
Culinary Trends in the Republic of Croatia as Part of Gastro Tourism Development

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Abstract:

The main aim of this article is to explore the trends of gastro tourism, the development of gastro tourism in the Republic of Croatia, the gastronomic offer of Croatia, the potentials and opportunities for the advancement of gastronomy in Croatia's tourist offer.

The research shows representation of new trends in today's gastro tourism market such as molecular food, slow food, macrobiotic food, eco, functional and vegetarian food. The main purpose is to find out to which extent are specific trends represented in Croatian restaurants.

The methodology used is secondary research, desk research, method of analysis and synthesis, comparative method, quantitative research, interview as well as the observation from real life. As part of the quantitative method there is a survey conducted amongst 30 Croatian restaurants; 10 restaurants in continental Croatia and 20 restaurants in the area of coastal Croatia (among the best in 2016).

Questions were asked about the extent to which the contemporary gastronomic trends were represented on the menus of selected Croatian restaurants. An interview was conducted with founder and owner of Palatin restaurant in Varazdin.

Findings show that Croatian restaurants are aware of new trends in nutrition and culinary area, but the offer of dishes covered by these trends is insufficient. Gastro tourism as a selective form of tourism is poorly associated as a special segment. It is assumed that around 3% of the total world travel is motivated by gastronomy as the primary motive of travel.

Considering that tourism in Croatia is an important economic activity. Croatia's gastronomic offer surely can be measured with the offer of other European destinations, such as Spain, Italy and other countries on this issue, but sadly this potential of Croatia is still poorly used.

Keywords: Culinary trends, gastronomy, gastro tourism, tourism development.

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1. Introduction

Tourism and travel became the leading industry through which destinations receive large number of tourist arrivals, and thus a large income. Tourism is defined as a set of relations and phenomena arising from the travel of people that includes more than 24 hours visit to destination that is not their permanent residence while the reason of visit does not involve any economic activity, whose definition has also been adopted by the International Association of Scientific Tourism Experts (AIEST). Croatia is predominantly a tourist destination with enormous tourism potential that generates significant 18% revenue share in the gross domestic product (Croatian news portal). Tourism in Croatia is the most important economic sector; it records growth every year. According to Sojern's research on popular researched destination for European travellers in 2016th, Croatia was on the 20th place as well 10th destination amongst top emerging markets after Sri Lanka, Iceland, New Zealand, Indonesia, Tanzania, South Africa, Indonesia, Philippines and Cuba (Sojern, 2016: Europe Travel Trends Report).

Contemporary trends (technological, social, economic) influenced changes in the tourist market which has led to the emergence of new forms of tourism, the so-called selective forms of tourism. Selective tourism represents the way of adjustment of the tourist markets according to new market changes. Selective tourism is divided into six basic groups: ecological tourism, alternative, educational and communicational, fun and recreational, exclusive, and other types of selective tourism (Jadresic, 2001).

Gastro tourism or special interest tourism belongs to the cultural tourism. Due to the constant changes on the tourist market, it is evident how it leads to changes in terms of culinary art, culinary techniques and the tastes of tourists. Good cuisine is an advantage that contributes to promotion of tourist destination used by famous culinary powers such as Italy and France. It is necessary for destination management to keep track of contemporary culinary trends in order to be ready, adapt and respond to new challenges in terms of gastronomy, in order to create a recognizable tourism product.

2. Literature Review

Gastro tourism refers to tasting the culinary specialties related to a specific region or dishes of famous chefs, which must be one of the main motives for travel (Baldwin, 2018). The food is part of the local culture of a place, region, or State; it is an important part of the tourist brand and a constituent component of the cultural and ecological development (Geic, 2011).

Characteristics that are integral part of every gastronomic specialty are the way of food preparation, the choice of ingredients, way of consumption and presentation of dishes as well as how is specific dish consumed according to tradition of individual States. Gastro tourists are special group of tourists whose main travel motives are

food tasting. They are mostly domestic and foreign guests, middle age, with middle spending power and highly educated (Drpic and Vukman, 2014).

Factors influencing the food choices can be classified into two groups: factors influencing the creation of dietary habits and factors influencing food choices when eating out of your own home while eating habits have a major impact on decision on what kind of food will be consumed when and why (Santich, 2004); factors that influence the acquisition of dietary habits are biological, economic, sociological, demographic and psychological (Kresic, 2012).

