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Sustainable Furniture Design for Rural Tourist Accommodation Inspired by the Heritage of Istria

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Abstract: Rural tourism is closely linked to a local's tradition, identity, and cultural heritage. When staying in a specific tourist destination, a modern tourist expects a complete experience of the destination. Experience is necessary in rural tourist accommodation where guests can feel the local culture, nature, gastronomy, environment, and heritage. However, what about the interior design of the accommodation facility and the furniture design that will provide a rural and at the same time modern atmosphere? The paper aims to explore the traditional heritage, culture, indigenous elements, and ornamentation of rural artifacts of Istria, a region in Croatia, to propose a conceptual design of functional contemporary furniture for furnishing the living room in tourist accommodation. The furniture collection, with visual and artistic elements, surface treatment, construction, and selected sustainable materials and ornamentation, aims to brand the indigenous rural Istrian heritage, while at the same time combines an innovative contemporary expression. The research is divided into two stages: the first stage was conducted during field research using photography, observation, and interview methods, and the collected data from this stage served as inspiration for designing a furniture collection in the second stage. The second stage uses the cyclical method of the creative process to design new sustainable furniture concept, consisting of a table, stool, chest of drawers, and coffee table, which form a collection in the tourist interior environment. This furniture design model that uses original heritage to brand the rural environment and increase the attractiveness of accommodation in rural areas could be applied to other locations so tourists can fully experience the rural area they visit and achieve experiential, relaxed holidays and amenities, thus supporting the sustainable development of rural tourist destinations. The practical implications of this research have yet to be confirmed. It is desirable to investigate the impact and satisfaction of users in such designed interiors and confirm such a concept. This will require the engagement of architects and designers and hotel accommodation owners, as well as and the support of economic entities, local authorities, and the government, who need to systematically change the ways of branding rural values to achieve a holistic approach to the tourism offer.

Keywords: furniture design; wood products; tourist accommodation interiors; rural tourism; tradition; heritage; brand; sustainable development

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Academic Editors: Tiberiu Iancu, Gabriela Popescu, Tabita Cornelia Adamov and Ramona Mariana Ciolac

Received: 29 December 2024
Revised: 2 February 2025
Accepted: 7 February 2025
Published: 9 February 2025

Citation: Domljan, D.; Lukež, N.; Vlaović, Z. Sustainable Furniture Design for Rural Tourist Accommodation Inspired by the Heritage of Istria. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 1415. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17041415

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a complex economic activity that contributes to the economic development of many countries. However, the development of today's tourism is most influenced by globalization as a process of economic, social, cultural, and political activities that

transcend national borders [1,2], while negatively affecting local cultural and rural heritage, undermining their integrity and authenticity [3,4]. Today's mass tourism poses numerous challenges such as overcrowding and cultural alienation, as well as the impact on the daily lives of local populations and the cultural heritage of rural areas [5–7]. Global trends are directing tourism towards greater profits, while the environment is increasingly struggling for survival, questioning sustainability [8,9]. This issue began to be considered more intensively after the consequences created by the emergence of mass tourism on the population of certain destinations became visible over time [7]. The development of this type of tourism has created several negative effects, some of which are increased water consumption, increased concentration of greenhouse gases in the air, the extinction of certain plant and animal species due to environmental pollution and climate change, increased amounts of waste, and the frequent destruction and devastation of cultural objects and heritage [10,11].

The aforementioned negative consequences have led to intensive reflection on sustainable tourism, which, as UNEC and WTO point out [12], should not be understood as a discrete or special form of tourism. On the contrary, all forms of tourism today should strive to be more sustainable, which, according to the definition of the World Commission on Environment and Development from 1987, means "applying processes to meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable tourism takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities [12],

Following on, cultural and rural heritage are strongly linked to tourism. Tourism has often been used as an economic justification for preserving cultural heritage and historical artifacts [13]. Cultural heritage has important economic value, which through its historical, artistic, and cultural value represents an important source of local and national income [14] and is characterized by strong and expressive aesthetics [15]. Grazuleviciute-Vileniske emphasized that cultural heritage can contribute towards well-being and quality of life of communities, can help to mitigate the impacts of cultural globalization, and can become an incentive for sustainable economic development [16].

On the other hand, rural tourism offers opportunities for generating and diversifying income for the rural population [17,18], has a positive impact on the preservation of the natural and cultural-historical heritage of rural areas, prevents migration from "passive regions", encourages the appreciation of the authentic values of a particular area, and can offer answers to questions about how to revitalize individual rural areas [19–22].

In any case, tourism, supported by cultural and creative industries in rural areas, in addition to economic benefits, contributes to the preservation of the rich cultural and historical heritage of such areas as well as to the development of the rural environment [23–25]. VegheÈ™ [26] points out that cultural heritage represents a determinant for the nations' brands, soft power, and travel and tourism competitiveness. Taking heritage into consideration by appropriate initiatives and actions aiming to preserve, restore, promote, and capitalize its tangible and intangible components will provide the solid foundation on which nations will have the capacity to build their brands and soft power to obtain the needed domestic and international awareness and appreciation, transforming them into interesting, attractive, and competitive travel and tourism destinations [26]. According to Qin et al. [27], traditional cultural property is considered part of sustainable social and economic development. Culturally innovative products with elements derived from traditional cultural property are attracting increasing attention and serve as a significant tool for communicating product aesthetics and underlying traditional culture. The results indicate significant positive effects of culturally innovative design on the young generation's per-

ception of cultural sustainability and resilience and how this is related to their purchasing behavior [27]. However, Macleod [28] points out a significant problem of authenticity and commodification in tourism, whereby tourism itself as an economic activity is blamed for the commodification of cultures. Objects and performances that were once created for local consumption become directed towards the tourist market and are therefore said to be exploited, devalued, and trivialized [29]. Postmodernism and tourism have created placeless spaces devoid of any local meaning or indigenous culture [30]. Within these soulless places, culturally impoverished individuals consume mediated experiences far removed from the authentic lives of their ancestors, who were in touch with their place, land, ancient traditions, and community. In this worldview, contemporary culture and tourism are largely impoverished by a lack of authenticity [28].

This is why today's contemporary global trends in tourism are changing and turning from mass to individual and indigenous tourism of a particular region. Trends in conscious, modern, and sustainable tourism are focused more on the intangible dimensions of tourist demand, i.e., on experience and sensation [31,32], as well as interpretation [33]. According to Poruțiu et al. [34], generation Y [35] are willing to pay more to experience unique and authentic things because they have the necessary income to do so, while generation Z [36,37] often opt for thematic, educational, or volunteer trips that enable them to learn and connect with other cultures and communities [34,38]. Experience is the main asset that tourist destinations in rural areas strive to offer to every guest and often includes getting to know the natural local beauties, local food and drinks, traditional souvenirs, and local customs. Cetin and Bilgihan [39] highlight five domains that emerge while experiencing the destinations, while Butler [40] questioned whether destinations can be resilient and remain authentic in the context of sustainable development when a large number of visitors are inflowing.

The accommodation supply in rural areas is very mixed in terms of size, type, location, catering, and activities offered. Pina and Delfa [41] developed a methodology to determine tourist profiles that incline towards choices of accommodation rather than others, within the supply at a given rural resort. Pulido et al. [42] investigated whether a type of accommodation influences tourist behavior by comparing hotel accommodation vs. rural accommodation and concluded that there is a difference in tourist behavior concerning accommodation as well as preferences in interests, spending, and desire to visit different facilities (such as restaurants or museums). Rural tourists prefer natural environments and destinations [43] and choose ecotourism, nature tourism, and leisure and recreational tourism [42].

Implementing the aforementioned concept of sustainable tourism resulted in the design of the so-called sustainable hotels [11,44–46], which, in addition to the classic offer, consider the sustainability of rural authenticity and the use of materials. However, no matter how much the "sustainability" of hotels is emphasized, the interiors and furniture in such hotels sometimes lack the authenticity of the local landscape or exaggerate local expressions, thereby negating the design aesthetic. Unfortunately, even the interior design of a rural tourist facility (which includes furniture, colors, lighting [47], materials, and other decorations in the space), although tourists consider them to be important factors [48,49], is often overlooked in the experience of staying in the interior of the hotel room in which the guest is staying. There is no mention of research into indigenous interior decoration and furniture design that can attract different generations of tourists. Apartment owners, often trying to equip their facilities as soon as possible, resort to cheap furniture from a nearby furniture store [50], while global hotel chains impose their interior design style. Such an approach results in the loss of authenticity, uniqueness, and diversity of the traditional

cultural heritage in certain rural locations and deprives the guest of a total experience in interiors.

