



Impact of gastronomic experience on the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination

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Abstract

Although the attractiveness of the destination is the primary factor that influences the choice of travel destination, in recent times, the tourist experience and the experience of tourists are also greatly influenced by the gastronomic offer. In addition to the fact that tourists want to spend their vacation in a pleasant and safe environment, the experience they gain by consuming the authentic gastronomic specialties of a certain area is also very important for them. So, it can be pointed out that food also has an important influence on the satisfaction of tourists. Therefore, the authors of this paper analyze the gastronomic experience of tourists on the example of Continental Croatia, on whose territory there are already profiled tourist destinations with a developed gastronomic offer. Examining the attitudes of tourists about the indicators that describe the gastronomic experience based on well-founded research and studies, the authors of the study found that tourists who stayed in the area of Continental Croatia show a high degree of satisfaction with the gastronomic experience. It has also been proven that previous gastronomic experience is positively related to the destination image of Continental Croatia.

Keywords: gastronomic experience, tourism, destinations, Continental Croatia.

1. Introduction

Food consuming is one of the basic needs of every living being, but also a part of culture, history and tradition. Food is also an important element of every journey, bearing in mind that tourists want to try something new and unusual during it (Janković et al., 2020). From the aspect of tourism, food is indispensable segment of the destination offer (Kanjeluk et al., 2017), which, in addition to other elements, can contribute to the creation of greater value and an authentic experience for tourists (Vuksanović, et al., 2016). Also, the gastronomic offer of the destination can increase the value of the tourist product, but it is also used as a strategic tool for creating a positive image of the destination (Vuksanović et al., 2019).

In recent times, food-related tourism represents a specific and growing market segment when it comes to special forms of tourism (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019; Rangus et al., 2023) because of the fact that 15% of tourists stay in destinations precisely because of the gastronomic offer (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Also, 25% of travel budget, tourists spent on food and beverages (World Food Travel Association, 2023). It is quite certain that gastronomy, which is specific to a certain climate, can be used to create a completely new tourist product with a focus on hedonism, getting to know new tastes and cultures, all with the aim of giving tourists an unforgettable experience. Therefore, the combination of gastronomy and tourism is a useful tool for creating numerous advantages for those destinations, which may not be rich in attractive resources, but whose cuisine and way of preparing food is authentic enough to attract the interest of tourist demand. Accordingly, the primary advantages of the development of food-related tourism is development of the rural economy and rural tourism, the organization of gastronomic festivals, fairs and various food and beverage presentations (Povey, 2011). Tourists spend significant funds on food during their holiday, which affects the development of the local economy and other economic activities. The gastronomy of a certain area can influence on the destination's image, bearing in mind that visitors devote considerable attention to enjoying food, especially when it comes to cuisine that is unfamiliar and exotic to them, which further influences the creation of a unique experience. Authentic food represents the identity of a

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tourist destination that can attract a large number of tourists because food is part of the cultural identity of a nation, thus each region or country has its own range of authentic foods (Janković et al., 2020). Destination image is often based on the perceptions, impressions and beliefs of tourists which is why each destination tends to use its comparative advantages in order to position itself better in the minds of tourists and on the tourist market. In this sense, in addition to basic resources, very often the gastronomic offer is the element that can differentiate one destination from others.

The influence of the gastronomic experience of tourists on the creation of the image of the destination on the example of Continental Croatia is research subject in this paper. The research area is defined based on the existence of objective reasons that this part of the Republic of Croatia has a rich gastronomic offer, which can contribute not only to creating an image, but also to improving the quality of the existing tourist offer. Continental Croatia has a rich and unique gastronomic offer, which is based on tradition with elements added from the cuisines of the surrounding countries, but is mainly based on the use of meat, aromatic herbs, vegetables, mushrooms, fish, etc., in the preparation of gastronomic specialties (Alkier & Milojić, 2021). In addition to food, wines made from quality grapes are consumed in this part of Croatia, but also various types of brandy (Dрпиć & Vukman, 2014). The gastronomic offer formed in this way is a good prerequisite for creating a unique offer for tourists, who expect an authentic experience during their stay in the destination but are also hedonists when it comes to food. For the market segment defined in this way, in addition to the quality of the food and beverage offer, an adequate plan of marketing activities is also needed in order for the area of Continental Croatia to be recognized by tourists as an attractive gastronomic tourism destination with an adequate visual experience of what awaits tourists during their visit.

