



CAN THE ADVERSE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE NAUTICAL TOURISM SECTOR OUTPERFORM ITS BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES?

**Eli Marušić¹, Katija Kovačić², Antea Blažević¹,
Maja Krčum¹**

Abstract. Introduction: Nautical tourism, a dynamic and expansive economic activity, is particularly significant in coastal areas with numerous islands, such as the Croatian Adriatic. The continuous growth in the number of nautical tourists, recreational boats, infrastructures, and marine traffic in popular island destinations presents both opportunities and challenges to the local economies and communities. Sustainable management of destinations experiencing nautical sector expansion requires essential information on economic impacts, one of the three central sustainability pillars. **Aims:** This study aims to identify the economic consequences of nautical tourism development and to determine the significant positive and negative effects of the sector. It seeks to investigate the relationship between key indicators of nautical tourism growth and its economic outcomes, positive and negative. **Methods:** The survey was conducted among island community members from the two largest islands in Split and Dalmatia County, Brač and Hvar, using an online, structured questionnaire. **Results:** The results show that respondents (N=139) evaluate adverse economic impacts, such as increases in overall prices, costs, taxes, fees, and charges, as more influential than the positive economic effects, which include increases in overall revenues and the number of projects and investments. The indicators of the sector's growth show stronger correlations with its adverse than with its positive economic impact. The study reveals that respondents' perceptions of the nautical sector's development and its economic implications are similar, regardless of their gender, age, education, residency, island destination, and knowledge of tourism. **Conclusions:** This research revealed that some unfavorable economic effects of the nautical sector outweigh its benefits, from the community's perspective, thus challenging the widely acknowledged interpretation of the sector's highly promising economic takeaways. The study contributes to the understanding of the consequences of tourism growth on the island economies.

Keywords: Economic Dimension Of Sustainability; Island Destinations; Community Perception; Local Economy.

¹ Faculty of Maritime Studies,
University of Split, Ruđera
Boškovića 37, 21000 Split,
Croatia

² Ministry of Defence, Trg
Kralja Petra Krešimira IV,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

* **Corresponding authors:**
emarusic@pfst.hr,
katkov@kifst.hr

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is becoming the dominant driver of economic prosperity in many coastal destinations worldwide, particularly in regions rich in archipelagos and island sites, such as the Adriatic coast of Croatia. The European Union (2017) emphasizes tourism as a dominant economic activity in Europe, accounting for a significant portion of the market, while also noting that Europe is the most visited region in the world. Authentic island locales are increasingly attracting numerous visitors and are becoming popular investment destinations for locals and global business elites. Marine-based tourism is among the leading activities in island environments, inducing promising economic opportunities for the local community. Adriatic Croatia is globally renowned for its extensive nautical infrastructure set in an alluring marine environment with many UNESCO-approved attractions (Croatian National Tourist Board, n.d.). The tourism phenomenon is spreading across Split-Dalmatia County at an unstoppable pace, while Croatia's popularity continues to reach new heights. Moreover, among diverse tourist categories, Croatia has often been synonymous with "must-experience" nautical tourism destinations over the past decade, offering a diverse range of water-related travel, tours, recreation, sports, leisure activities, journeys, transfers, and associated experiences.

Nautical tourism is a complex and comprehensive industry representing a conglomerate of numerous economic activities, primarily related to the maritime and tourism industry, but also directly and indirectly interrelates with other blue economy sectors. In this sense, nautical tourism is seen as the aggregate of multifunctional activities and relationships generated through tourists' stays in specialized ports or their activities outside the ports, as well as through the usage of recreational boats and objects related to the maritime and tourism sectors (Luković, 2007, 2012; European Commission, 2017). The concept of nautical tourism often relates to sailing or recreational boating for personal or economic activity. It includes many stakeholders, such as boaters (boat owners, crew, or guests), port operators, boat rental and management companies, boat service and maintenance providers, nautical event organizers, cruising companies, tour operators, accommodations, nautical infrastructure developers, investors, and more. The nautical sector generates significant revenues, capital investments, job creation, and entrepreneurship, contributing considerably to the coastal economies (Jugović et al., 2011; Luković, 2012; European Commission, 2017; Martínez Vázquez et al., 2021, 2022; Cavalheiro et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022; Cardoso, 2023). The European Union (2017) highlights the sig-

nificant economic value of nautical tourism at the EU level, underscoring its paramount contribution to economic growth and employment.