The field of sustainable interior design has witnessed a notable surge in global attention, driven by mounting environmental concerns and a heightened demand for design solutions that are both ecologically conscious and socially responsible [51]. According to Randhawa and Kumar [52], interior designers play a pivotal role as stewards of the built environment, wielding the potential to instigate positive change through the deliberate adoption of sustainable design practices. As Kibert [53] pointed out, sustainable interior design is a holistic approach that integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations to create interior spaces that are environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable.

In such interiors, one of the key points is the design of sustainable furniture. Design innovation and sustainability are key in shaping a sustainable paradigm. In this direction, D'Itria et al. [54] highlight the potential implementation of design for sustainability practices, leveraging inherent business capabilities, technological expertise, and organizational strategies. Therefore, a new goal in branding rural sustainable tourism would be to incorporate holistic sustainable interior design into tourist accommodations by designing indigenous furniture incorporating local characteristics. One way to preserve heritage is by taking certain values and traditional features of heritage and incorporating them into interiors and furniture designs that ensure a symbiosis of contemporary styles and traditional values. It is important to emphasize that when seeking inspiration, one should know how to avoid improvisation and literal copying of the ornamentation or shapes of the observed artifacts. From the designer's point of view, one should know how to transform a product from inspiration into a new design, without losing the semantic meaning of the original ornaments and materials.

The focus of this paper is on the analysis of the characteristics and importance of rural cultural and historical material heritage through the investigation into the ways and possibilities of implementing the attributes of traditional artifacts of the local population by designing new furniture for tourist facilities. Istria, a region in Croatia located on a peninsula in the northwestern part of the Adriatic Sea, is taken as an example. The paper presents the development of a sustainable and at the same time modern conceptual solution for furnishing rural accommodation based on the principles of design and traditional ornamentation of the Istrian tangible cultural heritage, such as used materials and ornaments in furniture, tools, utensils, clothing, instruments, and buildings. It is important to emphasize that the design process is complex, and good design is rarely just a literal copy or application of a certain attribute. In this paper, it is important to highlight the inspiration and semantic meaning of ornaments and materials used in the new design, avoiding improvisation and literal copying of the local artifacts.

1.1. The Aim of the Research

This paper deals with the topic of designing a functional contemporary range of living room furniture for accommodation intended for tourist purposes (e.g., smaller hotels, apartments, holiday homes, or rooms), inspired by indigenous elements of the rural and cultural heritage of Istria, which includes the application of heritage: motifs, materials, symbols, ornaments, and similar traditional tangible artifacts.

The aim was to research and analyze local traditional expressions of the cultural heritage of Istria and to design an authentic and practical contemporary typology of living room furniture for accommodation intended for tourist purposes, which will apply the indigenous Istrian heritage in its visual elements, surface treatment, construction, and selected materials, and at the same time achieve an innovative contemporary expression.

This will also contribute to the branding of rural tourism in Istria, as it will offer the guest staying in the selected accommodation the experience of the local community environment and bring the cultural heritage of Istria closer. In addition, the use of traditional elements creates opportunities for the preservation of the traditional culture and heritage of the local population. Additionally, the process aims to provide an example of how the application of rural heritage does not necessarily have to be at the level of literal copying of traditional ornamentation, which in today's modern society is neither functionally appropriate, technologically justified, nor visually meaningful. It should be emphasized that the term preservation in the work does not imply the conservation or restoration of an individual artifact, as is done in the architectural, archaeological, or conservation-restoration profession. Preservation refers here to "rescue from oblivion" and implies the study, respect, preservation, and maintenance of artifacts and their use as inspiration in designing new products. The intention was to approach tourists and raise their awareness of the traditional values of identity and culture significant to the region they visit.

This paper describes the process of product conceptual development, from the analysis of the autochthonous heritage of Istria in museums and outdoor locations, collected inspirations and design indexes, the first conceptual solutions and variations, up to the implementation solutions of the designed assortment shown through visual representations in an imaginary interior.

1.2. Specificities of Istrian Cultural Heritage and Tourism

1.2.1. Istria Through History

To fully understand the cultural heritage of a particular region, it is necessary to know its history, which is most often learned through oral tradition, browsing through books and magazines from museum libraries and collections, or studying ethnographic heritage that is often not recorded electronically.

The Croatian part of the Istrian peninsula is located in the western part of Croatia, covers an area of 2813 km^2, and has a population of 195,237 (2021 census) [55]. The Istrian peninsula has always been suitable for settlement because it is located at the crossroads of the West and the East, the North, and the South of Europe. Over the millennia, Istria has changed owners and states, from the Roman Empire, through Byzantium, the Frankish and Venetian Republics, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Yugoslavia, to the Republic of Croatia today [56]. Istria is among the most developed Croatian regions and is particularly known for its tourism, gastronomy, and processing industry [57].

1.2.2. Tourism in Croatia and Istria

Croatian tourism has been the basis of economic growth and development of the entire Croatian economy for a long time. Since tourism represents a set of experiences integrated into a complex tourist product, it is necessary to constantly question and evaluate the tourist offer so that it remains competitive, interesting, and attractive to the end consumer. According to the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Tourism Development Strategy, the key production groups as determinants of a certain specific form of tourism in Croatia are nautical tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, cycle tourism, sports/adventure tourism, sun-and-sea-based tourism, and rural tourism [58].

In the middle and end of the 19th century, Istrian tourism was known for offering vacation and leisure destinations for the former Austro-Hungarian aristocracy. Unfortunately, mass tourism did not even bypass Istria in the mid-1960s with an offer based on the concept of "sun and sea" [59].

Rural heritage in Croatia has only recently been recognized as one of the leading ideas for tourism development [60]. Aiming to further bring the diverse offer of Croatian rural

destinations closer to the domestic market, in 2021, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Croatian National Tourist Board launched the promotional campaign "Experience Local. Explore Rural Croatia!" [61]. The Istrian peninsula with its natural and gastronomic offerings is also included in this project. Istria has achieved great success in developing projects in the field of cultural tourism, in collaboration with European regions of the neighboring countries [62].

Looking at today's tourism in Istria, tourism is the most important economic branch that also focuses on rural tourism, which represents an excellent opportunity to promote cultural heritage. This recognizes the potential of Istria and the possibility of becoming one of the leading regions in the development of rural tourism, based on a rich tradition that includes rural architecture, traditional ambiance, cultural and natural heritage, and regional cuisine.

1.2.3. Materials in the Objects of Rural Istria

The most significant known objects of Istrian ethnography described in the available literature [63–66] are most often preserved in local museums. Objects made of wood, fabric, stone, clay, or metal are mentioned, and their analysis and insights throughout history will serve as inspiration for the development of new products.

The Art of Woodworking in Istria

The Istrian peninsula, like most of Croatia, is an area rich in forests with a coverage of nearly 40% [67]. Oak forests are the most common, but there are also forests of beech, pine, black hornbeam, spruce and larch, alder, birch, and poplar [68]. The most common crafts were once those related to woodworking. The basic techniques used in woodworking include bending, chiseling, gouging, cutting, sawing, turning, and carving. After World War II, many rural crafts and arts died out, and originally handmade objects were replaced by finished factory products [69].

Among the wooden products, some of them such as chests, distaffs, sticks, and musical instruments should be highlighted.

Chests: Chests were used to store things and are the best example of preserved folk art: simple in design, decorated only with rows of carved parallel stripes or "herringbone" patterns, and always with harmonious dimensions in a certain ratio [66]. In the Istrian region, the names *banka* and *kasela* appear for a chest.

Distaffs: The processing of plant and animal fibers into yarn for weaving, knitting, sewing, or binding is known as spinning. In the past, a wooden stick, known as a distaff, was used for this purpose, to which the yarn was tied [63–65]. Although some distaffs were simple and unadorned, most were carefully carved, mostly with geometric patterns such as triangles, rhombuses, rosettes, and straight lines. Some examples had motifs such as crosses or anthropomorphic figures, as well as engraved years or initials [64].

Musical instruments: Istrian folk instruments for entertainment and dancing, known as the *šurla* [70], *dvojnice*, *vidalice*, and *duplice* [71], and *sopele*, *sopile*, or *roženice* [72], were decorated most often with red-hot wire, hand-made dots, and crossed and parallel stripes that create geometric motifs [64].