2. Literature review

Gastronomic tourism

Gastronomic tourism enables the destination to market its gastronomic products through different types of activities and contents for tourists, enabling them to get to know a wide range of tastes, customs, cultures, ways of doing business, etc. (Hall & Mitchell, 2007; Nesterchuk, 2020; Čavić & Mandarić, 2021; Dixit & Prayag, 2022). On the other hand, it has been noticed that tourists increasingly observe travel as a as an opportunity to consume the cuisine of a certain area (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019), because gastronomy is one of the basic aspects of the culture of everyday life of the destination they are staying in (Van Westering, 1999; Moulin, 2000). The rich gastronomic offer of a certain area can be the initial impulse for the development of tourism in a certain place, bearing in mind that food is an important segment of the tourist experience today. Many destinations have recognized the importance of gastronomy as an important segment of the tourist offer and use it as a means of differentiation in relation to the competition (Okumus et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2011).

In the literature, the concept of gastronomic tourism is interpreted in different ways, where different terms are also used to describe tourist journeys motivated by a gastronomic experience, like culinary tourism, tasting tourism or food tourism (Sio et al. al., 2021). Among other things, this form of tourism implies visits by tourists to a certain place, where food is produced, presented and sold, whether it is at events or in certain facilities in order to consume a certain type of food that is authentic to a certain area (Pamukçu et al., 2021). The term gastronomic tourism can be interpreted much more broadly, bearing in mind that tourists consume food in different facilities, places, and circumstances during their holiday. Therefore, some authors point out that this form of tourism represents a journey to a certain place during which the tourist can visit local households where food is produced, gastronomic events, food and beverage fairs, tastings, and demonstrations of food production (Lee et al., 2015; Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021). The preferences of tourists when it comes to gastronomic tourism can be different, which indicates a wide spectrum of ways of consuming food during the holiday, from basic nutrition in restaurants and other facilities where food is served to planning and adapting the travel plan to the gastronomic experience (Hall & Sharples, 2003).

According to Nesterchuk et al. (2021), the primary difference between gastronomic and other forms of tourism is the fact that this type of tourism is based on the concept of getting to know, research, tasting and enjoying the culture of gastronomy of a certain country, area, region, or place. Starting precisely from the aspect of experience, Smith and Xiao (2008) define this term as any journey through which the tourist enjoys and acquires knowledge about local gastronomic products and thus experiences different experiences in contact with food. Some authors point out that gastronomic tourism is actually a subcategory of cultural tourism (Lin et al., 2021; Zvirbule et al., 2023), bearing in mind that Long (2004) believes that this form of tourism allows tourists to get to know the culture and traditions of a certain place through the consumption of food. destinations. This fact can be explained by the fact that through the consumption of food and different tastes, tourists learn about different cultures, accumulate knowledge, and gain an authentic experience (Gheorghe et al., 2015). In accordance with the previous researches, it is evident that this form of tourism is a complex category, which implies a combination of various aspects of the tourist experience through the consumption of food, contributing to the economic revitalization of destinations and differentiating the tourist offer with the aim of achieving competitiveness on the gastronomic tourism market.

Destination image

A tourist destination represents a symbiosis of natural and anthropogenic resources of an area, which as such has the necessary preconditions for the development of tourism, but is also an important segment of the entire social, socio-cultural and economic development of a place. The existence of resources is a key prerequisite, but it is necessary to use them for the purpose of developing an attractive tourist offer and achieving competitiveness on the tourist market (Pavlović et al., 2023). An important segment in the analysis of the very concept of a tourist destination is the image, that is, the way in which tourists experience and perceive a certain tourist place. The analysis of the destination image from the perspective of tourists is certainly an important segment of tourism studies in order to understand not only more precisely the way of image formation, but also the process of choosing a destination, the motivation of tourists and their future behavior (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Wu & Shimizu, 2020; Jeong & Kim, 2020). This term is the subject of research in studies in the field of tourism more intensively represented since the 1970s (Alahakoon, et al., 2021), which we can further connect with the trend of mass tourism and the appearance of new destinations on the tourist market with a pronounced impact on competitive relations between destinations. Such circumstances made it necessary to identify the key elements of the tourist offer, which can make one destination different from the others and improve its image in the minds of tourists.

