



An insight into the attitudes of enogastronomic tourists in Istria

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to investigate the rural tourism of Istria with a special emphasis on enogastronomy as a fundamental product of rural tourism in Istria. The paper consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical part, the focus is placed on defining and conceptualizing rural tourism. The empirical part of the research examined the habits, preferences, and motivation of enogastronomic tourists of Istria. The research was conducted with an online survey questionnaire constructed on the basis of relevant scientific literature and a model of motivation of enogastronomic tourists, which includes eight dimensions of tourists' motivation to consume local food and drinks. Descriptive statistical analysis methods were used in processing the collected data. The results of the research show that enogastronomic tourists who visit Istria are most attracted to the sensory experience while consuming food and drinks in the Istrian countryside, while they are least motivated to come to Istria by the aspect of social and ecological sustainability of the destination.

Keywords: rural tourism, enogastronomy, sustainable development, tourist motivation, Istria

1. Introduction

Food and wine have become extremely popular in forming the tourist experience, as well as an important segment of tourist attraction. Encouraging the opening of wineries, the development of agritourism and catering establishments contributes to the development and promotion of Istrian gastronomy. Istria is particularly prominent as a region extremely rich in rural benefits and specific enogastronomy, which has been attracting tourists from all over the world for years. Given the current trend of returning to nature and experiencing local authenticity, which is becoming more and more important to modern tourists, Istria as an ideal destination for rural tourism is becoming more and more attractive on the tourist market. In accordance with the growth of demand, there is a flourishing of the offer and an increase in the level of service quality in order to maintain a certain quality and individualization of the offer to the rural tourist. The paper conceptualizes the enogastronomic offer of Istria in function of the development of rural tourism.

2. Literature review

Rural tourism as a specific form of tourism that allows rest in a natural environment finds its place in professional and scientific discussions (Lane, 1994; Wilson et al., 2001; Saxena et al., 2007; Rosalina et al., 2021). Lane (1994) gives an overview of the development of tourism in rural areas and defines rural tourism as a discrete activity with different characteristics that can vary in intensity and by area. By distinguishing agrotourism and rural tourism, the author highlights their characteristics and examines the necessity of the specificity of the relationship between rural tourism and sustainable development. Saxena et al. (2007) introduce the concept of integrated rural tourism as tourism that is explicitly connected with the economic, social, cultural, natural and human structures of the locality where it takes place. Rosalina et al. (2021) provides a systematic review of definitions of rural tourism indicating the lack of consensus on a universal definition, despite attempts to formulate such definitions in earlier research (Lane, 1994). An analysis of rural tourism definitions reveals four aspects of rural tourism that include location, sustainable development, community characteristics and experience (Rosalina et al., 2021). Rural tourism is associated with the 'unique experience' that rural areas offer using their heritage and tradition (Kastenholz et al., 2012), which also affects the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists in rural