Stone Products

In the Istrian region, *kažuni* are known as small circular buildings with a domed roof, built without the use of binding material, which served as temporary shelter.

Istrian village stonemasons made a significant contribution to culture with their work, carving Glagolitic inscriptions into many stone monuments in the Istrian region [64].

Metal Products

In Istria, there was an emphasis on the processing and making of iron objects [54]. Rural households generally owned basic iron tools and implements such as sickles, scythes, hoes, ploughshares, ploughs, axes, scissors, and the occasional knife. Blacksmiths often incorporated decorative details into the *prijeklad* [73], which served as a decoration for the kitchen, and its splendor and size symbolized the power of the householder.

Clay Products

The production of clay or ceramic vessels represents the oldest form of handicraft in Istria, which has survived from the Neolithic to the present day. In many archaeological sites, a large number of vessels, jugs, glasses, goblets, cups, and pots from the Bronze Age, through Roman times [74], to the present day have been found. Ceramic vessels of various sizes were used in the household [75]. Smaller vessels were not decorated, while larger ones were decorated with a wavy ornament (so called *valovnica*), rows of dots, or the manufacturer's stamp on the bottom or side. *Valovnica* [76] were a favorite decoration and were sometimes combined with other decorations—oblique cuts, zig-zag lines, grooves, etc. [77].

Textiles in the Decoration of a Rural House and the Costumes of Istria

Textiles in the inventory of rural houses in Istria include linen tablecloths, sheets, pillowcases, blankets, rugs, and carpets [78]. Their characteristic features are their everyday use and decorative purpose, as well as characteristic ornaments in weaving. In addition to the interior inventory, the folk costume of the Istrian region is significant and is characterized by different colors of the costume, ornaments, and weaving [63,79]. One of the more interesting items of clothing full of ornaments was socks, which were mostly decorated with various patterns and ornaments by knitting [63,64].

It is necessary to mention one item that was not considered real jewelry and did not have great material value but was an accessory that women from the southern region of Istria (the vicinity of Svetvinčent town) wore tucked into their hair [63]. It is a small brass ring divided into four parts, called a *benčuk* or *bijančuk* [80]. It is a sign of dignity and was worn only by a married woman who was also the mistress of a cooperative family. A ribbon was threaded through the *benčuk*, and scissors and a razor, as well as a key to the chest, were tied to the ribbon.

2. Materials and Methods

The research analyzed artifacts found at sites in Istria and used several methods to define problems, set requirements, formulate conceptual solutions, and propose guidelines for the detailed development of the implementation solution. It was necessary to study objects of ethnographic value in Istria that would serve as a design index and a source of inspiration for newly designed furniture. For this purpose, the most famous destinations in Istria were selected where the Istrian cultural heritage can be seen and studied: the three largest Istrian museums and the two largest open-air cultural sites. Additionally, written archival materials, exhibition catalogs, and published books available in museums were studied. Since this work connects the artistic and scientific fields, in addition to scientific literature, non-scientific sources were also used to gather information and inspirations, such as non-scientific websites, which served mainly as general information and references to images or some events, exhibitions, or museum collections, and were left in the interest of scientific integrity.

Methods and materials were used through two stages:

- Stage 1 represents the preliminary work in which methods of observation and photography were used in localities along with a conversation with curators in museums in order to collect data and inspiration that will be used in stage 2;
- Stage 2 represents the creative design process in which the cyclic method of the creative process was applied and in which the data collected during stage 1 were used.

2.1. Materials

The materials are the analyzed artifacts found during field research. The found objects have ethnographic value and serve as inspiration for the design of the new furniture collection.

2.1.1. Artifacts in Museums, Collections, and Outdoor Parks

Collections of furniture, traditional objects, costumes, tools, jewelry, and other equipment used in former interiors in rural areas were reviewed, and the cultural heritage of park monuments of the outdoor sites was analyzed. The research collected rich photo documentation and analyzed individual objects that were later either discarded as less important or kept as further inspirations, which will be shown in the results.

2.1.2. Locations

The field research method was carried out by examining different locations relevant to this work. The localities, museums, and ethnographic collections in the area of Istria shown in Figure 1 were visited: (1) Glagolitic Alley from cities Rača to Hum, (2) the Buje Ethnographic Collection in Buje, (3) the Ethnographic Museum of Istria and (4) Pazin City Museum in Pazin, and (5) the Kažun Park in Vodnjan. Rich photo documentation was collected in the field and served as inspiration for the future development of product concepts.

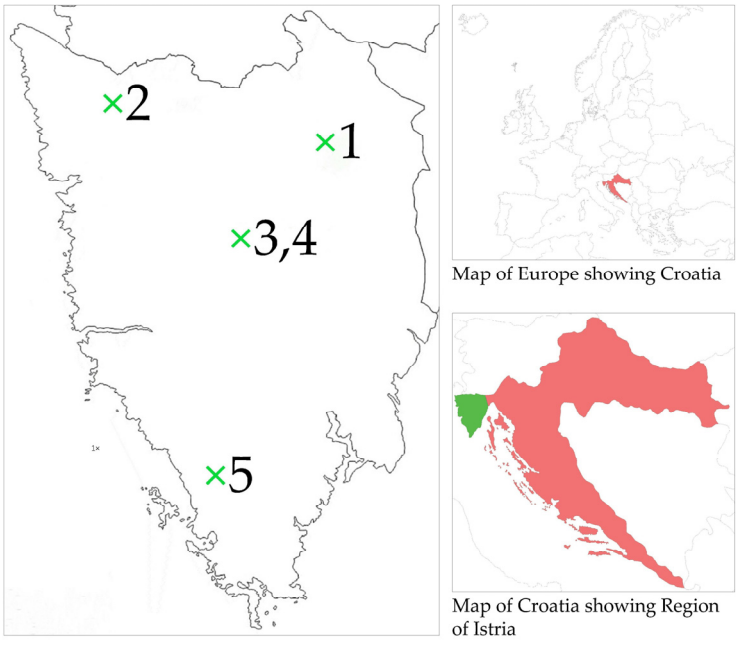


Figure 1. Map of visited localities: green crosses (**left**), map of Europe showing Croatia in red (**right above**); map of Croatia showing Region of Istria: green (**right below**) (by author Nikola Lukež).

(1) The Glagolitic Alley [81] is a memorial to Glagoliticians and Glagoliticism, erected at the junction of the road between the towns of Roč and Hum. It represents the path of Istrian, Croatian, and Slavic Glagoliticism, bears witness to the centers of Croatian medieval Glagolitic literature in the Istrian region, and points to the Slavic roots of this literacy and

its continuity from the 11th century to the present day. It was erected as a special project of the Čakavian Parliament from 1977 to 1985 [82].

(2) The Buje Ethnographic Museum [83] is located in a renovated historic building in the town of Buje. It was opened to the public in 1970 to collect folk artifacts. The museum is spread over four floors and is designed as a reconstruction of an old Istrian house with the working areas of a kitchen, bedroom, blacksmith shop, pottery workshop, loom, and grape and olive processing area, as well as an exhibition of Istrian chests.

(3) The Ethnographic Museum of Istria [84] and (4) Pazin City Museum [85] are located in the common premises of the medieval fortress Kaštel in Pazin. Their displays and collections intertwine through various themes of the holdings significant for the region of Istria. They maintain an ethnographic, archaeological, and cultural-historical collection of textiles, agricultural tools, and objects from the everyday life of the Istrian village from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The ground floor of the Kaštel houses the carpentry and blacksmithing workshops, while the second floor houses the permanent exhibition, rooms for temporary exhibitions, and workshops.

(5) The Kažun Park [86] is a unique open-air museum located in the town of Vodnjan. It is a monument to the ancient art of building a *kažun*, a traditional Istrian dry-stone shelter, and shows the construction through four phases, from the foundation through the wall to the roof.

2.2. Methods

The research used several methods that enabled defining the problem, setting requirements, formulating conceptual solutions, and proposing guidelines for the detailed design of the implementation solution. Field research was conducted, which included observations, photography, and interviews with curators in the field, and the cyclical method of the creative process runs through the entire work.

2.2.1. Observation, Interviews, and Photography on Localities

As methods, interesting artifacts were observed, analyzed, and photographed, and notes were taken at individual locations. Museum curators were interviewed. The interview was not structured as a classic interview but rather a spontaneous conversation with the observation of objects from the museum's collection. Ethical approval was not needed since curators are museum employees who, due to the nature of their work, must be available to visitors with information. That is why no special informed consent was required. The information obtained during the conversation was recorded and used to learn specific knowledge, perspectives, opinions, and insights when designing the product. Three curators from the Pazin City Museum, the Ethnographic Museum of Buje, and the Ethnographic Museum of Istria participated in the conversations. Special permission was requested for photographing museum artifacts, which was obtained on the condition that no flash was used.