A certain number of authors define the destination image as the totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and memories about a certain place, which are accumulated in a certain time (Crompton, 1979; Kim & Richardons, 2003). The destination image influences the destination selection, the behavior during the holiday as well as the level of satisfaction and experience of tourists (Jenkins, 1999). A very important aspect of the interpretation of the concept of destination image also refers to the elements and factors on which tourists form attitudes and opinions about a certain destination, or rather on the basis of which the image of the destination is formed. Therefore, it is important to point out that the destination image is the result of evaluating certain attributes, that is, the elements of the tourist destination's offer (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Chen, 2016). Destination image can also be interpreted as a combination of positive and negative perceptions, based on which tourists make a choice of a certain destination among several different alternatives (Carballo et al., 2015). Such an aspect of the analysis of the term destination image implies that destinations must use their comparative advantages to build such an image, which will be recognizable on the market and make it easier for tourists to make a decision about visiting and creating loyalty in the future. Destination image is a relatively complex concept, taking into account the process of its formation, which indicates the necessity of analyzing its key components: cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component refers to a set of different beliefs and attitudes about the tourist destination, which are based on facts collected from different choices over time and at the same time represents the perceived image (reality) of the tourist population. The affective or emotional component implies the values of the destination according to what is the object of interest of tourists and is based on personal feelings and comparing the image with the needs of tourists. The conative component is related to the activity, i.e., the concrete decision to visit a certain destination and is based on the assessment of the first two components (Popesku, 2016).

The formation of the destination image is a continuous and dynamic process because the tourist's image of the destination is formed based on the various sources of information, respectively internal feelings and motives, factors of the external environment as well as various means of communication, which can influence the tourist to have a more or less positive attitude towards the destination (Hung et al., 2012). Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) point out that different sources of information in synergy with personal factors explain the formation of the mentioned components and the image that tourists have of the destination, which further provides a fundamental basis for examining tourist behavior, motivation, repeat visits and loyalty. It is certainly important to point out that the analysis of the destination image should be approached at different stages of making the decision about the journey, and the journey itself, bearing in mind that the destination image can change due to the existence of subjective feelings until the formation of the final experience based on the consumption of services and other contents for tourists.

Gastronomic experience and destination image

Tourist experience is very important category in tourism research (Berbeka, 2022). The aspect of experience is a very complex concept, especially in tourism, bearing in mind that the primary focus of tourism development is actually the delivery of an appropriate experience, which will influence the memory of staying on a holiday in a certain destination in the minds of tourists (Manhas et al., 2016). Tourist experience can have positive and/or negative impact on tourist satisfaction but also on the most important aspects of destination development (competitiveness, image, loyalty) (Martins, 2016). Tourists experience and perceive the attributes of the offer in different ways, which affects their complete impression of their stay in the destination. One of the essential elements in forming the experience of tourists is gastronomy, which enables them to get to know different cultures, connect with people and places (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Şahin and Kılıçlar (2023) point out that the gastronomic experience is a tangible way of transmitting the cultural heritage and culture of the cuisine of the destination, as a result of which gastronomy becomes an integral element of the destination's offer, which is especially interesting for tourists, who are looking for variety. Also, gastronomic identity has a great influence on the initiation of travel and on tourist consumption (Žaper, 2014).

The gastronomic experience is not exclusively based on consuming food from different climates, but combines a wide range of activities related to food during the journey: visiting restaurants, food festivals, factories and households where food is produced, markets, education related to food, shopping for food in the form of souvenirs, participation in cooking, etc. (Kyriakaki et al., 2013; Park et al., 2023). Gastronomy is a fundamental segment of the tourist experience which was proven by Antón et al. (2019) and also that the food authenticity a certain destination has a greater impact on the experience of tourists, who are looking for authentic experiences. The acquired gastronomic experience can have a far-reaching impact on the destination image and its position on the market if the gastronomic offer is adequately implemented in the overall tourist offer. Many tourist destinations such as Italy, Greece, France or Spain are profiled as gastronomic tourism destinations and one of the first associations with these destinations is precisely the local cuisine. By highlighting gastronomy as an important segment of the tourist offer, these destinations managed to build an image of attractive destinations, which is why today they are among the most visited at the international level. According to Dragin et al. (2018), presentation of domestic gastronomic products is an opportunity for defining the strategy needed to build the image and brand.