Great influence on the adoption of the dietary habits of consumers have their knowledge, personal preferences, attitudes and beliefs about food and nutrition. The relationship of consumers towards food is affected by beliefs about what makes them healthy, their own views on an individual's ability to take control of their own lives, primarily over the eating habits and health problems, and the role of media based on articles published about food (International Food Information Council, 2002).

Food supply in catering establishments must necessarily monitor diet trends to meet guest expectations. In the market of trends that are present in gastronomy, functional foods, vegetarian diets, ecological food, Mediterranean diet, macrobiotic diet, molecular food and slow food are emphasized (Mckercher *et al.*, 2008).

Functional food has been named as a function of food in view of its impact on the human body and is a food that, apart from satisfying nutritional habits, has a positive effect on one or more functions in the body and accordingly improves human health or reduces the risk of developing the disease (Kresic, 2012). Ecological food on the market appeared in response to conventional, classic food. According to the definition of the International Federation of the Ecological Agriculture Movement (IFOAM), ecological agriculture is a production system that maintains soil, ecosystem and human health and represents a mix of tradition, innovation and science for environmental conservation and improving the quality of life of all participants (Sanchez-Canizares and Lopez-Guzman, 2012).

Mediterranean nutrition is one of the most important nutrition trends because it has been shown that people living in the Mediterranean area have a longer life span and a lower incidence of chronic diseases. Vegetarian diet developed based on an increased interest in the impact of food on human health, as well as on raising animal awareness. Vegetarian diet is a diet that does not include meat and meat products, and the main feature is that food is based on foods of plant origin. Macrobiotic diet is an alternative diet that has an impact on human health and encompasses whole grains, vegetables, soybeans, and limits the intake of milk and dairy products, meat and processed (Mestrovic-Molnar *et al.*, 2007). Molecular gastronomy or food of the future is the preparation of food through new culinary-scientific techniques (Mestrovic-Molnar *et al.*, 2007). The main feature of the

molecular cuisine is that certain chemicals are used in food preparation to change the colour and appearance of the food, but not the taste itself. Slow food is a new trend in nutrition that has emerged as a kind of fast food response. The Slow Food Association opposes the standardization of taste and habits of unhealthy food, protects cultural identities related to food and gastronomic traditions, preserves breeding and processing techniques inherited from tradition and protects domestic, wild animal and plant species (Mestrovic-Molnar *et al.*, 2007).

3. Methodology

Croatia is a small country, but rich in variety of flavours, indigenous meals and traditions. Given that gastronomy is an integral part of every tourist trip, it can be concluded that the gastronomic offer greatly influences the overall tourist experience in a tourist destination. According to the TOMAS survey of 2014, the motives of tourist arrivals in Croatia are passive vacation and relaxation, fun, new experiences and gastronomy experiences, which is in the fourth place. According to data from previous years' research has shown a trend of rising gastronomy as a tourist motive for tourists to Croatia - so in 2012, 22% of tourists stated that gastronomy was the main motive for coming in 2014, this percentage being 26%, while 2017, this percentage rose to 29%.

In 2017, according to the above survey, respondents, as far as catering deals are concerned, gave better ratings to Croatia than competitors such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Slovenia and Montenegro (Ministry of Tourism, www.mint.hr). In keeping with the changes taking place in terms of eating habits, it is necessary to adapt the gastronomic offer that will provide gastronomic delight to all consumer groups, regardless of the type of diet and food they prefer.

According to the strategy of development of Croatian tourism by 2020, gastronomic tourism is considered important but insufficiently developed in the sense that very small part of the population travels mainly for the sake of gastronomic delights (Osipov *et al.*, 2017). The offer of gastronomic specialties is insufficiently developed since Croatia is a predominantly tourist destination, and gastro tourism has for a long time been an integral part of the country's tourism promotion. According to trends, it is important to customize traditional Croatian dishes, create quality, health-oriented and attractively prepared meals to meet the new challenges that gastronomy meets. According to the strategy of the development of Croatian tourism by 2020, the goals that Croatia wants to achieve regarding gastro tourism are:

- become one of the most famous gastro destinations;
- construction and proper arrangement of many new and existing catering facilities in accordance with the tradition of local place and specialties;
- creating excellence in gastronomy about branding national and regional cuisines;

- development of educational programs with the purpose of education of all those who want to get involved in the gastronomy;
- encouraging the cooperation of local food producers with catering facilities;
- creation of specialized regional agencies for the development of gastro-tourism with the offer of complex programs.