Nautical tourism is increasingly popular and has experienced significant growth on a global scale (Martínez Vázquez et al., 2022; Cardoso et al., 2023; Filimon, 2023; Marušić et al., 2024), as evidenced by the rise in the number of tourists, vessels, new job opportunities, and businesses. Nautical tourism emerges as a relevant sector for the economic development of destinations with a vast coastline, archipelagos, and a favorable geographical position for nautical activities, such as Portugal (Sanots et al., 2022; Cardoso et al., 2023), but also Spain (Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2022), Croatia (Jugović et al., 2011; Croatian National Tourist Board, n.d.), and other Mediterranean countries (Luković, 2012). Nautical tourism stands out for its potential to drive economic growth in coastal and island destinations, while also serving as a lever for sustainable tourism (Cardoso et al., 2023). However, the tourism industry triggers numerous vital issues for local economies that rely heavily on tourism, leading to an increase in adverse economic, environmental, and social impacts on the local community. Moreover, the expansion of blue tourism in tourism-dependent island regions generates necessary financial benefits but also presents notable and diverse challenges to the communities and authorities. Islands are specific territorial, socio-economic, and administrative units, typically less connected to the mainland, with preserved natural environments and limited resources, and a local economy based on primary and tertiary sectors (Kerr, 2005), primarily tourism. For instance, notable growth in tourism and hospitality is perceived to lead to increases in prices, expenses, and the cost of living. Croatian coastal destinations face considerable price explosions but are progressively questioning when enough is enough.

Despite numerous unfavorable side effects, the tourism industry has great potential to be a key driver of sustainable economic development on islands. However, meeting the diverse sustainability requirements in governing island destinations is a vital prerequisite for the island's long-term survival. Local authorities and tourist boards that manage the destination need information on the manifold effects of nautical sector expansion. Tourist destinations and businesses, driven by relevant information and understanding of the nautical tourism market structure, dynamics, opportunities, and profit potential, invest considerably in developing the sector's capacities and competitiveness. Economic considerations are crucial in strategies, policies, actions, and decisions related to the sustainable development of island destinations.

