (50). Given that one of the key activities of the RCC is the implementation of lifelong learning and adult education programs, the inclusion of this group.

In addition to the promotional activities of the RCC, users will be additionally encouraged through the web portal of lifelong learning, which will offer online educational content, examples of good practice, news, as well as career guidance activities to be carried out in cooperation with the CES

regional office. All activities of establishing the RCC, through both tenders, positively contribute to horizontal policies in all three areas. Whether through infrastructural adaptation, improvement of educational programs or thematic education of target groups.

The project partners are Požega-Slavonia County (Partner 1), Stjepan Sulimanac Secondary School (Partner 2), Faculty of tourism and Rural Development Požega (Partner 6), Kutjevo p.l.c. (Partner 5), Karlovac School of Science (Partner 3), Požega School of Economics (Partner 4) and the Association of Student Homes of the Republic of Croatia (Partner 7).

Each in its area contributes to the overall content and functional capacity of the RCC Panonika. Požega-Slavonia County has a key role in defining the organizational structure and sustainability of the functioning of the RCC, since its establishment is on the list of strategic projects of the county. With Stjepan Sulimanac Secondary School, the applicant has experience in implementing joint projects and cooperation in creating development plan RCC Pannonia. Their contribution to the establishment and work of the RCC, as well as the contribution of the Karlovac School of Science, the School of Economics Požega and the Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development Požega, is reflected in cooperation in defining the organizational structure of the RCC, modernization and implementation of educational programs. premises, hydroponic cultivation, digitalization and automation of agricultural production, acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies of students, etc. Kutjevo p.l.c. has an important role in connecting and harmonizing the knowledge and skills of students with the real needs of the labor market, through participation in the modernization of educational programs and mentoring in practical classes. Cooperation with the Association of Student Homes of the Republic of Croatia provides the necessary accommodation capacities during the implementation of the activities of the RCC, as well as personnel and organizational capacities related to the work of student television. All project partners have experience in writing and implementing projects funded by EU or national funds.

The project team consists of the following persons:

1. Project manager (employee of the Regional Development Coordinator of PSC with many years of experience in writing and implementing projects);
2. Project coordinator with the applicant RCC Požega department (new employment);
3. Project coordinator with the RCC partner Pitomača department (new employment);
4. Head of project finance (new employment of the RCC department of Požega);
5. Project administrator (employee of the Regional Development Coordinator of PSC with many years of experience in writing and implementing projects);
6. Promotion manager (employee of the PSC Regional Development Coordinator, person responsible for promotion and visibility activities with experience in conducting promotion activities. In addition to the project team, the implementation of individual project activities envisages the engagement of experts as external collaborators as well as the engagement of the applicant's employees and individual partners, each in their own field of activity.

Požega-Slavonia County, as the founder of the Požega School of Agriculture and Food, recognized the establishment of the RCC in agriculture as one of the most important strategic projects, and has so far been involved in preparing and financing ideas and technical documentation for building, reconstructing and equipping the future RCC. Virovitica-Podravina County, as the founder of the partner school, was also involved in planning the activities of the future RCC as well as in the implementation of significant infrastructure and other projects important for the construction and



equipping of the school he founded. The Karlovac School of Natural Sciences has the same support, since the activities of the RCC have a positive regional impact in the area in which it operates.

So, the RCC Panonika has the support of the founders of the schools that make up its main structure, especially because the work of the RCC is of significant strategic importance for the development of the wider regional area. This contributes to the functional sustainability of the RCC and the focus on future growth and development.

Regarding the financial sustainability of infrastructure, the partner vocational schools finance the maintenance of infrastructure and equipment through funds for material costs, and from their own revenues. The founders of the schools, if necessary, co-finance the costs, in accordance with the current method of financing schools. When it comes to the financial sustainability of human resources, it will be made possible by the participation in the work of the RCC of employees employed in vocational schools that make up the RCC. Also, additional engagement of employees of schools and institutions, and for adult education, will be honored from their own resources based on the collection of registration fees for lectures, workshops and conferences. In any case, new educational programs in adult education and the provision of other innovative services will generate additional income that will contribute to the self-sustainability of RCC Panonika.