2.2.2. Cyclic Method of the Creative Process

In the process of research and design, the cyclical method of the creative process was used [87] with the application of other literature on design theory and creative process design [88–91].

The emphasis in the cyclical method of the creative process is on a cyclical (repetitive) process in all phases: (1) discovery of needs; (2) needs analysis; (3) determining the problem; (4) determination of criteria, goals, and requirements; (5) creation of several solutions (design concept); (6) feasibility analysis; (7) concept optimization; (8) choice of one solution; (9) communication of solution; (10) detailed development and prototyping;

and (11) satisfaction of needs, to verify a certain solution or conclusion. Such an approach to finding a solution focuses attention on the imaginary (potential) user.

This paper presents the results of phases 1–9 of the mentioned method.

When visualizing conceptual solutions of the product, computer programs AutoCAD® 2020, Autodesk Inc., SketchUp® 2022, Trimble Inc. and Enscape® 2022, Chaos were used.

3. Results and Discussion

The results are divided into two stages:

1. The first stage presents the results of photographed and analyzed inspiring artifacts and details of traditional material heritage collected at the observed localities during field research. The results of this group helped to define and implement the stages of the cyclical method of the creative process.
2. The second stage follows all stages of the cyclical method of the creative process, where it uses the results from the first stage to define requirements and design conceptual solutions.

3.1. Results of the Field Research

Localities, objects, and their details were recorded through photography, observation, and interviews. The results of photography provide visual material that can be used in the analysis and can serve as inspiration for the final product design. Field research collected various data that form a complete mosaic of the results obtained, structured in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of significant artifacts collected during field research for further inspiration and conceptual development.

Locality	Photographs	Description	Inspiration
(1) The Glagolitic Alley	 	Memorial of the Table of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Stone supports in the shape of truncated cones that support a round "vault", like the tabletop Stone Glagolitic Alphabet.	Circle (on the table top) Cylinder (table legs) Three supports (footing) Rough stone texture Alphabet forms (stone sculptures in the frontal plane)
	  	Memorial of the Istrian Demarcation, 20th century. Monumental stone pillars in the form of Glagolitic letters and details of a round table surrounded by stone chairs.	Circle (table top) Cylinder (entrance portal) Gathering around a round table Rough texture of stone
(2) The Buje Ethnographic Museum	 	Desk with metal legs. No information on the origin, but rich decoration points to belonging to a wealthy Venetian family; 17th century.	Decorations (table top) Carvings (table top and legs) Ornamentation (table top) Wood as the main material Form (legs in the shape of a Y, geometrical and plant ornaments on the table top)

Table 1. *Cont.*

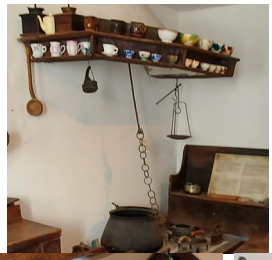
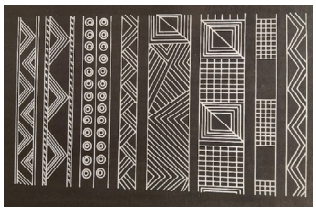
Locality	Photographs	Description	Inspiration
(2) The Buje Ethnographic Museum	 	Small wooden chest with simple wood carving details. No information on its origin; 18th century.	Wood carving decoration Wood as the main material Rectangular form (front leg, the whole shape) Structural joints
	 	Wooden chest. The wooden inlay reveals the owner's wealthier background, presumably a family of Venetian origin.	Decoration Marquetry—colorful pieces of wood of various shapes and stylized motifs Construction details Form (rectangular shape with square inlays filled with intarsia)
	 	Wooden chests decorated with woodcarvings of geometric and floral ornamentation. The chests belonged to middle-class Istrian families; 18th century.	Ornamentation Wood carving decorations Construction details Form (rectangular shape with prominent and decorated side legs)
	  	Grinding press or *mažina*. Massive stone base with a recess in the stone circle, a vertical shaft, and a wheel that crushed the olives. *Športa*, a rope bag, placed under a wooden press to squeeze out the oil.	Materials (wood, stone) Texture of the material (rope, stone) Simple forms circle (*športa*), cylinder (*mažina*)
	 	Jugs of various sizes, original Istrian pottery. Jugs from Rakalj (dark), Buzet (light), and from the Buje area.	Materials (ceramics, clay) Texture Functionality Simple forms
	   	Kitchen products made of metal Dishes, cutlery, furniture (chairs), *prijeklad*, dish holders, etc.	Material: wrought iron Simple forms on products (lines, circles, waves)

Table 1. *Cont.*

Locality	Photographs	Description	Inspiration
(3) Ethnographic Museum of Istria (4) Pazin City Museum		A chest of simple shape and form, for storing grain; made of boards of various widths, with tongue and groove joints, stacked vertically and horizontally, or joined together.	Wood carving decorations Wood as the main material Simple ornamentation Details on the lid, and incised line decorations on the front of the chest
	 	Various objects are used in grape processing and winemaking. Wooden sieve *(muljača)* for crushing grapes; 1930s. Wooden bucket *(brenta)* for transporting grapes; 1940s. Brinjani near Kringa.	Functionality of the products (simple storage) Wood and metal as the main materials Simplicity of form as the result of the functionality and structure Texture of the material and structure
	 	Distaff made of wood, richly decorated with ornaments; 19th century; Brinjani near Kringa.	Wood carving decorations Ornaments Geometric patterns—triangle, rhombus, rosettes, straight lines Functionality
	 	A yoke *(jaram)* for harnessing cattle to pull carts or plows. The shackles *(spone, pasture)* were placed on the animals' front legs to prevent them from moving too quickly. Objects made mostly of oak or ash.	Wood carving decorations Ornaments Geometric patterns
	  	Istrian wooden instruments, decorated with simple forms. *Dvojnice* Made by Alfonso Konović Jurićev Kal (Barban); 2010. *Šurle* made by Anton Peteh; Petešljari (Žminj); 1963.	Wood carving decorations Ornaments Geometric patterns Lines Dots Functionality (sound, gathering, dance)
	 	Istrian folk costumes. Women's cropped linen blouse *(stomanja)*, woolen overcoat *(krpet)*, decorated belt *(kanica)*. Woolen socks *(bičve)* with rich ornamentation. 1930s, Rakalj.	Ornaments Geometric patterns, floral patterns, lines, squares, rectangles, grids Decorative function

Table 1. *Cont.*

Locality	Photographs	Description	Inspiration
(3) Ethnographic Museum of Istria (4) Pazin City Museum	 	*Čentrin*, the Istrian version of lace. Tradition of rich embellishments and imaginative ornaments. 1935s, Rakalj.	Ornaments Geometric patterns floral patterns, lines, squares, rectangles, grids Decorative function
		Decorative motifs from burial urns, from the Pazin region (town Beram) from the Bronze Age. Linear ornamentation of simple expression.	Ornaments Geometric patterns, lines, squares, rectangles, circles, grids Decorative function
(5) The Kažun Park	 	*Kažun* Exterior and interior details. A small circular building with a domed roof, built without the use of binding material.	Simplicity of form Circle Drywall construction Stone as the main material Texture of the structure Functionality

3.2. Concept Development

Guided by the cyclical method of the creative process phases, the process of developing a conceptual solution is presented—from discovering the needs of the habits of a potential imaginary user, through setting requirements for product design, proposing conceptual solutions, and selecting a performance concept presented in a virtual 3D space.

To define the guidelines for initiating this development process, an analysis was conducted and the basic 5W questions (who, what, when, where, why) were asked, as shown in Figure 2.

To discover and analyze needs, websites of hotel accommodation in Istria and articles that deal with similar issues were searched. It was found that visitors/tourists, in addition to the natural beauty of Istria, notice the quality and equipment of rental accommodation. These accommodations are most often equipped with furniture according to world trends or in the style of a particular hotel brand. Unfortunately, cheaper accommodations often offer furniture purchased from a nearby showroom or a furniture manufacturer without any aesthetic identity. Such a global approach to hotel interior design or a simple, cheaper approach in apartments can cause visitors/tourists to feel a lack of authenticity in the space they are visiting.

