

The Use of Intranet in Croatian National Parks

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Abstract - Tourism has a significant position among state economies' business activities due to several benefits from its development and success. Behind all this are underlying technologies, organizational solutions, and professional skills to handle the information flows in the tourism sector. It is necessary to adapt the old-fashioned data sharing within public or private organizations to a new level in the globally competitive tourism sector. As a distinctive form of an information system, the intranet has many benefits for the tourism sector, enabling a more efficient way of distributing data and performing everyday tasks. We analyze how the Intranets are being implemented and used within Croatian National Parks in the present work. We surveyed parks' Intranet users, and the results show that the Intranets are indeed being used for simple tasks and on a daily basis; however, there is a large room for improvements to harvest the full potential of Intranets in Croatian National Parks. We conclude the paper with recommendations for IT professionals, park management, and policymakers.

Keywords - intranet; tourism; national park; survey

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that revolves around the movement of people to countries or places outside their daily environment for personal or business / professional purposes. The moving people are generally called visitors (tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents). Tourism deals with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure [1]. Nowadays, it is challenging to find a business that is not closely related to using a computer and an information system (IS). Computer use became more widespread in the last decade of the 20th century when computers became smaller, cheaper, and more modern with greater memory capacity, faster processors, and innovative information solutions. Instead of decisions being made by a person who needs time to think, today, computers and information systems do so, even in complex situations. They connect the data entered into the system, require minimal effort, and gain human trust in tourism [2, p. 6]. Lately, tourist "offline" travel agencies and other tourist organizations (public and private) have switched to the "online" way of internal business and communication. Hence, "tourism" herein refers to organizations and companies offering services to tourists.

Companies in the tourism sector need data exchange systems within the company, making extensive use of the Internet and all other e-commerce systems in tourism represented by the Intranet, Extranet, and other data exchange systems. Without these systems, it would not be possible to link departments such as marketing, accounting, operations, information management, and human capital management. Intranet in companies has the role of

providing access to the private network to individuals who work or are otherwise connected to a travel agency, hotel, and such a system allows users to connect to the business network directly at the workplace or remotely [3]. Employees analyze and collect data (feedback) information to more easily do business, communicate, and create a work environment and new products.

The term "Intranet" is often being used in several ways, making the concept very confusing. Firstly, it can relate to an internal network, i.e., to a part of physical systems accessible only from within an organization by authorized users, as opposed to the term "internet," which again stands for many uses, e.g., a network of networks, a protocol being used on such networks, and websites.

Secondly, it relates to an information system. It is a closed-type information system that customers cannot use, only the employees who have permission to access it. It uses Internet protocols, network connectivity, and public telecommunications systems so that individuals in the company can share information such as images, videos, audio files, text records, and more. Unlike the Internet, which is public and allows all individuals to access certain websites, an Intranet is a specially developed information system within a particular company or organization. The vital difference between an internet and the intranet (in physical meaning) is the network's ownership (and management); as in the sense of service, the intranet is again owned and managed internally, and additionally, it is internally developed, maintained, and uses not only website functionality, but blends other resources as well (e.g., file sharing, collaboration, etc.).

Hence, in this paper, an Intranet referred to an information system that uses an internal, private network of an organization and is built using Internet technologies such as HTML and TCP / IP protocols. It is exclusively intended to be used by the organization and its employees and is protected from unauthorized access. It is protected by security systems such as firewalls and authentication mechanisms. Thus, the intranet is not about the infrastructure (network); it is about the services built upon the infrastructure.

There are many misconceptions about an Intranet as an information system/software in a business organization, how it is maintained, who uses it, and how to use it. Due to these issues, we first clarified the concept of the intranet. In the following section, we review the related works and connect the intranet with the tourism business environment in general and of National Parks in Croatia in particular.

This paper aims to analyze how the Intranets are being implemented and used within Croatian National Parks.

II. RELATED WORK

There is not much research in the field of intranet in tourism. The use of information technology (IT) connected with tourism, on the other hand, has received a lot of interest; research has been conducted since the 1980s [4].

As the use of technology in tourism has increased over the last 20 years, scientists have primarily expressed in their articles a desire to determine the order of research to create new and more innovative products based on old ones. While some research is based primarily on the specific use of mobile technology and social media in the tourism industry, other research focused on a more general overview of the progress of “eTourism” in the current time frame. The use of technology has already been considered one of the essential facilities in tourism. They believed that the adoption of IS as a reference discipline provides a rigorous and comprehensive understanding of advances in the use of tourism technology [5].