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tourism destinations (Long & Nguyen, 2018). Lane, & Kastenholz (2015) discuss next-generation rural tourism by analyzing research responses to rural tourism growth and change. In recent years, there has been an academic discussion about the importance of the role of local food in tourism (Kim & Eves, 2012). It finds its place in many destination marketing and development strategies not only from the aspect of usefulness to the tourism industry and visitors, but also from a social, economic and environmental aspect (Everett & Slocum, 2013). Stalmirska (2021) suggests a multiplicative understanding and discourse of the construction that local food has among the holders of the tourist offer presented through three dimensions: geographical, cultural and socio-economic. Local food is understood as a component of rural tourism. Vuksanović & Demirović Bajrami (2020) identify the uniqueness of food and cultural heritage, the quality and price of food, the nutritional and health benefits of food, and the affective image of food as factors influencing local food. They see local food as a tool for building the brand identity of the destination. Enogastronomy as a tourist resource has the ability to generate rural development and is an attractive factor for tourists in search of authenticity (Hindley et al., 2019). The rural tourism of Istria is also represented in the literature, from the aspect of its uniqueness and tourist perception (Ružić, 2012). The research of indicators of rural tourism made it possible to shape the development model of rural tourism (Rajko, 2013). The anthropogenic attraction basis in the offer of rural tourism in Istria (Vojnović, 2018) and rural identity and the possibility of its inclusion in the rural tourism product of Istria are also considered (Ružić and Medica, 2010). However, there is a lack of research on enogastronomy as a factor in the development of rural tourism and the sustainable development of Istria, as well as statements about the habits, preferences and motivations of Istrian enogastronomic tourists. When talking about the term rural tourism, it can be said that it includes different segments and types of tourist activities. It is a complex tourist concept that includes many stakeholders, as well as the possibilities of tourist development in less developed geographical regions. The concept of rural tourism is very complex and consists of many segments that must be covered. Lane (1994) points out that the concept of rural tourism is at first glance very easy to define and that only in some later stages of research can it be concluded that the concept is extremely complex and layered. Although there is no scientific consensus, Lane (1994) defines rural tourism as a complex and layered activity that is not limited exclusively to staying in a rural environment. Rural tourism includes other activities such as staying in nature, ecotourism, walking, hiking, horseback riding, climbing, adventure tourism, sports and health tourism, hunting and fishing, cultural and educational tourism, and ethnic tourism. Rural tourism is defined as a type of tourism that is associated with activities that take place outside urban areas and that are focused on the natural and cultural heritage of rural regions (Long & Nguyen, 2018). Kastenholz et al. (2012) emphasizes the current trends in the tourist market of increasing interest in authenticity and escape from urban environments. There is an increasing desire to escape from everyday life full of stress, environmental pollution, noise, and business obligations. Lane (1994) also claims that rural tourism strives for the sustainability of tourist destinations, while urban tourism generates negative consequences for the environment and the future of tourism. The strong correlation of rural tourism with sustainability was proven by An & Alacrón (2020) based on the analysis of a large number of studies on the sustainability of rural tourism. Although rural tourism has existed in the world since the end of the 19th century, the real awareness of rural tourism as one of the important specific forms of tourism arose in 1970, when there were significant changes in doctrines, laws and regulations related to the development of rural tourism at the global level (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Wilson et al., 2001).

Attitudes of tourists motivated by the enogastronomic and rural tourist offer registered significant changes over the years, which indicated a strong necessity of determining what are the exact motives that attract tourists to choose and visit a particular destination (Gračan et al., 2010; Alkier Radnić et al., 2011; Drpić et al., 2011; Alkier Radnić et al., 2012; Drpić et al., 2012; Milojica & Čapeta, 2018). Testa et al. (2019) focused in their research on determining what are the motives that influence culinary tourists to taste locally produced dishes, wines, and other drinks in rural tourist destinations. The first main motivational factor is social and ecological sustainability. This factor relates to the motives of solidarity with the local farmers, tendency to contribute to the economy of the destination, maintaining the agricultural scenery, consuming food products that did not travel far, preservation of the local environment and natural resources, etc. Second motive was health concern which implies health aspects, respectively local food having positive influence on tourist's health (its good nutritive values, being produced fresh and free of chemicals, etc.). Third factor were cultural experiences, which included increasing the knowledge about and understanding of the destination's local culture through food consumption, experiencing excitement and new experiences through food consumption, etc. Fourth factor was prestige. This element is connected with tourist's tendency to take photographs of local dishes to show them to their friends, interest in giving advice about their gastronomic experiences connected with local food, and to enrich intellectually. The fifth element was sensory appeal which implies local food tasting and smelling nice. Sixth factor included interpersonal relations (relevance of local food consumption in spending time with friends and family as well as meeting people with joint interests). In this particular research the authors determined the most important factor being social and ecological sustainability. Qeidari & Hosseini Kahnootj (2023) analyzed tourist's motives for visiting gastronomic rural destinations and their influence on their loyalty to the destination. The findings indicated that tourist's strongest motives for traveling to gastronomic rural destination were gastronomic attractions of gastronomy tourism and specific services offered to them. It has also been determined that variables for tourists' loyalty to the destination are influenced by motivational factors for traveling to gastronomic rural tourism destinations. Moreover, loyalty has a strong, indirect effect on tourists' return to gastronomic rural destinations.

Previously presented research indicates relevance of determining motives of tourists interested in visiting rural enogastronomic destinations and tasting the food and wine. The research that combines determining motives of tourists