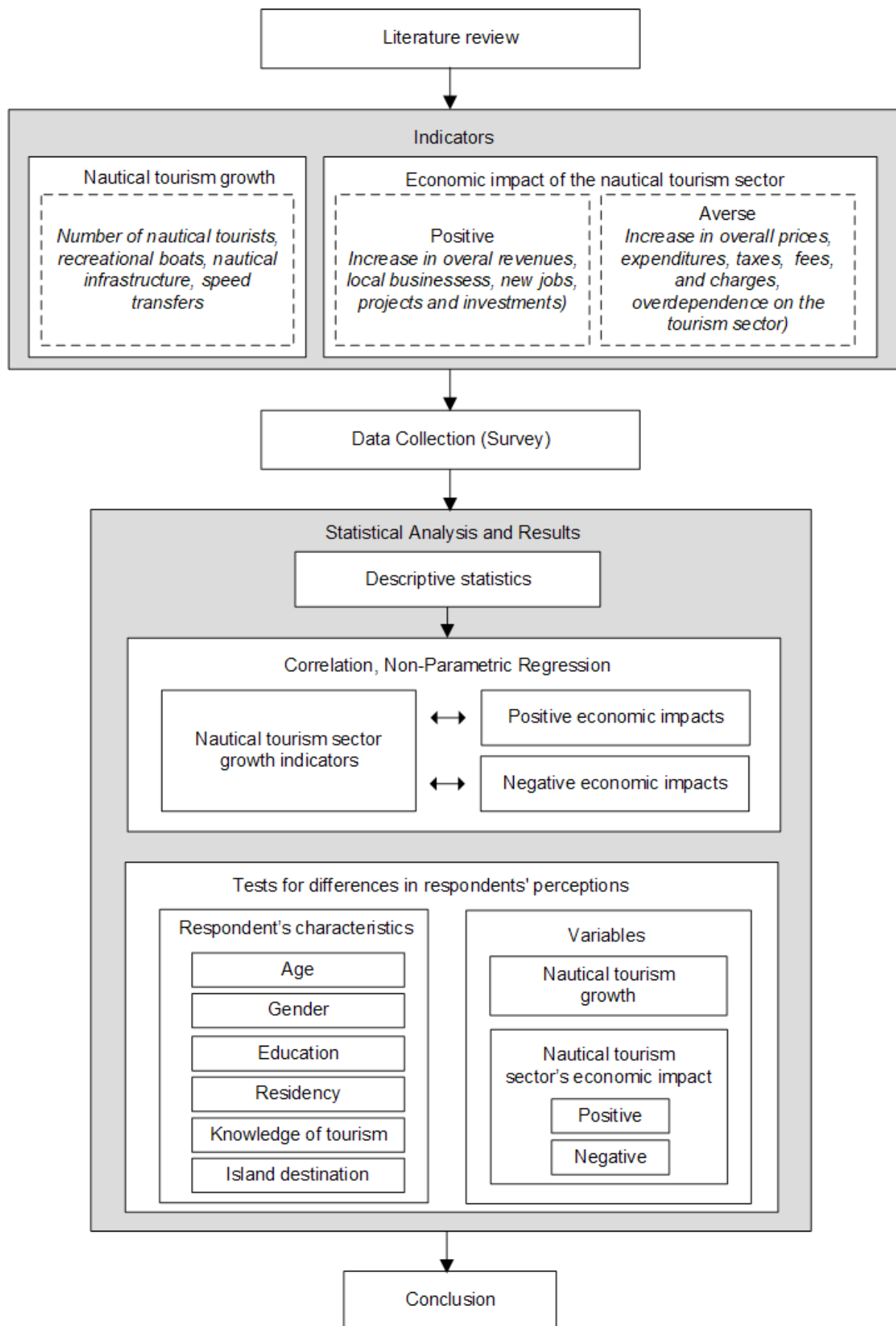


Figure 1. Research model (Source: Authors)

Numerous studies have investigated the economic effects of nautical tourism (e.g., Jugović et al., 2011; Martínez Vázquez et al., 2022; Cardoso et al.; Filimon, 2023; Marušić et al., 2024), focusing on the positive economic impacts on local economies, while often neglecting the negative economic consequences of the sector. Franzidis and Yau (2018) argue that many tourism-oriented destinations use tourism as an economic instrument to stimulate income, develop infrastructure, and generate employment and public revenue. Tourism can be an effective and powerful tool for decreasing poverty (Croes, 2014). Lee (2013) claims tourism creates opportunities to market local products and new jobs. Halim et al. (2022) argue that the perception, attitudes, and involvement of the local community, businesspeople, and local authorities as stakeholders in the development of tourism are crucial for the sustainable management of a tourist destination. The local community will support the development of tourism if residents perceive the positive effects of tourism development (Gursoy et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2022). Previous findings imply that to evaluate the economic contribution of nautical tourism, it is necessary to investigate the perceptions of local communities regarding all positive and negative economic effects.