Obranković [50] indicates that the design, interior equipment, and interesting accommodation architecture are key factors influencing the choice of a vacation space for the user/tourist and that they most often expect a combination of modern and traditional decoration. Users/tourists emphasize the importance of furniture made of wood and appreciate the natural and relaxing ambiance that wood provides. On the other hand, for property owners, the most important materials when furnishing and decorating the interior for rent are solid wood, followed by chipboard and fiberboard. When it comes to purchasing wood products, for owners of vacation properties, the most important thing is the quality of the product, followed by its design. The conclusion is that high-quality

interior furnishing with wood products significantly increases the value of real estate, and users become more aware of the diversity and originality of the interior [50].



Figure 2. Mind map with 5W questions (by author Nikola Lukež).

To meet the user's needs for newly designed furniture, it was also necessary to analyze the space and purpose of the most frequently used room in the accommodation—the living room. The living room is considered an (indoor) space in which people, since time immemorial, spend their free time, relaxing and socializing with other family members [92]. As today's generations mix their "free time" with "work time" using a laptop or computer, connecting the dining room and living room for the purpose of socializing, working, and resting, it is necessary to design appropriate furniture solutions that will provide enough space for storing, resting, dining, working, etc. Therefore, living rooms often have to satisfy different conditions, such as relaxation, entertainment, socializing, dining, or work, or to accommodate this incongruous combination of "quiet" and "noisy" activities [93,94].

3.3. Determining Requirements

To achieve the aim, it is necessary to consider various requirements, limitations, standards, and regulations. Defining requirements is therefore the most important phase in creating a concept. Each requirement is defined in detail in Table 2. All of them ultimately provide the main guidelines for shaping the product's conceptual design.

Table 2. Product design requirements.

Requirement	Detailed Description of the Requirement
Functional	- design multifunctional products that can meet various purposes, while rationally occupying space
	- combine multiple functions such as resting, socializing, intellectual work, dining, or playing
	- be suitable for furnishing small or medium-sized accommodation units with a living room of about 16 m^2 [95]
	- functional collection: desk with movable chair, coffee table, chest of drawers

Table 2. *Cont.*

Requirement	Detailed Description of the Requirement
Functional	Desk: writing, drawing, and working on a laptop for one person - square-shaped table top with a radius of the surface on one side of the table (semicircle) to apply a traditional heritage element
	Movable stool: sitting and storage (chest function)
	Coffee table/low table: serving and storage (TV remote controller, cup, book, etc.) - tray attachment (transferring food and drinks from the kitchen) that can also be used on the desk - easy to use, move, and relocate
	Chest of drawers: storage of personal and/or traditional items (souvenirs, brochures, books, etc.), TV sets. . .; open and closed parts (case with doors, drawer)
Visually/ aesthetically	-apply a good design that includes innovation, utility, aesthetics, comprehensibility, honesty, discretion, longevity, consistency in details, respect for the environment, and minimalist expression [96,97]
	- contain elements, motifs, materials, and details of Istrian cultural and rural heritage and combine contemporary and traditional expression
	- materials taken from the tradition and locality of Istria, Croatia: oak solid wood panel (HR); medium density fiberboard (MDF); metal (FE)
	- colors; surface treatment: MDF (RAL 6028 Pine Green); dull green color/coated with colored polyurethane varnish HR: natural texture, color, and shine of the solid/yellowish-brown color of natural wood, regular texture/final surface treatment with colorless vegetable-based oil (additionally emphasizing the contrast and enlivening the texture of oak wood). FE: black color/tone NCS S 9000-N, matt - non-reflective final coatings of treated surfaces (maximum 10 gloss units) 
	- use of metal (non-wooden materials)—visual dynamics and structural stability
	- symbolism of green in Istria—in the background of the coat of arms, where green, along with blue (sea and sky) represents the rich and lush vegetation of central Istria, the landscape, and nature [98]
	- ornamentation: applied elements and motifs from objects of Istrian ethnographic significance, simple geometric shapes and patterns (Table 1)
	- application of straight, curved, or intertwined lines, geometric shapes of similar motifs
	- wavelines *(valovnica)*: rhythmicity through regular and simple alternation and sequencing of square-shaped ornament elements and curved lines, the impression of moving and continuous movement
	- ornament as an integral part of the visual identity of the designed collection
Ergonomics	- Application of anthropological measurements of an adult user
	- use the average height of men and women from the five countries whose citizens account for the largest share of the total number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Istrian County [99]
	- as a guideline for further dimensioning, the total average height of men and women is 174.3 cm [100,101]
Social and psychological	- pleasant atmosphere and relaxation by choosing materials, colors, and shapes of products
	- "warm", non-aggressive, and calming materials and colors—a feeling of well-being in the interior
	- use of solid oak wood: aesthetic characteristics, positive impact on human health and well-being [102]; traditional building material in the Istrian region
	- use of colors: green—calmness, spiritual and physical relaxation, has a noble, calm, restorative effect, contributes to self-control and harmony and suggests rest [103,104]; the color of natural oak wood

Table 2. *Cont.*

Requirement	Detailed Description of the Requirement
Health and hygiene	- necessary hygiene maintenance due to frequent user changes
	- shape and material should avoid the ingress of dirt and various microorganisms into joints and connections
	- enable quick and easy cleaning of all surfaces
	- environmentally and health-friendly materials for surface treatment
	- recycling of materials must not cause environmental pollution.
Structural	- ensure stability, strength, durability and resistance to various loads (leaning, impacts. . .) while meeting current safety factors (valid editions of [105–112])
	- quick and easy assembly
	- perform structural joints according to professional rules and traditional expression—corner flat joint with dowels
	- apply modern fittings; drawer guides, door hinges, triple nuts and bolts with metric thread for mounting wooden and metal parts, and casters
	- installation of fittings according to the manufacturer's instructions to ensure full functionality of the product
Technical and production	- easily accessible materials—damage, and replacement of elements or parts of the product
	- the use of veneer pressings, lengthwise/widthwise/thickness glued panels, bent steamed wood, laminated wood, etc., is desirable
	- the technical solution depends on the production capabilities and the manufacturer's machinery and equipment
	- objective: application of modern machinery technology; production on CNC machines (milling), laser welding, bending of metal elements
Environmental and ecological	- rational use of biodegradable and/or recyclable materials
	- ecological solid wood with FSC and PEFC certification, panel materials (fiberboard), and metal (aluminum/steel)
	- ecologically controlled production in a facility compliant with the valid standard [113]
Economic	- higher price range of the collection: achieved through style, the use of rational combinations of materials, innovation, and construction complexity (while meeting a certain level of quality and safety, construction, and functional requirements)
	- availability, durability, and price of materials
	- complexity and cost-effectiveness of production, including overheads, delivery, and assembly costs

3.4. Conceptual Solutions

The route of the creative process of designing conceptual solutions for the living room furniture collection for accommodation intended for tourist purposes is presented (Figures 3–5). The process conceptually began with the design of the work table, the possible connection of a mobile chair as an integral part of the working table, a coffee table with a portable tray, and a chest of drawers/commode. The process of conceptualization begins with inspiration and continues with the creation of conceptual solutions through phase I—an initial idea based on inspiration; II—difficulty and complication in the creative process; III—functionality analysis; IV—optimization and refinement, up to the performance solutions shown in Section 3.7.