The partner schools generate significant own revenues, which will be used to finance the sustainability of the RCC's work. The Agricultural and Food School of Požega generates its own income from the school's arable land, which is 119 hectares of oilseeds and cereals, which are mostly sold to local buyers. Then through a bakery practicum, a greenhouse for growing flowers, an apple orchard, a hazelnut plantation, through a vineyard or the sale of grapes. The products are sold on the local market, flowers on the stand of the city market, as well as fruits and hazelnuts. The grapes are sold to local grape buyers. Fruits and vegetables from the school garden are partly sold at the market, some are processed in-house and used in the bakery practicum for the personal needs of the school. Stjepan Sulimanac Secondary School secures its income by placing its own products in the school restaurant, on a field-by-table basis, and in the school kitchen. The local market sells vegetables and herbs, mostly dried chamomile. At the same time, the school sells dried chamomile to large buyers or local tea processors, such as the Spider group, which is the largest producer of tea in Croatia, and the school has a guaranteed purchase agreement and a minimum price. One part is exported to the EU market, most often sunflower, medicinal herbs, buckwheat and soybeans.

In view of the above, the sustainability of the RCC as well as its mission and vision will be achieved by continuous investment in equipment and training of teachers and mentors with employers, and will be financed partly from EU funds and partly from its own resources.

## **5. PROBLEM DEFINITION, RESEARCH AND MAJOR FINDINGS**

According to author primary research, Regional Center of Competence Panonika is a place of excellence in vocational education and training in the subsector of agriculture. In addition to its core activity of vocational education, which also includes the implementation of work-based learning, it also carries out training and further education, as well as other activities that contribute to improving the quality of vocational education and training and its adaptation to the needs of the economy and the labor market.

Areas of action include:

- Implementation of vocational programs, adult education and lifelong learning, with the provision of accommodation for users.
- Networking of stakeholders in the advancement of education and promotion of agricultural professions.
- Continuous development of the RCC: programmatic, infrastructural, and staff-wise.

The fundamental characteristics of the RCC include innovative teaching methods and innovative learning models, work-based learning for more effective inclusion of participants in the labor market, addressing the needs of students with difficulties and other vulnerable groups, ensuring vertical mobility for continuing education, excellence of teachers, high-quality infrastructure, constructive and creative cooperation with social partners, the public sector, business entities, higher education institutions, and other interested institutions of the wider community.

The mission of the RCC Panonika is to contribute to increasing the competitiveness of agriculture by providing knowledge for agriculture based on modern technologies and contemporary farming, processing, and product placement methods, improving the quality of vocational education, adult education and lifelong learning, and ensuring accommodation for users.

The vision of the RCC Panonika is a dynamic modern educational organization, a center for acquiring new knowledge using new technologies and new innovative learning approaches, a generator for the development of agriculture and food through a partnership of all stakeholders."

In order to investigate the needs of teachers related to knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and business management, a CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) was conducted by authors of paper on a sample of 72 employees from all partner schools involved in the work of the RCC Panonika. This method of data collection enabled the representativeness of the sample, i.e. a wider geographical coverage than that which could be obtained with similar resources by using field (face-to-face) surveys, i.e. data collection methods. The sample for the CAWI survey was a simple probabilistic sample, and was selected by sending a survey questionnaire to all partner schools which then forwarded the survey questionnaires to their staff. Given that the survey questionnaire was online and did not require special preparation from the respondents, the participation rate was average and amounted to 34%.

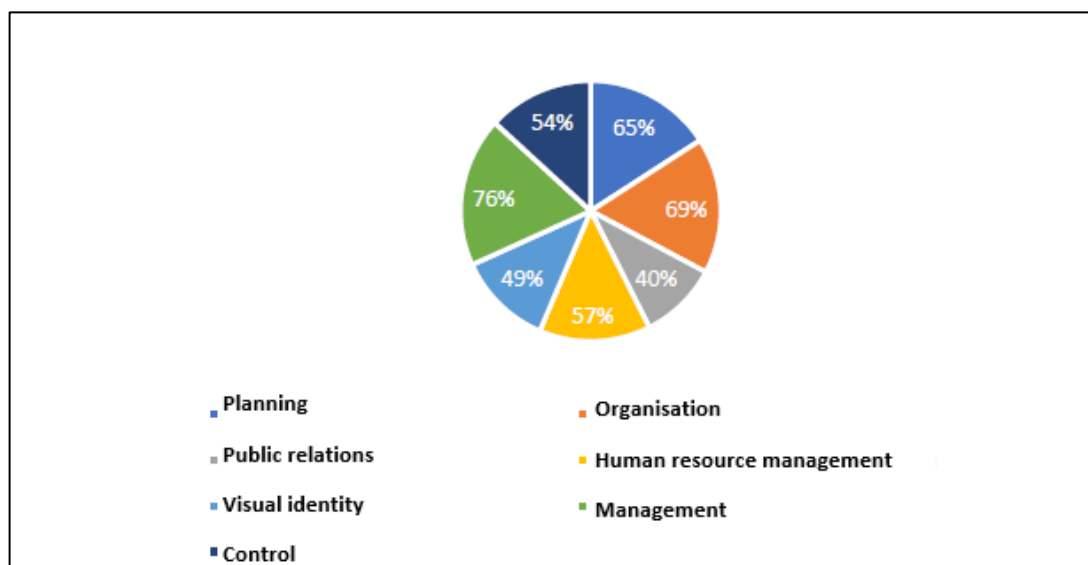
The questionnaire contained 16 research questions of various types (open questions, tables with Likert-type questions, multiple choice questions), and were constructed on the basis of the 2015 Survey on Improved Business Processes and Business Management in Public Administration made by the Croatian Institute for Employment, the Ministry of Labor and Pension System and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia.