Although sustainable development of nautical tourism encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions (e.g., Jugović et al. 2011; Lee, 2012; Martínez Vázquez et al., 2021, 2022; Halim et al., 2022; Elgin and Elveren, 2024; Marušić et al., 2024), this study focuses exclusively on the economic pillar, examining the economic impacts of the sector in island destinations, on the example of Croatian islands. This study identified a gap in the literature regarding the comparison of economically favorable and unfav-

orable outcomes in the nautical tourism industry, particularly in coastal destinations, which are experiencing ever-growing trends. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the relationship between the growth of the nautical sector and its economic effects, both positive and negative, using a quantitative research method. As such, this study contributes to the understanding of economic sustainability within the broader sustainable development framework.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper examines the outcomes of nautical tourism expansion in coastal destinations, using the example of the two largest islands in Split and Dalmatia County, Croatia.

The research model consists of the following steps (Figure 1): i) literature review, ii) identification of key indicators related to the growth of the nautical sector and the sector's economic impact, positive and negative, iii) data collection via survey method, iv) statistical analysis and results, v) conclusion.

Based on the literature, this paper identified the key indicators of the nautical tourism sector growth (NTS-In1 – NTS-In4), the positive economic impact variable indicators (PoEcon-In1 – PoEcon-In4), and the negative economic impact variable indicators (NeEcon-In1 – NeEcon-In4), as presented in Table 1.

The data were collected by surveying a sample of community members on the islands of Brač and Hvar (Croatia) in 2025 using a structured online questionnaire, divided into two main sections. Community members include people who live on the islands permanently (residents), and people who temporarily stay on or visit the observed islands for different reasons

Table 1. The nautical tourism sector indicators and the sector's economic impact indicators (Source: Authors)

INCREASE IN THE NAUTICAL TOURISM SECTOR ACTIVITIES IN THE PAST THREE YEARS		
Nautical tourism sector indicators	NTS-In1	Number of nautical tourists
	NTS-In2	Number of recreational boats /yachts /tourist vessels
	NTS-In3	Number of high-speed boat tourist transfers
	NTS-In4	Nautical infrastructure
THE NAUTICAL TOURISM SECTOR'S ECONOMIC IMPACT IN THE PAST THREE YEARS		
Positive economic impact indicators	PoEcon-In1	Overall revenues
	PoEcon-In2	Number of local businesses
	PoEcon-In3	Number of new jobs
	PoEcon-In4	Number of projects and investments
Negative economic impact indicators	NeEcon-In1	Overall prices increase
	NeEcon-In2	Overall expenditures /costs /expenses increase
	NeEcon-In3	Taxes, fees, and charges increase
	NeEcon-In4	Overdependence on the tourism sector

(non-residents, e.g., visiting family, proprietary, business). The first part operationalized the respondents' demographics (gender, age, education, and residency) and their knowledge about nautical tourism. The second part operationalized three main investigated variables via four indicators each, using a 5-point Likert scale: i) the nautical tourism sector growth variable (NTS-In1 – NTS-In4), the positive economic impact variable (PoEcon-In1 – PoEcon-In4), and the negative economic impact variable (PoEcon-In1 – PoEcon-In4).

Data analysis was performed using the statistical packages JASP (version 0.17.12) and IBM SPSS Statistics (version 20), which included descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and tests for differences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conducted a survey on the two Croatian islands, Brač and Hvar, located in central Dalmatia, to investigate the impact of the nautical tourism sector growth on the local island economies, from the perception of the community members.

3.1. The Islands of Brač and Hvar

The Island of Brač (Figure 2) is the highest (778 m, Vidova Gora) and third-largest island in the Adriatic

Sea, with a surface area of 395 km², divided into eight territorial units, comprising seven municipalities with almost 14,000 inhabitants, and the town of Supetar as its administrative center with the principal seaport on the island, 9.5 nautical miles distance from the mainland (Municipality of Milna – Brač, n.d.; Port Authority of Split-Dalmatia County, n.d.; Split and Dalmatia County Tourist Board – Brač, n.d.).