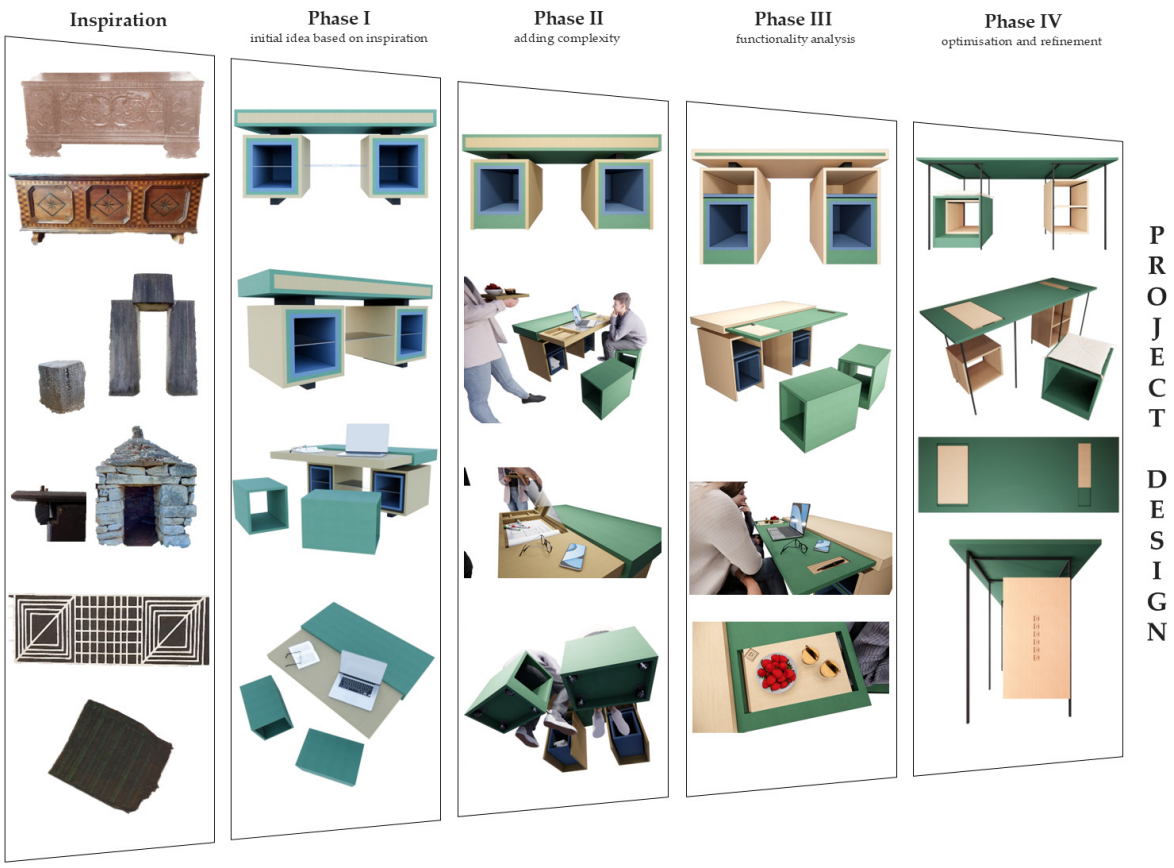


Figure 3. Conceptual design process—working desk with a movable stool (by author Nikola Lukež).

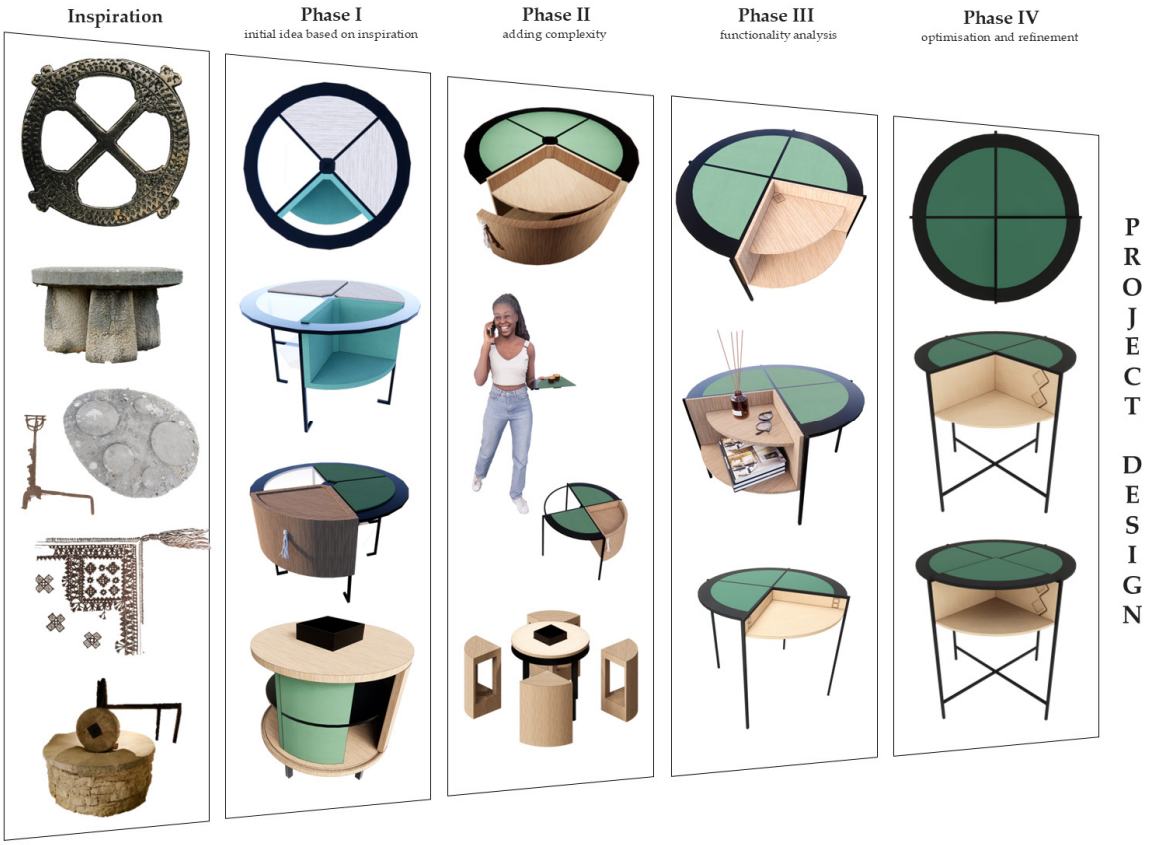


Figure 4. Conceptual design process—coffee table (by author Nikola Lukež).

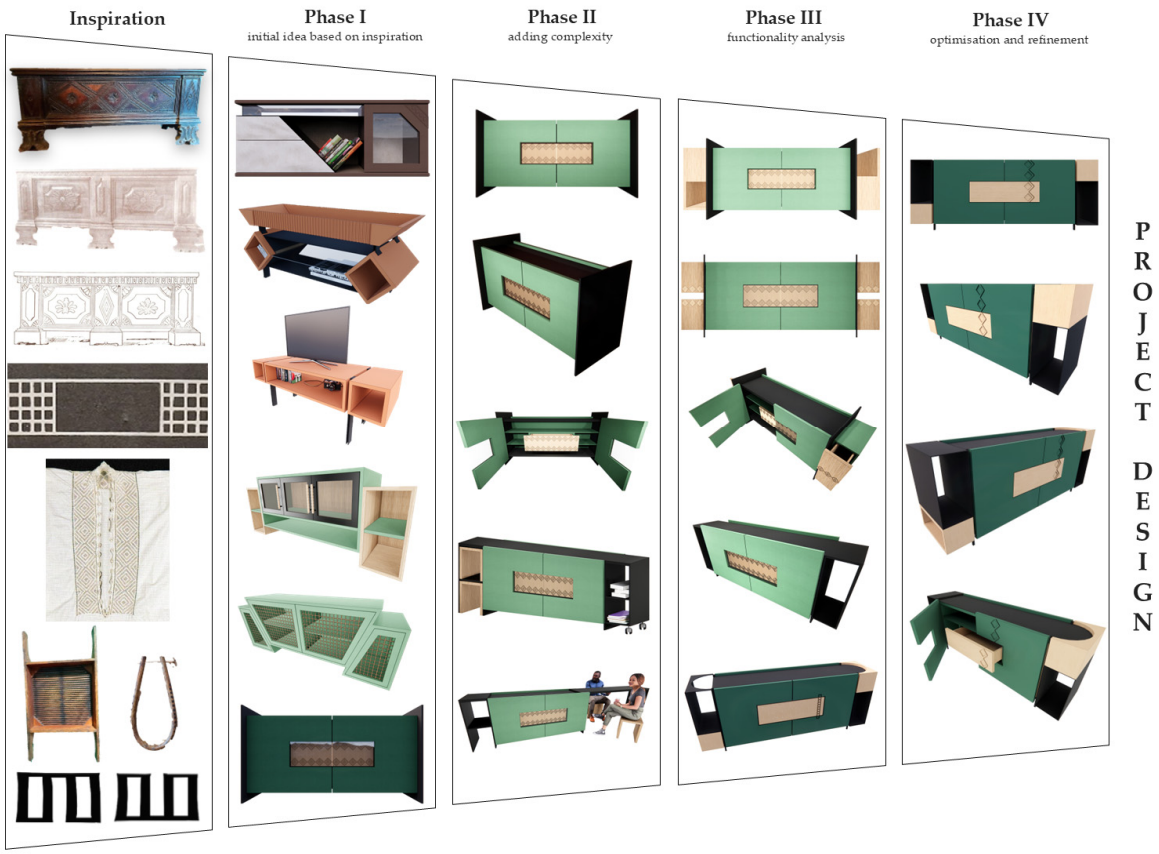


Figure 5. Conceptual design process—chest of drawers/commode (by author Nikola Lukež).