“In the national strategy of tourism development in Croatia, by 2020 (MINT, 2013) gastro tourism will be recognized as one of the specific tourist products with a high development potential. The strategy has a goal of development i.e. repositioning Croatia to a fast growing gourmet destination and the following are examples of contemporary efforts in this context” (Simic and Pap, 2016). The trend of development of gastro tourism in the last years is evident. Specialized agencies for gastro tourism have been established, and in Croatia there are nine (Association of travel agencies in Croatia). In the coming years, it is expected that Croatia will be greatly oriented towards creating a gastronomic offer that will include dishes from different parts of the world, with the emphasis on creating a traditional indigenous Croatian gastronomy. Croatia is a rich gastronomic destination, ten meals are declared part of the intangible cultural heritage, and many dishes bear the name "Originally Croatian" or "Croatian Quality". Specialties of Croatian cuisine, declared as non-material cultural heritage, are Pag cheese, Slavonian kulen, Soparnik, Zagorje native strukli, cheese skripavac, Christmas bread, pepper cookies, mining scraps and cheese brewer (Croatian food association).

Croatia has over 2300 restaurants, 716 pizzerias, 763 taverns, 301 inns and 1227 other facilities (Gastronaut, Gastro regions). In the territory of Croatia, we can distinguish six gastronomic regions: Istria and Kvarner, Dalmatia and Dalmatia Zagora, Zagorje, Medimurje and Podravina, Slavonia and Baranja, Gorski kotar and Lika and Zagreb and surroundings (International Food Information Council, 2012). Due to its gastronomic wealth, Croatia has great potential in branding and creating an attractive gastronomic offer (Hegeduš *et al.*, 2017). Gastro tourism in Croatia is a branch that develops more accidental than planned because there are no concrete activities in creating and adapting tourist offer aimed at gastronomy. In recent years, progress has been made in the creation of traditional Croatian gastronomic offer. In Croatian restaurants, new trends in diet are still insufficiently monitored, so there is a problem in insufficient gastronomy for consumers who prefer a different diet than traditional ones.

Croatia, in order to become famous gastro destination, must undertake various activities in promoting itself as a gastronomic destination, to create legal and other conditions for the development of gastro tourism, to create a unique recognizable Croatian gastronomy in accordance with new diet trends. The most popular gastro manifestations held in Croatia are the Days of Biscuits in Umag, the Days of Truffles in Buzet, the Days of Istrian Asparagus, the Baked and Chocolate Week, the International Festival of Prosciutto, Eco Food Fair, Dalmatia Wine Expo, Gourmet Story of the Opatija Riviera and Numerous other (Gastronaut).

4. Results and Discussion

Research on the representation of new culinary trends on the menus of restaurants in Croatia, was carried out on the ground to determine whether Croatian restaurants are following new trends in gastronomy and how the dishes offered on the menus adapt to these new gastro trends.

A survey questionnaire was used in the study, which contained 29 questions. Most of the respondents were able to choose one of the answers offered, while some questions had to be given specific answers given their own experiences. The survey was conducted on a sample of 30 Croatian restaurants, selected according to the article about the best Croatian restaurants in 2016. The questionnaire was distributed via e-mail. The research was conducted over a period of two months.

The first question that was posed to respondents related to whether respondents follow the contemporary culinary trends and has been at it positively responded to 83.3% of respondents, while 16.7% answered negatively.

The next question in the survey was that if you follow new gastronomic trends, what are those trends and which trends are you familiar with. Most respondents indicated that those trends were slow food, molecular nutrition, vegetarian diet, ecological food, Mediterranean diet.

Furthermore, when asked about the origin of the guests, 50% of respondents answered that most foreign guests are coming, while the same number answered that most guests are of domestic origin. Most resold, 66.6% responded that most guests were in the summer months, while 33.4% said they had equal number of guests a mile throughout the year.

All the restaurants that received a survey have vegetarian meals on their menus. The next part of the survey aimed to indicate which vegetarian meals are available and most often it was vegetables and vegetable soups, suggesting that their offer of vegetarian dishes varies depending on seasonal foods. The seventh question of the survey was to state the reasons why they did not have vegetarian meals on their menus but given that all restaurants responded positively to having vegetarian dishes in the offer, there was no answer to that question. Most of the surveyed restaurants, i.e. 83.3% of restaurants do not offer macrobiotic food in their offer, while only 16.7% of surveyed restaurants offer several meals that are considered macrobiotic. Macrobiotic dishes are represented on menus using healthy foods such as hemp seeds, buckwheat, lenses, food processed in a healthy way without the addition of artificial spices, sweeteners and emulsifiers. The reasons behind the inclusion of macrobiotic meals in the menus are: there is no demand for such food, macrobiotics do not fit in the concept of their restaurant, the ingredients are not available, and insufficient staff training.