The Island of Hvar (Figure 3) is the longest Croatian island, hilly and rocky, with a highly indented coastline that stretches for 270 km², famous as the sunniest Croatian island averaging 2,712 hours per year, and Pakleni islands, an unique and protected archipelago rich in marine biodiversity, especially popular in the yachting community (Croatian Encyclopedia, n.d.). The island has around 10,000 inhabitants, and the town of Hvar is the administrative center, with the Port of Hvar serving as the main seaport of the island (Visit Hvar, n.d.; Hvar Island Croatia, n.d.).

3.2. The Impacts of the Nautical Tourism Sector

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and normality tests for the research variables: nautical tourism sector, positive economic impacts, and negative economic impacts.



Figure 2. The Island of Brač (Source: Google Earth, n.d.)



Figure 3. The Island of Hvar (Source: Google Earth, n.d.)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (N=139) (Source: Authors)

	Mean	Std. Error	STD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk test
NTS-In1	3.9137	.07255	.85535	-.467	-.016	.857
NTS-In2	4.2158	.06191	.72993	-1.040	2.336	.776
NTS-In3	4.0719	.07478	.88170	-.721	-.161	.827
NTS-In4	3.4604	.08559	1.00913	-.212	-.412	.901
PoEcon-In1	3.7338	.07543	.88935	-.452	-.140	.872
PoEcon-In2	3.5108	.07598	.89578	-.340	.131	.883
PoEcon-In3	3.5468	.08557	1.00882	-.538	-.100	.887
PoEcon-In4	3.3597	.08604	1.01444	-.266	-.281	.904
NeEcon-In1	4.5971	.05659	.66724	-1.699	2.656	.636
NeEcon-In2	4.5036	.06568	.77435	-1.817	3.719	.667
NeEcon-In3	4.1079	.07620	.89839	-.641	-.272	.817
NeEcon-In4	2.4748	.16851	1.98666	.018	-1.498	.832

Std. Error of Skewness = 0.206, Std. Error of Kurtosis = 0.408, P-value of Shapiro-Wilk = < .001

The results (Table 2) show that the respondents perceive more significantly growth of nautical tourism via the increase in number of recreational boats (yachts, tourist vessels) NTS-In2 (Mean=4,2158) and the number of high-speed boat tourist transfers NTS-In3 (Mean 4.07) than via the increase in the number of nautical tourists (Mean 3.91) and the nautical infrastructure (Mean 3.46). The descriptive analysis results (Table 2) also imply that the respondents assigned the highest values to the negative economic impact indicators, i.e., overall prices increase (NegEcon-In1, Mean 4.59) and overall expenditures /expenses increase (NegEcon-In2, Mean 4.50), but also the lowest values to the negative economic impact indicator, the overdependence on the tourism sector (NegEcon-In4, Mean 2.47). The mean values of negative economic impact indicators outweigh those of positive economic impact indicators, such as increases in overall revenues, the number of local businesses, and the number of new jobs. The evidence suggests that respondents perceive the negative economic impact of nautical tourism as outweighing its positive economic impact. Luković (2012) notes that seasonal issues generate many adverse effects,

regardless of the variabilities in activities across various sub-sectors throughout the year. Cardoso et al. (2023) recognized the potential adverse economic outcomes of the tourism industry, emphasizing the need to develop strategies that promote sustainable development and prompting organizations to integrate sustainable practices.

The values of standard deviation indicate that the similarity in respondents' perceptions is lowest for the negative impact of tourism sector growth on local economy overdependence (NegEcon-In4, STD 1.98666) and highest for the adverse effects of tourism sector growth on overall price increases (NegEcon-In1, STD 0.66724). The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicate that the statistical values are higher than the accepted p-value ($p = 0.05$) and that the data are normally distributed. Thus, this research will use parametric tests and methods for further analysis.