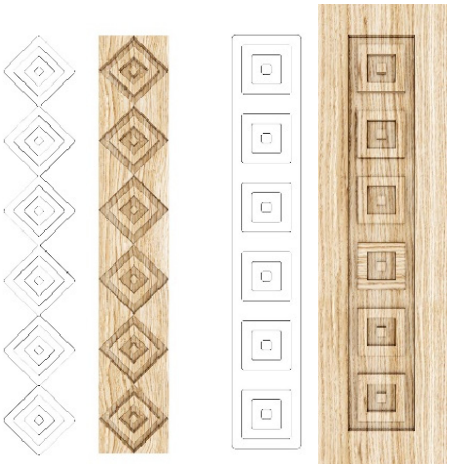
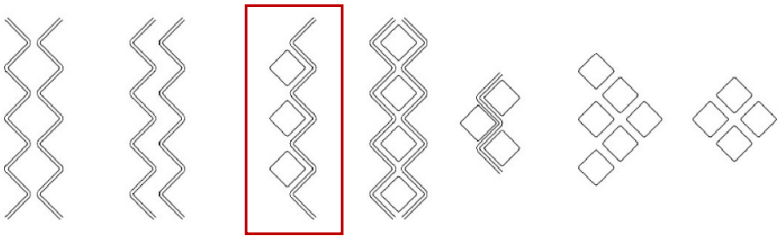
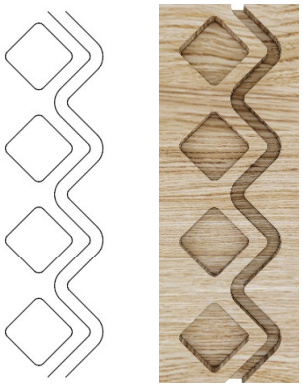
3.5. Ornamental Detail Development

Defining the materials and ornaments determined the main direction of further development of the entire collection. The materials are defined in the requirements (Table 2). Designed ornamentation, using identical materials and surface treatments, is one of the main semantic determinants of the collection. It should be emphasized that a designer will never "literally" take over an ornament (unless specifically requested to do so) but will supplement it with his own creative expression, taking care not to lose the original meaning of the inspiration, or rather the observed artifact. The conceptual expression of a good designer is seen in the knowledge of how to perceive a wider range of patterns and inspirations and shape them into a new expression that has a semantic link to cultural heritage.

As an example of inspiration by ornamentation, the process of artistic expression and formal ornamental simplification while retaining semantic expression is shown in Table 3. The ornament that runs through all the furniture elements forms the main link with the traditional culture of the region, connects the story into a unique experience, and provides identity and authenticity to the designed collection.

During the development of conceptual solutions, various ideas for ornaments emerged until their final refinement into an elegant and technologically feasible artistic design element.

Table 3. Overview of the development of ornamental expression.

Step	Shape/Ornament	Description
0		Inspiration: - motifs from urns and distaffs; - geometric shapes; - wavelines *(valovnica)*.
1		First concepts: - the presented ornament proposals do not meet the desired aesthetic criteria (rhythmicity); - difficult feasibility of using, e.g., the CNC machine due to the radius of the CNC machine milling cutter; - the possibility of breakage and falling out of small elements of the ornament; - rejected.
2		Re-analysis of shapes and implementation possibilities: - selected ornament marked in red frame; - combination of geometric shapes of square and wavy lines; - waveline *(valovnica)*—one of the most commonly used Istrian ornaments; - ornament dimensions 40 × 40 mm; - desired rhythm achieved; - further development.
3		Optimization: - emphasized rhythmicity; - reduced square dimensions to 20 × 20 mm; - it is possible to place a larger number of squares on furniture elements, together with the accompanying corrugation; - vertical direction of the ornament; - the depth of milling is 5 mm. - finalization.

3.6. Final Solutions

Table 4 shows an overview of the design solutions of the furniture collection intended for the living rooms of the tourist accommodation, with brief descriptions and approximate dimensions of each element.

Table 4. Overview of the collection's final design solutions.

Element	Inspiration	Presentation	Description
Work desk with movable stool	*Muljača Prijeklad*		Consists of a table top, a cutlery tray, a drawer, a shelf and a movable stool. Dimensions: 1520 × 600 × 750 mm.
Coffee table	*Škancija*		Consists of an upper plate with three fixed sections and a fourth movable insert (tray). Metal base made of square profiles. Dimensions: 660 × 660 × 600 mm.
Chest of drawers/ commode	Istrian wooden chests, Lace *čentrin*		Consists of a corpus, left and right sides, dividers, drawers, and side shelves. Dimensions: 1320 × 400 × 500 mm.

3.7. Visual Presentation

The designed final implementation solutions are connected into a collection in an imaginary interior (Figure 6). Their implementation in the living room space enables a complete and striking visual experience of the products and emphasizes their purpose and method of use.

Istrian heritage, like the heritage of most places around the world, is indigenous, preserved in individual fragments, influenced by other cultures that inhabited and changed the local expression but remained distinctive, with identified indigenous elements that can be integrated into the interiors of tourist accommodations.

This work aims to provide an example of how the application of rural heritage does not necessarily have to be at the level of literal copying of traditional ornamentation, which in today's modern society is neither functionally appropriate, nor technologically justified, nor visually meaningful, nor does it support sustainable design. Contemporary design must be aligned with restoration and preservation in a way that does not change or deface existing material and immaterial artifacts but symbolically shapes them into a clear visual message that the user can recognize at a semantic level in the new product, starting from the visual ornamentation, materials used, processing, function, or socio-historical connotation.



Figure 6. Rendered images displaying a living room equipped with designed furniture (by author Nikola Lukež).

From a design perspective, it is necessary to investigate the relative effects of different dimensions of traditional cultural elements on customer satisfaction with the offered product range in the interior [114], as well as key design details that attract attention to thoroughly investigate and evaluate consumer preferences and the visual appeal of contemporary furniture in the rural expression of the observed locality [115]. At the same time, the needs and habits of new generations of tourists would be re-examined to find new contemporary solutions, identify important cultural elements, and assess the impact on user satisfaction with the products offered (interior furnishings) [114].

The visual aesthetics of a product are often unfortunately influenced by individual taste. In further research and design development, the semantics of the product, local expressions, shape grammar [116], and indigenous ornamentation should be considered. If not interpreted in a contemporary and conceptual way, the dangers in the realization of a "heritage" furniture collection lie in the existence and application of heritage that threatens literal copying and saturation with ornamentation and excessive semantics [117], which ultimately creates kitsch. At the same time, the great will and readiness of the local population involved in tourism to accept contemporary expressions in their own interiors are needed. In addition to the aesthetic expression, the technological (production) aspect is also important, which, if not properly applied, can damage the aesthetics and affect the misunderstanding of the contextual significance of the local expression [118]. For example, in the further development process when optimizing the product, technological solutions can be in material variants (oak, maple, or other local wood), technology such as CNC or laser technology [119], or prototyping [120] or similar.

Concerning sustainable design, it is necessary to highlight the importance of all phases of the design process together with the development of ecological sustainability to the final product solution [121], additionally to appropriately evaluate environmental, economic, and social characteristics [122], in order to design a sustainable furniture in a rural interior.

Today, tourism is no longer just "sun, sea, and coast", and therefore, without regional characteristics, that is, without the spiritual atmosphere of traditional space and culture, the aforementioned offer is insufficient. Tourists cannot be attracted by the impersonal interior equipment of accommodation that mirrors current global world trends [123]. Changed behavioral habits of tourists that occurred due to COVID-19 and how tourists want to spend their free time [124] should be re-considered as well. The involvement of the public sector in ensuring the high quality of life of local communities is inevitable. Through the implementation of various tourism policy measures, local authorities take an active role in minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on destinations, which requires both a change in mentality and policy [125]. Mohsen and Matarneh [51] emphasize the importance of applying tools and recommendations to guide decision making; encourage innovation; and ultimately create interior spaces that contribute positively to environmental preservation, economic efficiency, and social well-being. As UNEP and WTO emphasized [12], in seeking more sustainable tourism, governments must recognize the different positions and motivations of these stakeholders and work with them to achieve common goals Additionally, governments should provide an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, tourists, and other stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues. However, it is important to guard against the falsification and degradation of culture and heritage in the way they are promoted to tourists [12].