Only 16.7% of surveyed restaurants have meals belonging to molecular food. It should be pointed out, therefore, those restaurants that claimed to have dishes of molecular cuisine offered a bid of two dishes, which were vegetables and sardines and coconut gel. Accordingly, it is evident that the offer of molecular dishes is very weak and that this trend has not yet been sufficiently met by Croatian restaurants. The reasons why molecular cuisine is not offered in its offer is a combination of long food preparation, unfinished restaurant concept, insufficient staff training, insufficient equipment of the cuisine needed for the preparation of molecular dishes.

When asked about the presence of slow food in the menus, 83.3% of the surveyed restaurants agreed to offer food that belongs to the slow food movement. Restaurants that responded positively stated that the dishes were being prepared at the time of order and that the foods were fresh, which were also the two basic conditions that make slow food, then that food was purchased from small producers, used whole grains, and food processing itself was longer from traditional ways that meet the requirements of slow food. 16.7% of restaurants responding that they do not offer foods that belong to slow food foods have led to the fact that they do not follow new diet trends and are not sufficiently informed about what foods meet the conditions of slow food. All respondents answered that they use ecological food in the preparation of dishes, that they buy from the local producers and that they are looking at the quality of the food, not the price.

When asked about the degree of satisfaction of the guests who had eaten in the restaurant, most restaurants responded that the guests were satisfied with the offer and quality of the dishes and that the guests often return to their restaurants. The next question in the survey was either about educating cooks about new culinary techniques. 73.3% of the restaurant responded that their chefs are educating about new culinary techniques, while 26.7% of restaurants say their chefs are not educating about new culinary techniques. The way their chefs are educating about new culinary techniques are: through seminars, workshops, literature, and the Internet, and in some restaurants, they cook during the winter period to send their volunteers to famous world restaurants.

Asked "How often do you change the logbook?", 66.7% of the respondents said that, in order to accommodate the needs of guests, they change their menus two to three times a year, 16.7% of the restaurant changes their menus once a week, and 16.7 % of restaurants change menus once a year. Most of the restaurant respondents, 66.7%, said that adding new meals to menus did not increase the number of guests in their restaurant. The next issue of the survey was whether the prices of new meals were higher than standard meals and all restaurants responded that the prices of new meals are not bigger than the standard meals. Asked about the presence of traditional Croatian specialties on their menus, 90% of the respondents said that they offer at least one Croatian specialty, while 10% of the restaurants said they did not have traditional Croatian specialties. The specialties that have been mentioned in its offer include pretended soup, vultures with turnips, turkeys with mules, sprouts,

fishermen, fish dishes. In addition, when asked about the issues they encounter during their business, they said they encountered problems related to poorly regulated legislation on domestic food, finding adequate workforce and increasing taxes in catering facilities. The last question of the survey was to evaluate the business of their restaurants and all restaurants rated the restaurant's business very good or excellent.

5. Analysis of Results

Modern diet trends have largely affected the offer of meals in restaurants around the world. Given the constant changes in life style and style, it is important to keep up with new gastronomic trends, so restaurants can tailor their offer to these new trends. Nowadays, health is increasingly taken care of, and it is important to use organic products in the preparation of meals and to adapt the recipes to these new trends in order to accommodate all the tourist populations regardless of the food they prefer.

Based on the research carried out, it is evident that Croatian restaurants are aware of new trends in nutrition, but the offer of dishes covered by these trends is very poor. Gastro tourism as a selective form of tourism is poorly associated as a special segment. It is assumed that around 3% of the total world travel is motivated by gastronomy as the primary motive of travel. Based on the results of the research we can conclude that most of the surveyed restaurants are oriented towards healthy, ecological, vegetarian and slow food.

By acquiring food from local producers, it promotes ecological production and contributes to the development of small agricultural enterprises. Most of the tourists love to try out the traditional dishes of the country they have come to, which most of the restaurants they see and allow. It is important to point out that vegetarian dishes are found in all of the surveyed restaurants on the menus. The study showed deficiencies in the representation of molecular and macrobiotic food in the restaurant offer. There have also been some shortcomings in the breadth of food supply related to certain diet trends. Croatian restaurants, given the rich and varied gastronomy, have a great potential in creating their menus, only need more information on new trends and adaptation of recipes according to different types of diet. By expanding and adapting the tourist offer to new trends, it will contribute to increasing the number of tourists and extending the tourist season throughout the year. Gastro tourism is an untapped potential in Croatia. The fact is that most tourists visiting Croatia are delighted with gastronomy.