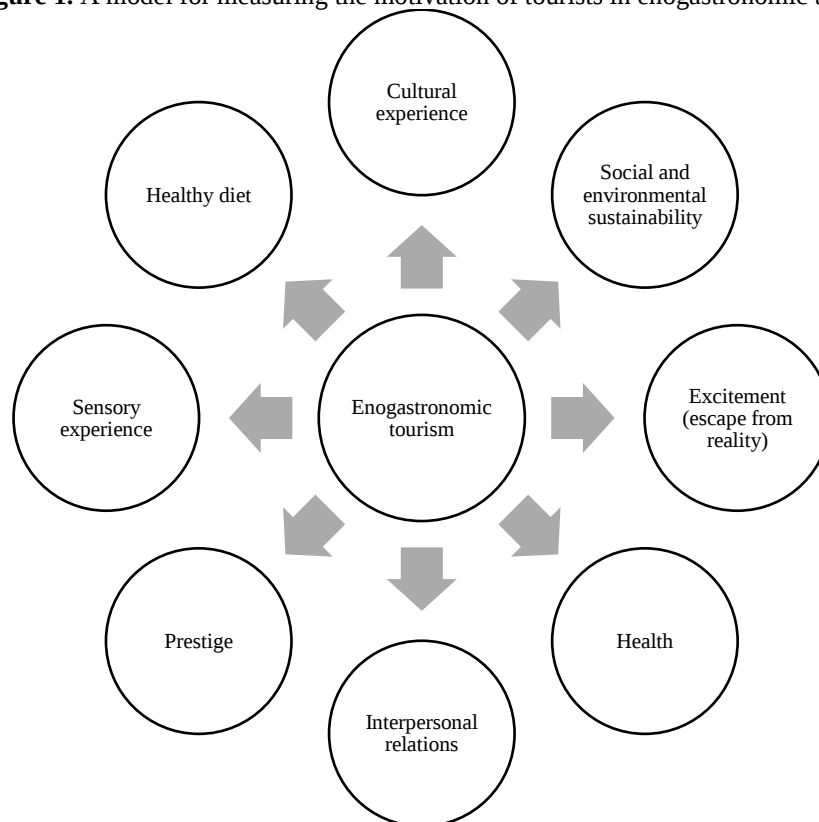
for enogastronomic tourist offer in rural destinations is very scarce, which was the reason for undertaking this research, in order to contribute to the theory and the practice, and provide some new insights.

3. Methodology

The main goal of the empirical research is to examine the guest's motivation and preferences regarding the enogastronomic tourism of Istria. The research is based on primary data obtained through surveys. The survey was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire to tourists who stayed in the County of Istria. The survey questionnaire was only available to Croatian-speaking people who had visited one of the Istrian restaurants at least once. The research is descriptive because the data obtained through the survey were analyzed using the methods of descriptive statistical analysis.

In the structuring of the questionnaire, a model (Fig. 1) was used that examines the motivation and preferences of rural tourists with an emphasis on enogastronomy applied in the research of Kim & Eves (2012). The model measures the motivation and preferences of tourists in enogastronomic tourism. The model for investigating the motivation of tourists in enogastronomic tourism consists of 6 dimensions of enogastronomic tourism: (1) cultural experience, (2) health concern, (3) escape from routine, (4) sensory experience, (5) interpersonal relations i (6) prestige. In addition to the 6 basic dimensions, two dimensions were added to the adapted model used in the research of Testa et al. (2019): (1) healthy eating and (2) social and environmental sustainability. The model is often used and accepted as extremely reliable due to the clearly determined construct of tourist consumption of local food in a tourist destination. In doing so, they integrate tourist motivation and food choice research, which is recognized as an under-researched area (Kim & Eves, 2012). Within the mentioned 8 dimensions there are 28 variables (statements) in order to examine the dimensions more precisely. The measuring instrument used to examine the motivations and preferences of rural tourists with experience in the enogastronomy of Istria is a five-point Likert scale of agreement.

Figure 1. A model for measuring the motivation of tourists in enogastronomic tourism



Source: Kim, Y. G., & Eves, A. (2012). Construction and validation of a scale to measure tourist motivation to consume local food. *Tourism Management*, 33(6), 1458–1467. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.01.015>; Testa, R., Galati, A., Schifani, G., Di Trapani, A. M., & Migliore, G. (2019). Culinary tourism experiences in agri-tourism destinations and sustainable consumption- Understanding Italian tourists' motivations. *Sustainability* (Switzerland), 11(17). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11174588>