To meet the parameters of sustainable tourism and sustainable design practice, the development of the product presented in this paper respects the sequence of important factors that influence good design and sustainable environment, production, and the needs and well-being of users. Regarding the design process, it is worth remembering that industrial design is a strategic problem-solving process that drives innovation, builds business success, and leads to a better quality of life through innovative products, systems, services, and experiences [126]. Industrial designers create and develop concepts and specifications that optimize the function, value, and aesthetics of products, environments, systems, and services for the benefit of user, industry, and society [127]. Producing a new product depends on how, where, and by whom it may be used, additionally making the user closer to more convenience, calmness, enjoyment, and efficiency [128]. Today's designers struggle with many demands in order to design a sustainable and high-quality user-centered product, and they must be well-informed about all novelties, practices, and parameters. It is impossible to do this independently, and an interdisciplinary and holistic approach full of compromise and responsibility is necessary. Delanay et al. [121] point out that product design has been found to greatly influence the sustainability of new product development and offers a holistic view of environmental sustainability throughout the design process. Muhammad Suandi et al. [122] highlighted the importance of choosing the right sustainability characteristics, which align with the triple bottom line model to enhance product performance, such as material use, product structure, human well-being, and product costing. In her thesis, Seyajah [128] presented a new method for formulating a Sustainable Design Index that integrates modularity and reconfigurability, structural design matrix, axiomatic design, and computer-aided design (CAD) to assist designers in early decision making in furniture design. In all of the above, it is necessary to provide a user-centered design approach all the time so that the product is meaningful and useful.

The results presented in this research strive to contribute to a sustainable design practice by introducing methodological control of the development process at the very beginning of the design and following and applying the stated requirements (Table 2), which include not only visual aesthetics but also consider functional, structural, ergonomic, price, ecological-environmental, technological-production, social-psychological, and hygienic-health parameters. Specifically, a holistic and interdisciplinary approach is applied from the

very beginning of the design process; experts from different fields are included as important stakeholders such as designers, wood technologists, archaeologists, art historians, museum curators, ergonomics, craftsmen, and manufacturers; the values of cultural heritage and rural landscape are evaluated and protected as the main inspiration; modern technology is applied during production to improve the performance of the product; the behavior of new generations of tourists is analyzed and respected; and the 6R (reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, redesign, and remanufacture) is kept in mind.

Ultimately, the entire product development process focuses on sustainable design, process, and methodology, which cyclically returns the process to the previous stage if a certain segment is not respected according to the given requirements.

This paper aims to encourage a new culture and trend in furnishing the spaces of tourist accommodation by region, with the initial proposal to design the furniture in the most frequently used living room. It is necessary to enable the tourist to feel connected to the space and its furnishings with furniture that reflects the local culture. This concept can be applied to numerous other regions and countries that foster rural tourism, which, by applying local heritage, could strengthen the local cultural heritage in the interiors of accommodation units to create a complete tourist experience.

The idea of the article is to stimulate the interest of architects, designers, local authorities, landlords, property owners, and manufacturers to use this model of furnishing facilities to bring tourists closer to the local community through an authentic atmosphere in the interior of the facilities in which they stay. This concept of furniture design and interior furnishing could stimulate the interest of visitors (also the local population) in learning about their culture and heritage. In this way, the tourist would be introduced to the local tradition, customs, cultural heritage, folklore, or gastronomy, and through interior design, would be provided with a comprehensive sense of belonging to the local community.

In future research, it is necessary to investigate whether the application of semantic elements of heritage in furniture and interior design can provide tourists with a sense of connection with the location where they stay and, at the same time, satisfy their wishes and expectations. It is necessary to examine potential users/guests of rural Istrian localities; how they perceive the designed collection; whether the interrelationship and semantics of heritage and modernity are sufficiently prominent; and whether the concepts encourage them to experience the locality and, if so, determine in what way they are encouraged.

4. Conclusions

Each region, place, and location have their values that need to be explored, nurtured, and passed on to future generations. This research aims to contribute to the preservation of traditional heritage elements by the modernization of furniture with a specific function in tourist facilities.

This research shows how a small geographical area like Istria, although historically intertwined with various cultural changes and economic and social upheavals, still manages to preserve and transmit a modest wealth of cultural and rural heritage, which can also serve as inspiration for contemporary sustainable furniture design in tourist interiors of rural areas of Istria.

As a conclusion, the following values and future challenges can be highlighted:

- The paper provides an example of the development of a conceptual design for contemporary furniture that uses indigenous elements of Istrian rural heritage and sustainable materials to furnish tourist accommodation.
- The challenge in the process of designing this type of product is in the dosage of aesthetics, conceptual expression, semantics, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage, i.e., the way of connecting the past and the present in a newly designed furniture

collection, where the requirements must be met, and the experience of the location must be realized.

- This model of analyzing the value of cultural heritage and implementing it into conceptual solutions is proposed to be used in tourism promotion and branding the region's rural identity. Furnishing tourist accommodation with indigenous furniture design inspired by local semantics can highlight the values of unique local history and tradition.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research should go towards confirming the designed concept of the proposed range, in terms of user applicability and suitability, functionality, ornamental and visual aesthetics, technological feasibility, ecological materials and sustainability, economic parameters and marketing activities, social-psychological suitability, etc., as well as its applications in real environments.

Specifically, it is proposed to

- Raise awareness of the importance of heritage-inspired furniture design among designers, architects, wood engineers, tourism accommodation owners, investors, and many other professionals involved in the design of sustainable furniture for the interior design of tourism accommodation.
- Educate and encourage designers and architects to integrate cultural heritage, ornaments, design elements, and sustainable materials in their concepts as a valuable inspirational element in creative design and thus contribute to the recognition of rural landscapes at a semantic level, as well as organize trips to rural areas and visits to museums and cultural sites to obtain new inspirations and start the planned design process.
- Establish stakeholders during the design process so that the design is ultimately good, useful, and of high quality (e.g., connect designers, design managers, design engineers, architects, sustainability experts, manufacturers, users, art historians, tourism professionals, and many others), as well as conduct workshops, seminars, and training sessions to educate stakeholders.
- Present such concepts to the tourist community, local authorities, and owners of tourist accommodation to adopt such design concepts. Cross-disciplinary collaboration can lead to more holistic and sustainable design solutions.
- Be included in local tenders for new furnishing tourist accommodation concepts that support the application of rural heritage elements in furniture design.
- Support local tourist accommodation owners with incentives at the local and central government level, which would facilitate the application of such design concepts in furnishing. Regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of design concepts and its implementation.
- Educate and encourage furniture manufacturers to apply and produce such designed furniture collections for tourist purposes while being aware of sustainable production chain, culture heritage, LCA, and other economic benefits.
- Develop and disseminate case studies and best practices that demonstrate successful applications of design concepts while evaluating user/tourist satisfaction. By applying heritage elements in the design of furniture and interiors, tourists must be provided with an experience of connection with the location in which they are staying that simultaneously satisfies their wishes and expectations.

We hope that this work will encourage architects, designers, local authorities, landowners, property owners, and manufacturers, as well as the academic community, to research, develop, and apply design principles and authentic heritage elements, such as materials, se-

mantics, and ornamentation of the local area, in the development of furniture for furnishing the interiors of tourist accommodation facilities in certain regions.

Such concepts will require the support of local authorities, politicians, and economic entities, who systematically need to change the ways of rural values branding to achieve a holistic approach to the tourism offer. This would enable a comprehensive experience of a sustainable and healthy local environment in a particular tourist destination and achieve the well-being and relaxation of users in rural interiors.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, N.L., D.D. and Z.V.; methodology, D.D. and N.L.; software, N.L.; formal analysis, N.L. and D.D.; investigation, N.L.; resources, N.L.; data curation, N.L. and D.D.; writing—original draft preparation, N.L. and D.D.; writing—review and editing, D.D., N.L. and Z.V.; visualization, N.L.; supervision, D.D. and Z.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are not publicly available. Photographs, recordings, digitalized fieldnotes, visualizations, and interview transcripts can only be accessed by the authors.

Acknowledgments: We would like to kindly thank the curators in the museums of the researched locations/villages who shared their knowledge and from whom we learned a lot about Croatian and Istrian Heritage.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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