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for the nautical tourism sector growth variable indicators (NTS-In1 – NTS-In4) and the positive economic impact variable indicators (PoEcon-In1 – PoEcon-In4). The results show that the correlations between the

Table 3. Correlation matrix: Nautical tourism sector and positive economic impact (Source: Authors)

	NTS-In1	NTS-In2	NTS-In3	NTS-In4	PoEcon-In1	PoEcon-In2	PoEcon-In3	PoEcon-In4
NTS-In1	1							
NTS-In2	.680**	1						
NTS-In3	.546**	.584**	1					
NTS-In4	.349**	.356**	.313**	1				
PoEcon-In1	.141	.123	.099	.154	1			
PoEcon-In2	.153	.174*	.137	.291**	.554**	1		
PoEcon-In3	.114	.134	-.012	.150	.478**	.635**	1	
PoEcon-In4	.111	.071	.117	.198*	.404**	.522**	.635**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Correlation matrix: Nautical tourism sector and negative economic impact (Source: Authors)

	NTS-In1	NTS-In2	NTS-In3	NTS-In4	NeEcon-In1	NeEcon-In2	NeEcon-In3	NeEcon-In4
NTS-In1	1							
NTS-In2	.680**	1						
NTS-In3	.546**	.584**	1					
NTS-In4	.349**	.356**	.313**	1				
NeEcon-In1	.243**	.254**	.234**	.019	1			
NeEcon-In2	.143	.178*	.148	.016	.732**	1		
NeEcon-In3	.125	.130	.228**	.081	.266**	.411**	1	
NeEcon-In4	.161	.199*	.076	-.001	.244**	.159	.085	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

nautical tourism sector growth indicators and positive economic impact indicators are primarily positive, weak to moderate, but not statistically significant. However, the results indicate a moderate and statistically significant correlation between the nautical infrastructure indicator (NTS-In4) and the indicator of the number of local businesses (PoEcon-In2, correlation coefficient 0.291), and the correlation between the nautical infrastructure indicator and the number of projects and investments indicator (PoEcon-In4, correlation coefficient 0.198).

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation matrix for the nautical tourism sector growth variable (NTS-In1-NTS-In4) and the negative economic impact variable (NeEcon-In1 – NeEcon-In4). The results indicate that the correlations between the growth indicators of the nautical tourism sector and negative economic impact indicators are primarily positive, moderate, and statistically significant. There is a moderate and statistically significant correlation between the number of nautical tourists (NTS-In1) and the overall price increase (NeEcon-In1, correlation coefficient 0.243). The indicator of the number of recreational boats /yachts /tourist vessels (NTS-In2) correlates with the overall price increase (NeEcon-In1, correlation coefficient 0.254), the overall expenditures /costs /expenses increase (NeEcon-In2, correlation coefficient 0.178), and overdependence on the tourism sector (NeEcon-In4, correlation coefficient 0.199). The number of high-speed boat tourist transfers indicator (NTS-In3) correlates with the overall price increase

(NeEcon-In1, correlation coefficient 0.234) and the increase in taxes, fees, and charges (NeEcon-In3, correlation coefficient 0.228).

All previously described correlations are statistically significant. The comparison of correlation coefficients reveals that the correlations between nautical tourism sector growth indicators and negative economic impact indicators are stronger than those between nautical tourism sector growth indicators and positive economic impact indicators. The previously mentioned suggests that respondents perceive the adverse effects of nautical tourism growth to be stronger than the positive economic impacts of the sector's growth. Elgin and Elveren (2024) comment on discussions in the existing literature on the tourism industry's adverse economic effects, e.g., unfavorable implications for real GDP, highlighting interesting findings that tourism-focused small economies experience rapid growth, yet heavily tourism-reliant economies do not consistently outpace those that are not tourism-dependent.

Furthermore, this study conducted tests to examine differences in respondents' perceptions of nautical tourism growth and the sector's economic impact, based on their age, gender, education, residency, knowledge of nautical tourism, and island destination (the island of Brač /the island of Hvar). The performed tests of the differences include one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-tests. The paper presents statistically significant differences in respondents' perceptions only (Table 5).