The “Imminus” group article mentions the emergence of the intranet in the UK as early as the late 70s and early 80s, and the intranet is one of the main reasons for the growth of tourism businesses. Due to significant investments in information technology, tourism organizations, mostly SMEs, have mainly rejected modernization. The authors presented a new form of intranet for travel and tourism called “Imminus,” which was founded by the “Thomas Cook Group” organization as “Travinet Limited” in the early 1980s based on its internal information technology department. Later, the name changed, leaving only Imminus, which at the end of 1997 controlled about 50% of the UK holiday booking market. As reservations were made by travel agency staff at the time, only they had access as agents to all information and data within the intranet. The advantages of Intranet “Imminus” were as follows [6]:

- Exclusivity, specialization, and optimization - even then, it turned out that it reduces the search time and time required for booking and that the use of Imminus saves valuable time.
- High level of service - proved to be usable 24 hours a day to provide support, management, and maintenance 365 days a year from the Imminus Network Management Center, which will give agencies high-quality security, disaster recovery, and backup.
- Coexistence of established and new technologies - before Imminus, there was a well-known platform, “Viewdata,” supported by the new Imminus, as well as new technologies.

The strategic importance of the Internet in tourism has undoubtedly been demonstrated in the past. The tourism industry, primarily large enterprises, has always sought to rapidly introduce technological innovations to meet customer preferences, market needs, or a tourism product’s design. The adoption of e-commerce, which can be considered a type of technological innovation, presents both opportunities and challenges in inter-organizational relations and business strategy [7].

In an early study on the use of the intranet by travel agents, scientists argued that travel agencies need to reshape their business processes to remain competitive. They already realized the importance of interaction in all directions of tourism, and their studies discovered that IT and Intranet are very important in this field. Namely, they argued that an organization that realizes the IT sector’s potential on time and invests in it would generate significant revenues and reduce costs [5].

Wang [6] indicated that the Intranet service within the hospitality sector has significantly expanded in recent decades due to a diverse range of advantages. The opinion is that it is positively changing the direction and strategy of the company. Leading authors support the view that the intranet can facilitate effective collaboration and communication among employees, which will positively impact the relationship and, ultimately, the essential thing: guest satisfaction. Similarly, from a hotel perspective, intranet leads and encourages innovative ways of collaborating and significantly motivates and inspires employees to simplify departmental communication and streamline business development [6].

Travel companies use the intranet for a variety of reasons. Often, the general need is to facilitate communication and document sharing in the company, simplify day-to-day activities, and organize people and data. The intranet can help create two-way communication that enables managers and employees at all company levels to combine reports from finance, business, marketing, and other departments. An organization can combine results and processes and then visually incorporate and display results to the user in real-time [8].

One of the motivating factors for introducing Intranets in tourism organizations is sometimes their decentralized structure. In tourism, the intranet is also used for the following reasons [9]:

- simplification and easier division of activities;
- improving internal communication in a horizontal or vertical direction with other departments or employees;
- reporting on innovations in the organization and new tourist trends;
- increasing the engagement of employees or departments by providing prepared data and information;
- facilitating cooperation within the organization and space for the free exchange of information;
- the ability to easily access relevant information, including company policies, benefits, and updates;
- centralized and organized data in one database to facilitate the supply of necessary materials.

According to Mohammed [9], the intranet is an unknown concept to most tourism employees.

The development of the intranet has significantly advanced in the last thirty years. Today, the intranet connects different parts of the business (also in tourism) and enables employees to communicate quickly and

efficiently and exchange information [10]. The average intranet consists of several standard features such as a document management system, a staff directory, blogs, a business calendar, and newsletters. The intranet often becomes essential to a company's internal operation [11, pp. 109–114].

Intranets are primarily applied in the following areas [12, p. 273]:

- exchange of information between employees;
- cooperation in management;
- preparation and delivery of business documentation;
- development activities;
- educational activities;
- chatting.

From the properties, structure, and possibilities of using the intranet in business systems, we can conclude that an intranet is a form of design and implementation of the business system's internal communication infrastructure, which best meets the needs of modern organized business.

Gaps in previous tourism technology studies were not thoroughly filled. The intranet was an unknown and under-researched term, and not all tourism organizations used information technology [5]. Unfortunately, fewer new studies are examining the use of the intranet in tourism nowadays. Corporations are increasingly building their Intranets away from the public eye for data security and confidentiality. Users and researchers are aware of the positive aspects of the intranet within a tourism organization, which saves time and money and positively impacts all other environmental factors such as sustainability, socialization, and the like [13]. Intranets are no longer just for big multinational companies. If a company does not develop a network strategy, it can plant the seeds of its destruction [14].

