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PERCEPTION OF FACULTY OF TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT STUDENTS ON SLOW FOOD CONCEPT

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

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ABSTRACT:

The Slow Food movement, originated in Italy in 1989, is a movement that defines a respectful attitude towards food. It includes the protection of local food, food culture and traditions. The movement advocates the cultivation of food that is carefully prepared and consumed with pleasure. It encourages the improvement of relations between producers of ecologically produced food, cooks and consumers. Slow Food represents resistance to fast food and modern fast consumption, which has led to the abandonment of local gastronomic traditions and a decrease in people's interest in authentic food. The aim of this paper was to investigate the attitudes of students of the Faculty of tourism and rural development in Požega about Slow Food. Using the online survey method, the research has been conducted on a sample of 38 students of Enogastronomy and Tourism. The results of the research showed that the Slow Food concept is not recognizable among students because only 30% have heard about it. Enjoying the food they consume is extremely important for almost all students. Half of the respondents had heard of Slow Food, while only a quarter declared that they had consumed food presented as Slow Food. According to the respondents, Slow Food is best described by the attributes "natural", "ecological", "healthy", "conscious food consumption" and "enjoying eating".

KEYWORDS: Slow Food, student, organic food, perception, consumption

INTRODUCTION

Since 1986 when Carlo Petrini together with a like-minded group preformed demonstration against Mc Donald's and globalization of food, Slow Food movement has grown into complex approach to food and international organization spread worldwide [1]. According to [2] Slow Food has been perceived as organization, movement, ideology and lifestyle. However, it is important to see it as an alternative type of food consumption which gathers local production, culture, tradition, preparation of food and in the end its consummation. There are three main principles of Slow Food: good, clean and fair, meaning that food should be tasty, produced in authentic and natural way related to certain geographic and cultural region, and also produced in environmentally and socially sustainable ways [3]. Pleasure occupies an important place in the Slow Food philosophy, perceiving food beyond just functional role, whereby pleasure implies consummation of food as well as production and preparation [4]. Dunlap [5] stated that Slow Food as movement is tightly related with leisure. In recent decades, consumer demands regarding food quality

and safety have changed significantly. Consumers have become better educated and aware that the way they eat significantly affects their health, which is becoming an increasingly important criterion when choosing food products. In that light, Slow Food principles could become very interesting for hospitality and tourism sector [6] because Slow food tourism can be considered as an important part of the cultural tourism market, attracting tourists who are looking for authentic experiences and the consumption of local food and beverages [7].

The share of tourism in the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Republic of Croatia is about 20%, however it is characterized by distinct seasonality [8]. According to research Institute for Tourism [9]. Basic motives for tourist arrivals in Croatia are sea and nature which explains seasonality. Only 6.6 % of respondents stated that gastronomy is their motive for visiting Croatia. However, Drpić and Vukman [10] stated that gastronomy tourism in Croatia grows every year, assisted by promotion of its gastronomic riches, taking in consideration the fact that in such a small space there is an offer of many different types of food. Skryl et al. [11] conducted a survey among 30

Croatian restaurants about contemporary culinary trends, including Slow Food. 83.3% of the surveyed restaurants answered that they offer food that belongs to the Slow Food movement i.e use fresh ingredients, purchase from small producers, use whole grains, and food processing itself follow traditional ways. However, only few of restaurants in Croatia are officially recognised as Slow Food restaurants. Gastronomic tourism is an opportunity for Croatia to expand its tourist season throughout the year and contribute to the fact that catering facilities in Croatia's seaside do not close during the winter months.