Employees who participated in the survey are employees of partner schools in the implementation of the project of establishing a Regional Center of Competence Panonika: Agricultural and Food School Požega, Stjepan Sulimanac Secondary School, Karlovac School of Science, Požega School of Economics, Požega Student Home and Virovitica Student Home.

The answers to the questions asked show the current level of knowledge of respondents related to business management, which serves as a basis for selecting topics for compiling modules of training to be held to increase the level of knowledge related to business management.

In this question Fig.1. Contribution to efficient management an assessment of the importance of individual components that would contribute to the effective management of the organization was requested.

Figure 1. Contribution to efficient management in agriculture and tourism



Source: Author research

Grades 1 - 5 for individual components are offered. "Organizing"; "Public relations"; "Human resources management"; "Visual identity". The largest number of respondents answered that they believe that Leadership is the most important component of effective management 76%, while Public Relations is the least important for effective business management 40% in agriculture and tourism.

Respondents give answers over 74% acceptable to all questions regarding hypothesis that RCC will play vital role in Slavonian and Croatian tourism and agriculture. Regional competence centers in Croatia, particularly in the fields of agriculture and tourism, will play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable development, knowledge transfer, and innovation. These centers will serve as hubs for knowledge dissemination, training, and applied research, aimed at boosting local competencies and enhancing the competitiveness of Croatian agriculture and tourism on the global stage. The agriculture sector benefits from these centers through the introduction of modern farming techniques, sustainable practices, and advanced technologies. This has led to increased productivity, reduction of wastage, and improved product quality, aligning with EU standards and practices.

The tourism sector, one of Croatia's most significant economic pillars, witnesses an enhancement in service quality, innovation in tourism offerings, and improved stakeholder collaboration due to these centers. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, regional competence centers ensure that Croatia's tourism offerings remain dynamic, diverse, and aligned with global trends. Moreover, according to author primary research, these centers will foster collaboration between academia, industry, and government, ensuring a holistic approach to address challenges and seize opportunities. Through ongoing research and development initiatives, they keep abreast of global best practices and ensure that both sectors remain resilient and future-ready.

It is essential for policymakers and stakeholders to continue investing in and supporting these centers, as they remain instrumental in ensuring the sustainable growth and global competitiveness of Croatia's agriculture and tourism sectors.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Project RCC Panonika is applied and financed through Call for project proposals Establishment of regional centers of competence in vocational education in (sub) sectors: mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and computing, agriculture and health to be financed as limited call under Priority Axis 3 - "Education and Lifelong Learning" 10.iv Improving the importance of education systems and labor market training systems, facilitating the transition from school to work, strengthening the vocational education system and training and their quality, including the skills oversight mechanism, by adapting teaching curricula and the introduction and development of a work-based learning system, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship programs, Specific Objective 10.iv.1 Modernization of vocational education supply and raising its qualities in order to increase the employability of students as well as opportunities for further education.

The project of establishing the RCC Panonika creates the necessary program and staffing conditions that will improve learning opportunities based on work and practical classes, using good examples from other countries. Program conditions are created by modernizing existing educational programs and creating a new standard of occupation, qualification and curriculum. Staffing conditions are ensured by organizing specialized education and study trips intended teaching staff. The organization of the RCC, its activities and development goals are based on innovative and multidisciplinary approach. The main issue is that preparing and conducting project is easiest part of job, the biggest challenges are coming: getting a cope with lower number of students and trying to compete with other schools in attractivity, quality, perspective and similar, what will be future task of authors working in higher education and science.

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