Recent studies by the hotel industry in the Canary Islands claim that today employees have the opportunity to discuss ideas and information on the intranet within a tourism organization and access the wide range of content they need for their day-to-day work [15]. Most reports on Intranet use are in the hotel industry [16]. Therefore, traditional tourism industries use the intranet, so there is great potential in "new" areas, such as, e.g., eco-tourism. Zheng, Xu, and Kong [17] suggest to an eco-tourism company to spread industry-related knowledge among employees through the intranet to be aware of the new industry dynamics and relevant, rapidly changing information at any time.

Intranet services allow the users of corporate networks to use it without any preparation or additional hardware or software. Connecting the Intranets between organizations enables fast and rational use of the participating organizations' resources used in joint operations [18]. Such Intranets connected to other intranets are called Extranets, but only if two different corporations are connected.

III. MOTIVATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The intranet and its importance and connection in tourism in the Republic of Croatia's territory have not been sufficiently researched, so we believe it is essential to explore its presence and activities within public tourism organizations. The question arises how Croatian National Parks use the intranet, especially in improving internal communication horizontally or vertically, reporting on innovations inside and outside the organization, and increasing employee or department engagement.

The National Park is the most well-known protection category out of nine categories regulated by the Nature Protection Act [19]. National parks are an attraction that has been developing and gaining in importance recently. Modern tourists are increasingly turning to nature and exploring national values, and we believe that this group includes national parks and all other protected areas. National parks are desirable tourist destinations that allow their visitors to escape into nature and get to know different plant and animal species. One-third of Croatia's territory is under the protection of Natura 2000. There are eight national parks (see Figure 1). They attract about 2.7 million visitors a year [20]. While the nature parks' visitors are primarily domestic tourists, the national parks are dominated by foreign tourists with a 96.6% share in the total number of visitors. The most visited national park in 2017 was Plitvice Lakes, which was visited by about 1.7 million tourists [21].

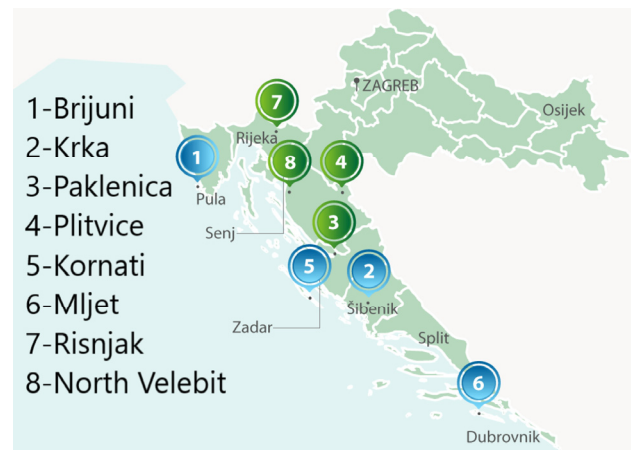


Figure 1: National parks of Croatia (source: camping.hr)

Figure 1 shows the location of national parks in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Most national parks are in the northern Adriatic, Lika, and the central and southern Adriatic. There is no national park in east and central Croatia. The Republic of Croatia's National Parks are Plitvice Lakes National Park, Paklenica, Risnjak, Mljet, Kornati, Brijuni, Krka, and Northern Velebit National Park [19].

National parks in Croatia do not have their official and unified website and reservation site, a single mobile application, a single annual report, and a corresponding single business plan. Thus, we decided to analyze their use of the intranet within the organization and finally prepare a proposal for innovative use of an Intranet connecting all national parks with their data within the company.

At present, it is not possible to obtain accurate public data and precise information on the web, such as the number of tourists who are increasingly interested in National Parks in Croatia; otherwise, some data is only available from newspapers and portals. We believe this is due to poor connectivity and lack of communication within Croatian National Parks. With the help of the present research, we want to uncover the current use of intranet in national parks in Croatia, which are the main problems in Intranet use, and then explain how to solve them.

The purpose of our article is to explain in more detail how the intranet is being used within the Croatian National Parks and if it serves as a source of innovative ideas. The research has the following broader goals:

- to determine which national parks in Croatia use the intranet and which do not;
- analyze how the intranet is being used within national parks in Croatia and what are employees' perceptions about it;
- suggest ideas to facilitate communication within the organization;
- propose ideas for better use of the intranet and networking within all eight national parks.

Within this paper, we will present the results for the first two. The paper is organized as follows: in the next section, we present the methods of our research, and in section IV, we present the results. Our contribution is concluded in Section V with final remarks.