According to official Slow Food web page [12], there are only 4 convivia and 1 community in Croatia. Convivia is a local Slow Food chapter. It organizes events and activities at the local level, ranging from simple dinners and tastings, where members come together to share the everyday joys of food; visits to local producers and farms, conferences and discussions for adults and children. Food community is a group of small-scale producers and others, united by the production of a particular food and closely linked to a geographic area. Food community members are involved in small-scale and sustainable production of quality products. Çelebi and Genç [13] and Voinea et al. [14] investigated the perception of youth towards Slow Food in Turkey (Gastronomy and Culinary arts students) and Romania (Quality Management, Expertise and Consumer Protection). As they pointed out - students of such specific study programs will be the bearers of gastronomic trends, the developers of tourism in local communities and above all sustainability guardians. It is crucial that they are familiar with the potential of Slow Food principles so they could apply them in the future. To the best of our knowledge, there hasn't been similar research in Croatia or any other research among the student population in the research region (continental Croatia – Slavonia) involving gastronomy. Vuksanović et al. [15] also mentioned scarcity of studies and research gaps about gastronomy and food in the continental Croatia area and surrounding countries, pointing local producers as drivers of rural development and tourism progress, which is in consistency with Slow Food concept. As we already mentioned, there are only few Slow Food facilities in Croatia, so the primary goal of this paper is to find a perception of Tourism and Enogastronomy students towards Slow Food concept in order to get a clearer picture of the current knowledge of this very important topic, which would direct us to future research and projects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Students of the Faculty of tourism and rural development in Požega, Croatia, have been trained as experts who will contribute to enrichment of the tourist offer with their knowledge. It is very important that they know the latest trends in gastronomy, which is an integral part of every tourist destination. Main goal of this survey is to reveal the Slow Food perception of Enogastronomy and Tourism students of Faculty of tourism and rural development in Požega, Croatia. The research sample consisted of 38 students of all study years. Survey questions were adapted and inspired from similar research papers [13, 14]. Questionnaire was conducted on line (Microsoft Forms questionnaire *via* Merlin platform, which is obligatory platform for communication between students and professors on Faculty for tourism and rural development. After uploading the questionnaire on the Merlin platform, all students got notification as "pending assignment"). Survey consisted of 12 questions (2 questions for demographic and 10 questions for food in general and Slow Food perception). At the time when the survey was conducted, during 2023., 1st and 2nd year of Enogastronomy programe and the 1st year of Tourism programe were in progress, because those were new study programes at the Faculty. The city of Požega is located in eastern continental Croatia, Slavonia region (Figure 1.) The majority of students come from this region although there are few from other parts of Croatia like north Croatia and south Croatia.

After the respondents' answers were collected, the answers were presented in tables and graphs.

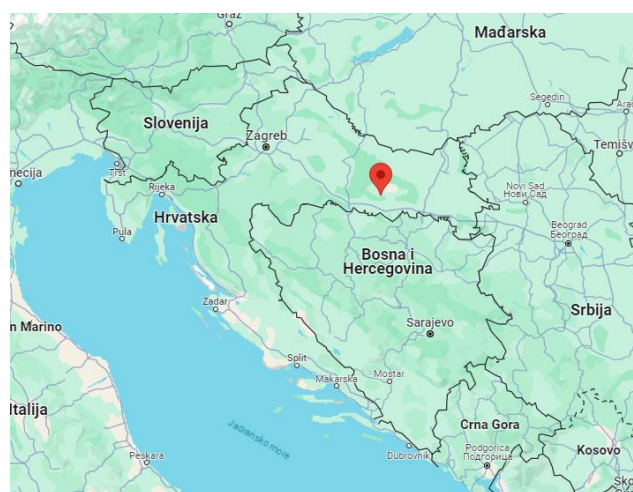


Figure 1. Geographical position of Požega city [16]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey is based on a sample of 38 respondents. Their demographic profile is shown in Table 1. 11 (29%) men and 27 (71%) women participated in the research. The age of the participants varies between 19 and 51. Majority of participants were 19 (37%) and 20 (32%) years old.

Table 1. Demographic profile of students

		Frequency (n)
Gender (n=38)	Male	11
	Female	27
Age (n=38)	19	14
	20	12
	21	9
	27	1
	30	1
	51	1

The students' answers to the questions about cooking skills and eating habits shown in Table 2, give an insight into their commitment to food preparation and consumption. Considering the young age of the respondents, result of even 76% respondents who know how to cook is very interesting, but expected because students of Enogastronomy were also part of the research sample. Among male respondents, 27% answered that they cook "a little bit", while 22% of female respondents gave the same answer. The majority of respondents eat their meals at home or in the student canteen, and multiple answers to this question were possible.

Table 2. Cooking and eating habits of students (n=38)

		Frequency (n)
Do you cook?	Yes	29
	No	0
	A little bit	9
Where do you consume food?	Home	34
	Restaurant	1
	Fast food	1
	Student canteen	22

Table 3. shows the answers regarding the experience with the Slow Food concept. A larger number of respondents have never heard of Slow Food (n=22). Accordingly, as many as 76% of them declared that they have never tasted food labeled as Slow Food. However, more than half of the

respondents (60%) agreed that Slow Food should be included more often in the gastronomic offer, while 34% declared that they do not know. As previously stated in the Introduction part, there are only few officially recognized Slow Food facilities (farms, restaurants) in Croatia, so students didn't have a chance to meet this concept very often. Unlike our findings, Çelebi and Genç [13] presented that all students who participated in survey regarding Slow Food in Turkey (n=20), had Slow Food experience. Voinea et al. [14] interviewed 50 Romanian students in regard to Slow Food, and 66% of them have heard of it, but 83% of them haven't consumed Slow Food products in the year before survey was conducted. Beside, 80% of respondents didn't know any of Romanian Slow Food products although there are many products on the market. Some students also equalized homemade food with natural ingredients and Slow Food.