4. Research results

Enogastronomic tourism in Istria, as a form of rural tourism, has experienced a tourist boom in the last ten years. Istrian enogastronomic tourism usually includes visits to vineyards, agrotourism, wineries and various events dedicated to wine. The socio-demographic profile of the respondents was investigated using a questionnaire (Tab. 1). Respondents were

offered five questions. The first question refers to the gender of the respondents. Most respondents are female, 82% of them. Men are represented with 18%. Age is evenly distributed, and among the respondents, the most represented belong the age groups 18 to 25 years (23.76 %) and 36 - 45 years (23.20 %). The least represented are elderly respondents, namely: the age group 56-65 years (11.60%) and the oldest age group "more than 66 years old" (5%). Considering the significant balance of other age groups, it can be asserted that the sample is balanced with respect to age groups. As for education is concerned, it can be emphasized that all respondents have completed at least secondary school. As many as 56.90% of respondents completed university studies, and around 5.52% of respondents completed doctoral studies as the highest level of university education in Croatia. 37.58% of respondents completed secondary education. The results of the respondents' profile regarding their marital status show an identical share of respondents (40.33%) for the unmarried category and the married category (40.33%). The widow category comprises 4.42%, while the divorced category includes a high 14.92% of respondents. The last question from this unit refers to the economic status of the respondents. Most respondents are employed or self-employed (71.82%). They are followed by respondents who belong to the category of pupils or students (15.47%), and other respondents (i.e., pensioners, housewives, etc.) are represented by 11%. The least represented is the unemployed category (1.66% of respondents).

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of the respondents

Variables	Frequencies	
	n	%
Gender		
Male	33	18,23
Female	148	81,77
Age		
18 - 25	43	23,76
26 - 35	28	15,47
36 - 45	42	23,20
46 - 55	38	21,00
56 - 65	21	11,60
66+	9	4,97
Level of education		
Secondary school	68	37,58
Faculty	103	56,90
Postgraduate study	10	5,52
Marital status		
Single	73	40,33
Married	73	40,33
Widow/er	8	4,42
Divorced	27	14,92
Economic status		
Employed or self-employed	130	71,82
Unemployed	3	1,66
Pupil, student	28	15,47
Rest (i.e., retired people, housewives)	20	11,05

Source: Author's calculation based on Microsoft Excel

Respondents most often visit Istrian agrotourism 2-3 times a year, from which it can be concluded that there is a high level of demand for Istrian enogastronomy. The fact that the largest number of tourists most often visit taverns, family agricultural farms and agrotourisms rather than restaurants, fast food establishments and other establishments is not surprising. It is interesting that an extremely small number of respondents highlighted the winery as the place where they experienced the strongest enogastronomic impression. It is interesting to note that most of the tourists who visit Istria for food and wine usually do not use the accommodation service, from which it can be concluded that the majority of food and wine tourists from Croatia come to Istria for a one-day trip. Furthermore, when visiting Istria (apart from accommodation and eating local food) the majority of Croatian tourists practice some of the additional rural activities. The largest number of respondents practice wine tasting, which does not completely match the surprisingly small number of wineries in the previous question. In addition to wine tasting, tourists practice excursions, tours of cultural and historical sights, hiking, cycling and adrenaline sports.

Table 2 shows the results of descriptive statistical analysis of dimensions and variables. Eight dimensions of motivation and preferences of tourists in Istria were investigated: (1) cultural experience, (2) health concern, (3) escape from routine, (4) sensory experience, (5) interpersonal relations, (6) prestige, (7) healthy eating and (8) social and environmental sustainability.

The cultural experience dimension consists of five questions. The variable "experiencing local food allows me to discover something new" (AM=4.27) shows the highest degree of agreement among respondents. A high degree of agreement is achieved by the variable "it is important for me to taste local food in its original region" (AM=4.18). On the other hand, the lowest degree of agreement is present in the variable: "when I taste local food, I expect it to be exciting" (AM=3.75).

Kim & Eves (2012) came to somewhat different research results. The respondents showed the highest degree of agreement with the statement "experiencing local food helps me to see how other people live".

The dimension excitement consists of a total of three statements. The respondents showed the highest degree of agreement in the variable: "tasting local food on vacation helps me relax" (AM=3.95). Other variables: "tasting local food on vacation takes me away from crowds and noise" (AM=3.67) and "tasting local food on vacation makes me not to worry about routine" (AM=3.60) achieve a lower degree of agreement. These results are very similar to the research of Kim & Eves (2012), in which the variable "tasting local food on vacation helps me relax" achieves an extremely high degree of agreement, while the variables "tasting local food on vacation takes me away from crowds and noise" and "tasting local food on vacation makes me not worry about the routine" achieve a lower degree of agreement among respondents.