In recent years, progress has been made in the development of gastro tourism. Its importance was noted, and a gastronomic map of Croatia was created, where the specialties and diversity of national and regional dishes were distinguished. Croatia needs to strengthen the development of indigenous Croatian cuisine, which will cover all the specific dishes of all regions in Croatia. It is important to put emphasis on traditional Croatian dishes, but also to follow new trends in nutrition and

accordingly adapt dishes and supplement the gastronomic offer of dishes of famous world cuisines. According to the number of restaurants and the number of guests coming to the restaurants, one of the 7 most important gastro destinations in Croatia are Zagreb, Split, Novigrad, Dubrovnik, Opatija, Rovinj and Sibenik. For the moment, gastro tourism offers very rarely the thematic gastropubs, which include traveling throughout Croatia or just in some places, getting acquainted with their local culture and tradition, and tasting typical dishes of Croatian regions. Such trips are usually one-day, and may be over several days.

More recently, they have been organizing thematic gastro events such as strudel, culinary, food fair and traditional products. Gastronomic events can be organized on the theme of preparing various dishes along with some accompanying entertainment programs such as boat rides and fish halibut, hunting and game preparation, and the like. To develop gastro tourism, it is necessary to develop a special strategy for gastro tourism development, to include a gastronomic offer in tourism products, to design a marketing program for gastro tourism and to foster cooperation at all levels. According to the above, Croatia has recognized the potential of gastro tourism, but it is still insufficient given that some European countries have significant income from gastro tourism.

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, gastronomy seeks to turn into a tourist attraction for attracting tourists and creating a gastronomic destination. All the world's cuisines are different and different, and at the same time, this variety is inspiring tourists to try out something new. New trends in nutrition point to changes that occur in the social and technological sense which has led to changes in way and style of life. People take more account of their health and accordingly adapt their food to this trend. The problems encountered by gastro tourism are insufficient information and knowledge of new trends in gastronomy and insufficient education of restaurant staff on new culinary techniques in order to create menus in accordance with these new trends. In recent years gastro tourism exponentially grows year after year, indicating that tourists have recognized this form of selective tourism.

The trend of gastro tourism has been recognized by leading gastronomic destinations such as France, Spain, Italy and Mexico, whose cuisines are known throughout the world. The before mentioned countries view gastro tourism as a special segment of tourist demand and as part of their tourist offer they have organized gastro travels that allow tourists to taste food and get acquainted with their specialties, tradition and customs. Croatia, apart from the sun and the sea, should expand its tourism offer to other selective forms of tourism - precisely in this context, the opportunity for developing gastro tourism that is slowly beginning to develop. Croatia has great potential for developing gastro tourism, but for now it has not been sufficiently recognized. Croatian gastronomy is very rich and varied. It is necessary that within the framework of tourist arrangements offered by touristic communities and

agencies, gastronomy and gastronomy should be promoted based on which Croatia could be promoted as a gastronomic destination.

Gastronomic tourism is an opportunity for Croatia to expand its tourist season throughout the year, increase tourist expenditure, enrich its tourist offer with new amenities and contribute to the fact that catering facilities in Croatia's seaside do not close during the winter months. Through the survey and interview, it is evident that Croatian restaurants try to keep up with new gastronomic trends, they do combine traditional food with modern cuisine but the offer of dishes in most restaurants adapted to these trends is still insufficient.

Compared to the development of gastro tourism in Croatia with gastro tourism in Spain, France, Italy, India and Mexico, it is clear how much Croatia lags behind the development of gastro tourism of these countries. Considering that tourism in Croatia is an important economic activity, it is important to develop other forms of tourism. Croatia's gastronomic offer surely can be measured with the offer of Spain, Italy and other countries on this issue, but sadly this potential of Croatia is still poorly used. France, Spain and Italy are considered to be the gastronomic forces of Europe. They are widely known for their specialties and variety of gastronomic regions. Each of these countries has left a great mark on gastronomy around the world - that is why they are considered to be famous gastro destinations today. French and Mexican cuisine are under UNESCO protection.

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