Table 3. Experience and attitude of students about Slow Food (n=38)

		Frequency (n)
Have you heard of the Slow Food movement?	Yes	16
	No	22
Have you consumed food with the label Slow Food?	Yes	9
	No	29
Do you think that the slow food movement should be more applicable in the gastronomic offer?	Yes	23
	No	1
	I do not know	13

Table 4. shows the features that the respondents arbitrarily included in the description of the Slow Food concept. For almost half (40%) of the respondents, the Slow Food concept means food that tastes good, is nutritionally rich, is served in small portions, and comes from organic farming. 10% of respondents consider the Slow Food concept to be conscious consumption of food and enjoyment of the moment. 15% of respondents believe that Slow Food is food that is produced in a traditional way and prepared according to traditional recipes. Still, 18% of students didn't know how to describe Slow Food, which is expected since 60% of them previously answered that they had never heard of the concept. However, some of respondents still gave their opinion according to their expectations what Slow Food should be, although they didn't know it from earlier. Turkish

students described Slow Food as "healthy", "conscious consumption" and "local tastes" [13].

Table 4. Description of Slow Food according to students (n=38)

	Frequency (n)
Good-tasting, nutritionally rich food, served in smaller portions, and comes from organic farming.	15
Conscious consumption of food and enjoyment of flavors.	4
Food produced in a traditional way and prepared according to a traditional recipe for a specific region.	6
Eating less food.	2
Low energy food.	2
Eating more cooked food than fast food.	2
I do not know	7

Characteristics which describe Slow Food movement, according to respondents, are shown in Figure 2. For the vast majority of respondents (n=27), the concept of Slow Food means "natural". For 26 respondents, it means "good quality", that is, "conscious consumption of food", "ecologically acceptable" and "enjoying eating" (n=25). Students could choose multiple answers from offered possibilities. Students from already mentioned survey by Čelebi and Genç [13] mostly used terms "ecofriendly", "sustainability" and "pleasure".

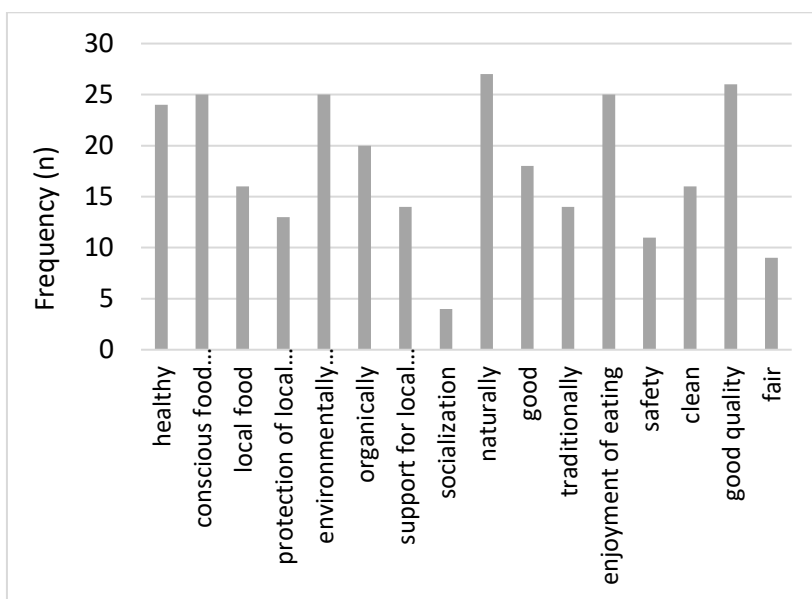


Figure 2. Terms that describe Slow Food movement the best, according to students (n=38)

Students were offered to rate the importance of the origin of the food they consume, enjoyment of the food they consume, and ecologically produced food they consume. They assigned the least important feature a score of 1, and the most important feature a score of 5. Results are presented in Figures 3 - 5. The origin of the food they consume is not so important according to the attitudes of the respondents shown in Figure 3. For only a quarter of the respondents this feature is the most significant; the

share among male and female respondents is approximately equal, 27% and 26%, respectively. On the other hand, only 3 students (8%) answered this question with a grade of 1 or 2, and all of them were female.