Certain studies have indicated that a positive food experience affects the destination image on the tourist market. Using the example of the city of Jeonju (South Korea), Carpio et al. (2021) found a positive influence of satisfaction with local food, the perceived quality of the destination's image and the expectations of tourists on the overall tourist experience. Dealing with the analysis of this subject in the case of gastronomic events and their influence on destination image, Folgado-Fernández et al. (2017) also identified a positive influence of the gastronomic experience on the loyalty of visitors. Similar conclusions were reached by Lu and Hu (2021) analyzing the connection between image, experience, and perceived values in the case of Macao food tourists. In addition to influencing the destination's image, a positive gastronomic experience also affects the creation of an emotional bond between the tourist and the visited destination, as well as repeat visits, which has also been proven in certain studies (Tsai, 2016; Baltescu, 2016; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Hsu & Scott, 2020). In addition to the variety, taste and authenticity of the local cuisine, the image of the destination is also influenced by the visual presentation of the gastronomic specialties. Li et al. (2020) pointed out that short videos about food as well as the description of prepared dishes shown in the videos influence the greater interest of tourists in the destination, which further positively reflects on the destination image. Also, Madaleno et al. (2019) point out that the previous experience related to the gastronomic offer of the destination depresses the image and repeat visits of the destination. The authors pointed out that the attributes of local products, personality traits related to food as well as the motivation to consume food during a visit to the destination are important factors that influence the future intentions of tourists. Hall and Sharples (2003) state that the creation of a destination's image can be based on the diversity of food and tastes if the cuisine of a certain area differs significantly from other regions, which gives the destination the opportunity to develop tourist loyalty in addition to its identity. A study about the food image of Italy, France and Thailand proves that food can influence the image of a destination. The results, reached by the authors, indicate that Italy has the most favorable food image and that such an image affects future visits by tourists (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010).

A similar study was conducted by Okumus et al. (2007) on the example of Hong Kong and Turkey. The author's key conclusions refer to the fact that Hong Kong pays much more attention to food promotion and positioning as a gastronomic tourism destination compared to Turkey, as well as focusing on the placement of both domestic and international cuisine, while Turkey highlights the elements of traditional cuisine. The image of the destination does not have to be based exclusively on the fundamental elements of the tourist offer, but also on food, which does not only mean satisfying basic needs, but also getting to know the cultural and other values of the destination. Using local cuisine as a means of differentiating the destination, it is possible to develop a tourist product, which will enable the destination to build a recognizable image despite the lack of attractive attributes of the offer. The acquired gastronomic experience, especially if it is positive, can influence tourists to recommend the destination and/or visit it again, which will also strengthen its position on the tourist market. In accordance with the defined research subject, the authors set up and tested the accuracy of the following hypotheses:

H1: Previous gastronomic experience affects the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination.

H2: The gastronomic offer of Continental Croatia has a positive effect on its image as a tourist destination.

H3: The gastronomic experience of tourists, gained during their stay on the territory of Continental Croatia, has a positive effect on its image as a tourist destination.

3. Research methodology

The examination of the attitudes of tourists about the acquired gastronomic experience during their stay in the destinations of Continental Croatia, which is recognized as an area with a rich and varied gastronomic offer, is the subject in this research. In order to realize the set goal, the authors, based on a review of previously published theoretical and empirical papers and studies, defined a survey questionnaire, which combined questions about the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education, professional activity, country of origin) and the destination they visited on the territory of Continental Croatia. The questions related to the subject of the research are defined in such a way that they examine whether the tourists had a gastronomic experience or not during the journey. In this part of the questionnaire, respondents expressed their degree of agreement with the following variables: previous experience (4 statements), destination image (6 statements), food, i.e., gastronomic offer (6 statements) and gastronomic experience (8 statements).