IV. METHODS

To determine which national parks use the intranet and how it is being used and implemented, we administered an anonymous questionnaire. We were neither asking about the respondents' names, positions, ranks, location of the national park nor any other individually identifiable information except the general demographics.

Based on the literature review, we set the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: Employees in national parks in Croatia believe that the intranet is important for quality communication between employees.

H₀₂: Employees believe that the information on the intranet is outdated and not useful for everyday work.

H₀₃: When employees in their organization have an idea for new content on the intranet, they don't know exactly whom to turn to.

H₀₄: Employees do not have all the necessary information on the intranet.

H₀₅: Employees believe that using the intranet reduces paperwork.

In our questionnaire, there were several types of questions asked and various kinds of answers, the opportunity to express an opinion, and the choice of answers. The survey covered general questions (gender, age, and education) and questions related to the use of the intranet. The survey contained a total of 16 questions, and

the estimated time to fill the questionnaire was five minutes.

A. Data collection

We activated the survey on 19 August 2020 and completed it on 23 August 2020. We received 50 valid answers. The data collected is from a convenience sample and shall be interpreted as such.

B. Ethical and legal considerations

We neither collected nor stored personal data. We notified the management of Croatia's natural parks of our intent to collect the data from their employees. The participants gave their informed consent when fulfilling the questionnaire. All the data were subject to GDPR limitations which we strictly followed.

V. RESULTS

This section will present the results, i.e., the answers we received from 50 surveyed employees.

The national parks currently using the Intranet are Plitvice Lakes National Park, Mljet National Park, Brijuni National Park, Krka National Park; NP Paklenica claimed they are not using an intranet. Our questionnaire was not answered by NP Northern Velebit, NP Kornati, and NP Risnjak. Further examinations revealed that they do not have an Intranet.

Out of a total of 50 employees surveyed, 40 (80%) are women, 7 (14%) are men, and the remaining 3 (6%) do not want to answer this question. The average age of a respondent is 39.1 years, ranging from 20 to 61 years.

None of the respondents finished primary school only, and none had a doctor's degree. Twelve respondents (24%) completed secondary school, 30 (60%) completed higher education, and 8 (16%) completed a master's degree.

Thus, most of the surveyed employees are female, not older than 40, and have completed higher education. This finding indicates that the sample does not represent the general (Croatian) population. Our sample is biased towards females, better-educated ones, and younger than the population median.

Regarding the perception of the intranet's role for quality communication between employees (H₀₁), two related questions were asked. Firstly, 90 % of respondents agreed (20 % partially and 70 % completely) that the intranet is essential for quality communication. Similarly, 20 % and 68 % agreed / completely agreed that an Intranet is necessary for a successful business. H₀₁ is retained.

Next, we checked whether the info provided by the Intranets is current and valid (H₀₂). We asked if the information on the intranet is appropriate, useful, and understandable. Respondents had a yes/no choice, and they agreed in 74 %, 76 %, and 70 %, respectively. Additionally, we checked the frequency of Intranet usage. 62% of respondents use the intranet daily. A vast majority of employees use the information from the intranet at their workplace daily, and the information shared on the

platform is relevant, useful, and understandable. Hence H₀₂ needs to be rejected.

From the previous questions, it can be seen that the employees use the intranet and find it useful and consider it essential for their daily tasks. Next, we checked if they know to whom to turn if they have any interesting information to share on the intranet. Here, most respondents (54 %) claimed that they do not know which person is responsible. Here, H₀₃ needs to be rejected.

Next, the question of whether all the needed documents are available on the intranet remains unanswered. About a quarter of respondents agree that mostly the documents are available, nearly a half disagrees, and almost a third is undecided. H₀₄ is rejected.

Since obviously, the employees can find most of the documents on the intranet, we asked the respondents if the intranet reduces their paperwork. 60 % strongly agree, 8 % agree, 16 % strongly disagree, and 2 % somehow disagree, whereas 15 % remain undecided. We can conclude that the intranet indeed helps in reducing the paperwork; hence H₀₅ is retained.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The work presents a preliminary analysis of the usage of Intranet in Croatian National Parks. Namely, each park of the Croatian National Parks uses different ICTs and business policies. Despite being wholly-owned and controlled by the government, they have no interconnectedness; the same regulations apply and have relatively similar if not identical business processes. Their diversity in the use of the information systems and intranet is evident from the responses.

The interviews' answers show that the information shared via the intranet means a lot to employees. In most cases, the information and data are relevant, useful, and understandable; hence a common Intranet platform would be received warmly by the users.