Table 5. One-way ANOVA (Source: Authors)

Indicator	Age	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
NTS-In2	Between Groups	5.171	4	1.293	2.534	.043
	Within Groups	68.355	134	.510		
	Total	73.525	138			
PoEcon-In2	Between Groups	12.959	4	3.240	4.440	.002
	Within Groups	97.775	134	.730		
	Total	110.734	138			

Table 5 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA analysis.

The results of the one-way ANOVA (Table 5) show that respondents from different age groups have statistically significant differences in their perceptions regarding the growth of the number of recreational boats/yachts/tourist vessels (NTS-In2) and the number of local businesses (PoEcon-In2). As previously noted, the results of the independent sample t-test indicate that there are no significant differences between the perceptions of respondents regarding the research variables, considering their gender, education, residency, island destination, and knowledge of tourism.

The findings of this manuscript reveal that, despite the ever-growing evidence of the economic benefits of nautical tourism on small, local economies that are increasingly dependent on the tourism industry, the sector's adverse economic effects outweigh its positive effects. Cardoso et al. (2023) highlight the rise of the nautical tourism sector, which has significant economic importance for marine destinations, and also stress the need for integrating sustainability logic into strategies and practices. Although scholars and industry experts have increasingly studied the adverse effects of the nautical sector (e.g., Luković, 2012; European Union, 2017; Cardoso et al., 2023; Marušić et al., 2024), the unfavorable economic outcomes remain largely unexplored and understudied.

4. CONCLUSION

This manuscript examines the economic benefits and challenges of the nautical tourism industry from the perspective of the island community members. The nautical sector operates as a significant driver of local economic development in coastal areas, particularly in island destinations. Although the development of the nautical sector has many positive impacts on the local economy, it also generates considerable adverse economic challenges.

Following the scarce evidence in the literature on adverse economic outcomes resulting from the expansion of the nautical sector, specifically in highly tourism-dependent destinations, this paper aimed to fill the existing gap in this matter. Investigating the perceptions of local community members regarding the researched problem is necessary, as they have direct insight into the impact resulting from the rapid growth in the key indicators.

The results of this study show that, from the surveyed community's perception, the negative economic impacts measured through key indicators, such as the overall price increase and overall expenditures/costs/

expenses increase, outweigh the positive effects, investigated via key indicators, such as the overall revenues indicator, number of local businesses, number of new jobs, etc.

The findings show that the three investigated variables (the growth of the nautical sector, the positive economic impact, and the negative economic impact) are weakly to moderately correlated. Furthermore, the correlations between the indicators that measure the three variables are statistically significant in some cases. Analysis of the correlation coefficients reveals that the correlations between the nautical tourism sector growth indicators and the negative economic impact indicators are stronger than those between the nautical tourism sector growth indicators and the positive economic impact indicators. The previously mentioned suggests that the respondents perceive the adverse effects of nautical tourism growth to be stronger than the positive economic impacts of the sector's growth. The findings indicate that there are practically no differences in the respondents' perceptions regarding the three studied variables, with minor differences related to their age in two indicators.

Furthermore, the findings reveal vital insights into the relationship between the economic benefits and challenges of the nautical sector in destinations with relatively developed traditional local economies that are increasingly turning to the tourism industry and becoming heavily dependent on it, such as well-populated islands in Croatia. However, this manuscript limited the investigation to a narrow range of indicators for assessing the observed variables (the nautical tourism sector growth, the positive economic impact variable, and the negative economic impact variable). Therefore, further study should investigate more indicators and consider broadening research methods to objectivize the findings from the survey method. In addition, this research has not included other influential factors on the local economy, such as other tourism types or economic activities, which adds to the limitations of the study. However, this paper indicated the significance and comprehensiveness of the research problem. Finally, the results suggest the need for further research on a larger sample and a more extended geographical area.

To conclude, this research contributes to understanding the benefits and drawbacks of the nautical sector's expansion in island destinations through the vital indicators that constitute the economic pillar in the sustainability area.

Conflict of interest: All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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