In order to achieve a certain degree of validity and relevance of the questions and defined statements, the survey questionnaire is based on relevant and previously published empirical studies on this subject (Ab Karim et al., 2010; Leong et al., 2017; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Mora et al., 2021). The survey was conducted electronically, that is, by distributing questionnaires to potential respondents via e-mail addresses and social networks. The target group of respondents consists of tourists who visited the area of Continental Croatia (107 respondents). After the primary data were collected, the authors processed them using the statistical program for research in social sciences, SPSS.25. In order to process the collected data, the authors used descriptive statistical analysis, measures of variability, correlation, and multiple linear regression. Descriptive statistics were used to describe basic characteristics of the respondents (frequency and percentages), while calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation showed the ratings of the statements, for which the respondents expressed their degree of agreement with them. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the measurement scale. Correlation and multiple linear regression were used in order to examine the connection between the analyzed variables, that is, the accuracy of the set hypotheses.

4. Research results and discussions

A total of 107 respondents, whose socio-demographic characteristics are shown statistically in table 1, participated in the examination of attitudes about the influence of the gastronomic experience on the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination. According to gender, 56.1% of female respondents and 43.9% of male respondents participated in the survey. Respondents aged 30-39 years (29%) have the highest percentage participation in the sample, followed by respondents belonging to the age group 40-49 years (23.4%). According to the level of education, 32.7% of respondents completed doctoral academic studies, and 29.9% master's studies, respectively the majority of the respondents are very educated. A far smaller number of respondents completed secondary and higher education. The largest number of respondents comes from: Serbia (34.6%), Croatia (30.8%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (17.8%). Under the option Other, the respondents declared that they came from Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of the respondents (n=107)

	n	%
Gender		
Female	60	56.1
Male	47	43.9
Age		
18-29	22	20.6
30-39	31	29.0
40-49	25	23.4
50-59	22	20.6
60 and more	7	6.5
Level of education		
High school graduate	8	7.5
Vocational degree	11	10.3
Bachelor's degree	21	19.6
Master's degree	32	29.9
PhD degree	35	32.7
Country of origin		
Serbia	37	34.6
Croatia	33	30.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	19	17.8
Germany	2	1.9
Hungary	2	1.9
Italy	2	1.9
Turkey	1	.9
Austria	1	.9
Other	10	9.3
Total	107	100.0

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 25.0

According to the data presented in table 2, it is evident that the value of the Cronbach Alpha's coefficient ranges from .843 for the factors that influence the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination to .897 for the gastronomic experience during the holiday of tourists in the territory of Continental Croatia. Given that the values are within the acceptable range and are greater than 0.7, it was concluded that a high consistency was established between the analyzed findings. The data, presented in table 2, indicate that the average marks range from 3.57 to 4.31. When it comes to past gastronomic experience, the lowest average score was registered for the statement related to learning more about the local culture through the food experience (M=3.80), while the highest average score was calculated for the statement about the respondent's enjoyment of the dining experience (M=4.17). In the case of factors that influence the image of Continental

Croatia as a destination, the highest average score was the attractive image (M=4.05), while the lowest average score was for good living and working conditions (M=3.64). Average marks in the case of the food image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination range from 3.57 for offering exotic cooking methods to 4.31 for offering quality food. The findings, which refer to the gastronomic experience during vacation in the territory of Continental Croatia, were marked with an average score of 3.83 for different flavors from the food of home the respondents to 4.27 for good taste.