If new strategies are developed at the national parks, it would be desirable to bring the intranet to the appropriate level. Since Croatian National Parks do not have a standard and integrated Intranet platform used by employees, we propose such a solution accessible to all employees in all Croatian National Parks. Besides, the idea can be extended to nature parks and other protected areas or even in the shape of an Extranet. The suggestion is to develop a single Intranet for all Croatian National Parks and other nature conservancy areas and divide it into four levels: to provide employees only with essential and relevant information.

The first level (see Figure 2) would enable sharing the vital information to all participants and everyone within the natural parks and other conservation areas domain. At this level, everyone can see the data, and everyone can participate in sharing. The second level would be made of only two (or more) organizations participating in the same project or cooperating or having a simple common link (e.g., river-based national parks). The third level would connect all the organizations engaged in the same activity (e.g., all eight national parks, all nature parks, etc.). In contrast, the fourth level would involve only employees from a single organization. Integration or coalition of (all)

protected areas into one Intranet system would bring business to a whole new level, and the basic actions would be improved and modernized. In this case, all the organizations would have a single, dedicated but unified professional IT team who takes care of the intranet. This would increase the use of the benefits of the intranet, reduce the use of all unnecessary actions (e.g., phone calls, paperwork). Employees would more easily communicate and build business relationships, strategies, plans and exchange the essential information. The information would be appropriately filtered, relevant, and valuable. They would know who to turn to in case of suggestions, criticisms, new content, changes, and the like.

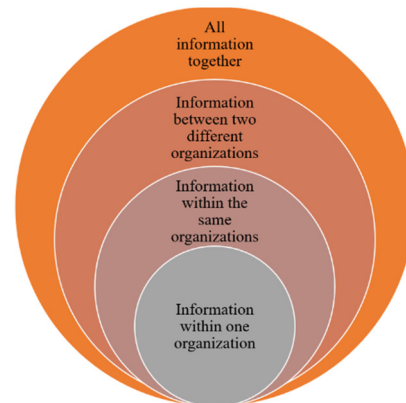


Figure 2: Division of information within the "Intranet" into four levels

Namely, Croatian National Parks have a lot of room for improvement in information systems such as intranet and information technology, which would further facilitate communication, exchange of certain information, and the performance of daily tasks. This means that they need a change in the culture within the organization, investing more in employee education and a single Intranet service. This also means that they need a change in staff performance. It is possible to create a common Intranet platform for all the parks with the same domain. Croatia is a tourist country and an EU member state. Croatian National Parks would have standardized rules, business policy, means of communication, and, ultimately, a stronger brand with an integrated system. This would result from the cooperation of all national parks and other conservancy areas, not to mention synergies in creating and sharing quality tourist products.

A. Limitations

The first limitation of the present work is the fact that this is only a preliminary study on the use of Intranet in Croatian National Parks where we studied only a few aspects: the perception of the role of the intranet for quality communication between employees; the validity, timeliness, and usefulness of the information on the intranet; the existence of ways to upload (share) the data from bottom-up; and if the intranet reduces paperwork. Additional research should be conducted to cover other aspects of the usability of the intranet.

The second limitation of the presented work could be that the intranet is very similar to the word Internet. There is a likelihood that individuals employed in the Croatian National Parks mixed these two very similar terms, despite

that we took good care in our questionnaire to explain the difference.

The third limitation is the size and the type of sample. A convenience sample was being used due to the nature of the study. The study aimed to obtain preliminary information about the intranet's use and usefulness in Croatian National Parks and not an in-depth understanding of users' perceptions on the intranet they use. The results cannot be freely generalized to other national parks or nature conservancy areas. Yet, they provide an essential aspect of Intranets' usefulness in some of Croatia's surveyed national parks.

B. Concluding remarks

In Croatian National Parks' organization, we see many untapped potentials that would make work easier for employees, improve the organization, and set business standards and business policies. There are still employees who do not use the intranet, do not take advantage of it, and continue in an old-fashioned way communicating with co-workers. In this way, they make their job more difficult, slower, and not as productive. In our opinion, a feasible solution for Croatian National Parks would be an integrated Intranet connecting (at least) all eight national parks. It should include the intranet and enabling them to interconnect and share the data, from which they could refine ideas for new business opportunities. The introduction of such an Intranet requires a particular group of experts dealing with information systems and information technology, appropriate education, and training.

The intranet is intended to enable organizations to improve communication and collaboration among employees, increasing productivity and providing significant savings in time and money. Through the efficient and effective exchange of knowledge, the intranet can facilitate better information exchange among the organization's staff.

The modern intranet is an important strategic and operational tool applicable and useful in public sector organizations such as National Parks. Management and policymakers should take further steps to introduce it.

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