Looking at the health dimension, which consists of three statements, the variable "local food contains many fresh ingredients produced in the local area" has the highest degree of agreement and is the most significant variable within this dimension (AM= 4.10). The variable "local food is nutritious" has a slightly lower degree of agreement (AM= 3.96), while the variable "tasting local food keeps me healthy" achieves the lowest degree of agreement (AM= 3.63). A comparison with the research of Kim & Eves (2012) leads to completely opposite results. The respondents expressed the highest degree of agreement with the variable "tasting local food keeps me healthy", while the respondents showed a significantly lower degree of agreement with the variables "local food contains many fresh ingredients produced in the local area" and "local food is nutritious". The dimension interpersonal relations consist of three statements, and the results of the arithmetic mean vary between 3.51 and 4.20. Respondents show the highest degree of agreement with the variable "tasting local food enables me to have a good time with friends and/or family" (AM=4.20), and the lowest with the variable "local food increases friendship or kinship" (AM= 3.51). Research by Kim & Eves (2012) shows different results. The respondents show the lowest level of satisfaction with the variable "tasting local food enables me to have a good time with friends and/or family", while the highest level of satisfaction is shown with the variable "local food increases friendship or kinship". The prestige dimension consists of three statements, of which respondents agree the most with the variable "I want to give advice about local food experiences to people who want to travel" (AM=3.82). The variable "I like to talk to everyone about my experiences with local food" (AM=3.73) was rated somewhat lower, while the variable "I like to take pictures of local food and show it to my friends" achieved the lowest level of agreement among respondents (AM=3.48). The obtained results of the empirical research are significantly different from the research of Testa et al. (2019), in which respondents show the lowest level of satisfaction with the variable "I want to give advice about local food experiences to people who want to travel", which is contrary to the results of the empirical research.

Table 2. Descriptive statistical analysis

Dimensions / Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD
Cultural experience	4.01	1.0390
When I taste local food, I expect it to be exciting.	3.75	1.0848
Experiencing local food in its original place makes me excited.	3.85	1.1047
Experiencing local food helps me see how other people live.	3.98	1.0671
Experiencing local food allows me to discover something new.	4.27	0.9524
It is important to me to taste local food in its original region.	4.18	0.9860
Excitement	3.74	1.1878
Tasting local food on vacation helps me relax.	3.95	1.0608
Tasting local food on vacation takes me away from the crowds and noise.	3.67	1.2519
Tasting local food on vacation makes me not worry about the routine.	3.60	1.2507
Health	3.90	1.7775
Local food includes many fresh ingredients produced in the local area.	4.10	0.9551
Tasting local food keeps me healthy.	3.63	1.2161
Local food is nutritious.	3.96	1.0613
Interpersonal relations	3.81	1.224
Tasting local food allows me to meet new people with similar interests.	3.71	1.1763
Tasting local food allows me to have a pleasant time with friends and/or family.	4.20	0.9816
Local food increases friendship or kinship.	3.51	1.2093
Prestige	3.68	1.2054
I like to talk to everyone about my experiences with local food.	3.73	1.1815
I like to take pictures of local food and show it to my friends.	3.48	1.3316
I want to give advice on local food experiences to people who want to travel.	3.82	1.1030
Sensory experience	4.18	0.9533
It is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation smells nice.	4.11	0.9712
It is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation looks nice.	4.20	0.9587
It is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation has a pleasant texture.	4.32	0.8864
It is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation tastes good.	4.08	0.9970
Social and environmental sustainability	3.73	1.1248
Eating local food allows me to contribute to the development of the rural area.	3.88	1.1248
By consuming local food, I contribute to the preservation of the environment and its natural resources.	3.81	1.0937
Local food is more environmentally friendly.	3.92	1.1011

It is important to me that the local food I eat has an organic certificate	3.30	1.0213
Healthy diet	4.07	0.270
For me, knowing the producer is a guarantee of the correctness of homemade food	4.29	1.022
I believe that homemade food is free of synthetic chemicals harmful to health.	4.12	1.119
I prefer to consume local food because it is good for health.	4.21	1.062