Table 2. Descriptive statistical analysis

Past gastronomy experience	\bar{X}	SD
I had an enjoyable food experience.	4.17	.807
The food service provider provided for me good gastronomic experience.	4.09	.830
I learned more about the local culture through my dining experience here.	3.80	1.08
Tasting the local cuisine during the travel enhanced my experience.	4.09	.99
Total score ($\alpha=.852$)	4.04	.771
Factors affect the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination	\bar{X}	SD
Good infrastructures	3.75	.881
Well-trained staff in tourism	3.93	.898
Good living and working conditions	3.64	1.00
Communication of an appealing vision of the country	3.93	.959
Attractive image	4.05	.894
Total score ($\alpha=.843$)	3.89	.691
Image of Continental Croatia as tourist destination	\bar{X}	SD
Continental Croatia offers variety of foods	4.20	.863
Continental Croatia offers good quality of food	4.31	.794
Continental Croatia offers regionally produced food products	4.14	.852
Continental Croatia offers attractive food presentation	4.08	.859
Continental Croatia offers exotic cooking methods	3.57	1.12
Continental Croatia offers variety of foods	4.20	.863
Total score ($\alpha=.885$)	4.09	.714
Gastronomic experience during the holiday in Continental Croatia	\bar{X}	SD
Authentic food experience	4.01	.885
Learn about the local customs of the destination visited	3.86	.985
The food smells nice.	4.12	.798
The food has a nice visual appearance.	4.17	.783
The food has good taste.	4.27	.808
Fresh ingredients are used for preparation.	4.21	.786
Different flavours from the food of my home	3.79	1.08
Different from what I usually eat	3.83	1.14
Total score ($\alpha=.897$)	4.02	.699

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 25.0

In order to examine the influence of previous gastronomic experience, the gastronomic offer of Continental Croatia and the gastronomic experience during the stay on the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination, a multiple regression was applied. The preliminary analysis checked the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and the presence of extreme values. No major violation of assumptions was observed for the use of multiple regression. No multicollinearity was observed among the predictor variables (VIF<10, Tolerance>0.10 for all predictor variables). The model is statistically significant (F=37.59; p=0.00). Three predictor variables (previous gastronomic experience, gastronomic offer of Continental Croatia and gastronomic experience during the stay) explain 51.1% (R²=0.511) of the variation of the dependent variable, i.e., the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of multiple regression

Predictor (independent) variables	β	t	Sig.	Dependent variable: Image of the destination	
				95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Past gastronomy experience	0.558	4.916	0.000	0.389	0.914
Gastronomic offer of Continental Croatia	-0.014	-0.118	0.906	-0.219	0.194
Gastronomic experience during the stay	0.212	1.618	0.109	-0.031	0.307

P=0.00

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 25.0

Only one variable (previous gastronomic experience) contributes statistically significantly to the model $\beta=0.56$; p=0.00. Namely, previous gastronomic experience is positively related to the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination, thus confirming the first hypothesis. There is no statistically significant relationship between the other predictor variables and the dependent variable, so hypotheses 2 and 3 are rejected.

5. Conclusion

The focus of the research in this paper is aimed at examining the attitudes of tourists about the gastronomic experience, which they gained while staying in the area of Continental Croatia, as well as the influence of the gastronomic experience on the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination. Through the analysis of previous research, it was pointed out that the experience of local cuisine affects the image of the destination where tourists stay. The results of the research showed a high degree of agreement among respondents with the statements related to previous gastronomic experience, food image, gastronomic experience during the stay in the territory of Continental Croatia as well as factors that influence the image of the mentioned destination. The authors have set three hypotheses, of which only H1 was confirmed. By processing the collected data, the authors proved that previous gastronomic experience is positively related to the image of Continental Croatia as a tourist destination. The obtained results are consistent with the study by Hsu and Scott (2020), who proved that the experience with food has a positive effect on the destination image and the attachment of tourists to it. Some other authors also proved in their papers the connections between the gastronomic experience and the way tourists perceive the destination through the consumption of local cuisine (Marine-Roig et al., 2019; Ullah et al., 2020; Esparza Huamanchumo et al., 2023).

The theoretical contribution of the paper reflects in the sublimation of previous studies, which were published on this topic and which empirically proved the impact of the food experience on the destination image. The practical contribution of the paper is reflected in the possibility of using the obtained results as a guideline for improving the quality of gastronomy and the entire offer of Continental Croatia. Certain limitations of the research were observed during data collection and processing, related to: very small number of respondents, lack of information on which part of Continental Croatia the respondents stayed in, as well as lack of information on which specialties left a special impression on the respondents. Therefore, future research should examine which areas of Continental Croatia are most interesting for tourists from the aspect of gastronomic offer, as well as whether there is a possibility of branding destinations through more intensive promotional activities with an emphasis on gastronomy.

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