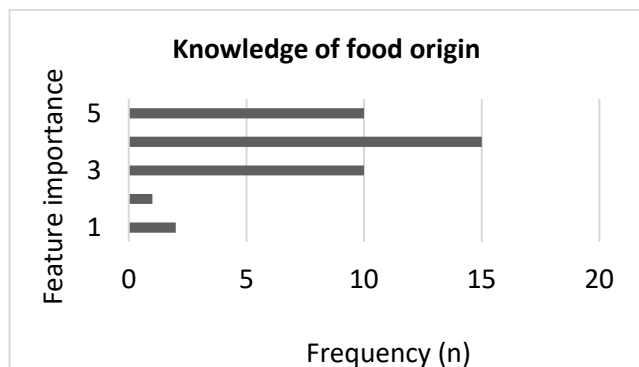


Figure 3. Importance of the origin of the food that students consume (n=38; 1- not important; 5 - extremely important)

Out of the three offered features, the most important for students is the enjoyment of the food they consume (Figure 4). 85% of respondents rated this feature with the highest rating, while consumption of organic food (Figure 5) is less important to them. Only 28% of respondents considered this feature to be extremely important, while 13 of them (34%) gave score 3, and 8% scored it with 1 and 2 (the same as in the previous question regarding the origin of the food).

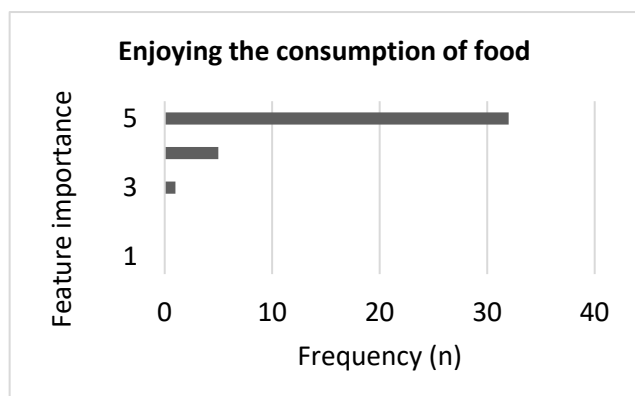


Figure 4. The importance of enjoying the food consumed for students (n=38; 1- not important; 5 - extremely important)

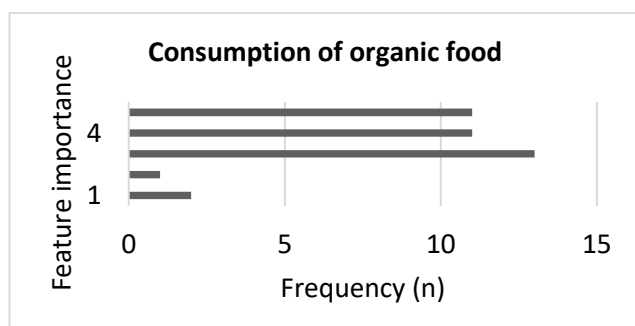


Figure 5. Importance of consuming organic food for students (n=38; 1- not important; 5 - extremely important)

CONCLUSION

Slow Food concept supports local producers, sustainable way of production and pleasure of preparation and consumption of food. Gastronomy as integral part of cultural heritage is important factor for tourism development. Croatia as touristic destination has extremely seasonal character and it is very important to develop selective forms of tourism which attract visitors longer than a summer period. Students of Enogastronomy and Tourism will soon become professionals in this field and responsible for sustainability of this industry.

Research showed that Slow Food as a concept is not recognizable enough among students (only 30% of students have heard about Slow Food, and only 23% tasted Slow Food products). Considering that the origin of the food and organic food were extremely important for less than 30% of respondents, it is crucial to upgrade their knowledge about gastronomy and food in a sustainable perception not only by regular curriculum, but also by involving them in different events like seminars or fairs of local products. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that the oldest students who participated in this research have just finished the third semester of their studies, and they still lack professional knowledge related to these topics, since their first year of study covers mostly general subjects. It would be good to repeat the survey among the students at the final years of their study. Survey should be extended to other target groups like households (persons who procure groceries in the family), farmers, and restaurants to get the larger picture about Slow Food and similar concepts in eastern Croatia.

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