Source: Author's calculation based on Microsoft Excel

The dimension sensory experience consists of a total of four statements. The largest number of respondents agree with the variable related to the sense of touch: "it is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation has a pleasant texture" (AM=4.32). The variable related to the sense of sight is next by the degree of agreement: "it is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation looks nice" (AM= 4.20). It is interesting that the lowest degree of agreement among respondents was achieved by the variable "it is important to me that the local food I eat on vacation tastes good", which is related to the sense of taste. In the study by Kim & Eves (2012), respondents show the highest level of agreement with the variable related to the sense of sight: "it is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation looks nice", and the lowest with the variable related to the sense of smell: "it is important to me that the homemade food I eat on vacation smells nice". It can be concluded that for this dimension the results of empirical research are very similar to the base model. The dimension social and ecological sustainability consists of four dimensions in the arithmetic mean range from 3.30 to 3.92. The best ranked variable is "local food is more ecologically acceptable", which achieves the highest degree of agreement among respondents (AM=3.92). It is interesting that the variable "it is important to me that the local food I eat has an organic certificate" (AM= 3.30) shows a certain level of distrust towards local food production standards. By comparing the empirical research with the research of Testa et al. (2019) completely different results are observed. In the research of Testa et al. (2019), respondents show the highest degree of agreement with the variable "it is important to me that the local food I eat has an organic certificate", while the variable "local food is more environmentally friendly" achieves a significantly lower degree of agreement among respondents.

The last dimension is a healthy diet, and it consists of three statements. The respondents showed the highest degree of agreement with the variable "Knowing the producer for me is a guarantee of the correctness of domestic food" (AM= 4.29), while the lowest degree of agreement is present in the variable "I believe that domestic food is free of synthetic chemicals harmful to health", which confirms the respondents' awareness of a certain amount of caution when consuming food of local origin. The results of the dimension cannot be compared with the results of the research by Kim & Eves (2012) and Testa et al. (2019) because the authors did not include this dimension in the factor analysis of the results.

Table 3 presents an analysis of the motivational dimensions in the enogastronomic tourism of that influence the attractiveness of Istria as a enogastronomic tourism destination.

Table 3. Analysis of motivational dimensions in the enogastronomic tourism of Istria

Dimensions	$\bar{X}$	SD
Cultural experience	4.01	1.0390
Excitement	3.74	1.1878
Health	3.90	1.0775
Interpersonal relations	3.81	1.1224
Prestige	3.68	1.2054
Sensory experience	4.18	0.9533
Social and environmental sustainability	3.73	1.1248
Healthy diet	3.76	1.0579

Source: Author's calculation based on Microsoft Excel

According to the results of the research in Table 3, it is visible that respondents are most motivated to visit an enogastronomic facility of rural tourism in Istria, respectively by the sensory experience dimension (AM= 4.18). The cultural experience dimension has a somewhat lower significance (AM= 4.01). The dimensions of prestige (AM= 3.68) and social and ecological sustainability (AM= 3.73) achieved the lowest significance of respondents' motivation to visit an enogastronomic facility in Istria. When comparing the results with the base and upgraded model (Kim & Eves, 2012; Testa et al., 2019), it can be concluded that the dimension of interpersonal relations is the most significant dimension of respondents' motivation, while the health dimension is the least significant in motivating respondents to consume local food.

5. Conclusion

Based on the conducted research on the motivation of enogastronomic tourists, it can be concluded that the sensory experience is the dimension that most strongly attracts tourists who are looking to consume local food. Tourists want an authentic experience full of sensory impressions that they don't want to forget. Cultural experience in the enogastronomy of Istria is also important for tourists; they wish to learn something new during their stay in Istria, hear interesting facts, participate in rural tourism activities, for example truffle hunting with professional sniffer dogs, olive oil production using the ancient method, etc. It is interesting that the social and ecological sustainability of Istria is the least important to

Croatian tourists, which is a worrying fact and it is necessary in future research to further analyze the importance of the sustainability of the destination from the perception of tourists who stay in Istria. This segment is quite important for the rural development of Istria. It is important to emphasize that responsible management is necessary in accordance with the laws of sustainable development and respect for nature as an invaluable and irreplaceable resource. The research contains many limitations that should be noted. The survey was conducted in the Croatian language and could only be completed by Croatian-speaking tourists, which certainly influenced the results of the survey. The research is based on recall, which affects the final results. Also, the research is based on Istria as a rural tourism destination, so the results cannot be generalized to other destinations. Currently, there is extremely little research on this topic, and this research serves as a basis for future more detailed research on this topic. One of the proposals for future research is to examine how the existing model affects dependent constructs, i.e., satisfaction, loyalty, memory, etc. The lack of scientific literature and interest of scientists can only serve as support for new research directed towards enogastronomy and rural tourism. There is a possibility of comparing regions and studying the motivation of the enogastronomic tourism of Istria with, for example, the motivation of the enogastronomic tourism of Međimurje. A proposal for future research is to create a more complete model that will better capture the motivation of the enogastronomic tourist, that is, his interest in consuming local food. In the end, it is necessary to conduct research focused on experts, that is, entrepreneurs and employees in hospitality facilities in Istria in order to gain insight into new information.

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