

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF GASTRONOMIC HERITAGE IN GREEN TOURISM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY FROM SERBIA

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Abstract: Traditional gastronomy is an important part of intangible cultural heritage and plays an increasingly important role in the development of sustainable tourism. Bearing in mind the rise of interest in environmentally friendly tourism, traditional gastronomy may add to the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability of tourism destinations. In addition to cultural significance, traditional food products may also influence tourists' attitudes toward environmentally friendly tourism. This study aims to investigate the role of traditional gastronomy in the green transition of tourism in the Republic of Serbia, with particular emphasis on tourists' perceptions and intentions. A quantitative research approach, based on a structured survey of 95 tourists who have previously consumed traditional gastronomic products at various tourism destinations in the Republic of Serbia, was used. The respondents rated 32 items on a seven-point Likert scale. The results indicated high reliability since the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the instrument was high, with Cronbach's alpha = 0.961. Descriptive analysis and Spearman's rank correlation method were used to determine the relationship between gastronomic motivation factors and tourists' intentions on green tourism. The results indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between gastronomic motivation factors and tourists' intentions. This suggests that traditional gastronomy could be a major influence on tourists' attitudes towards green tourism. Therefore, it shows the importance of incorporating gastronomic heritage in green tourism.

Keywords: Traditional gastronomy, green tourism, sustainable development, gastronomic heritage, Republic of Serbia.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary tourism is marked by significant structural changes due to increased environmental awareness, changes in consumer behavior, and the need for more sustainable development approaches (Liu, 2003; Robinson et al., 2020). Mass tourism, based on the intensive use of space and resources, has increasingly been questioned due to its negative environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts (Gössling et al., 2015). As an alternative solution to these problems, green tourism has been gaining importance in contemporary tourism theory and practice, focusing on the rational utilization of resources, support for local communities, and the sustainability of tourist destinations (Dodds & Joppe, 2001; Ivanović et al., 2016). Gastronomy plays an important role in contemporary tourism, particularly in the context of green tourism, based on local, authentic, and traditional products (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Traditional gastronomy goes beyond being an alternative tourism service and becomes an expression of local identity, differentiation, and even sustainability (Sims 2013; Vuksanović et al., 2016). Contemporary tourists are highly interested in traditional gastronomy in terms of their desire for authentic experiences, local food products, seasonality, and environmentally friendly food preparation practices, thus ascribing strategic importance to traditional gastronomy in the development of green tourism (Krasavac et al., 2024).

In addition, the Republic of Serbia has a rich gastronomic heritage with diverse features, shaped by the historical, cultural, and geographical specifics of its regions (Tasić, 2018). Traditional gastronomic products, methods, and customs are an important yet insufficiently exploited potential for tourism development (Vukolić et al., 2024). Although the literature recognizes the importance of gastronomy in sustainable and green tourism development, empirical studies exploring the relationships between gastronomic authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and green tourism development are insufficient, especially in the context of Serbia (Esponda Perez et al., 2024).

From the perspective of destination management, the integration of traditional gastronomy in the context of green tourism requires the application of various managerial practices, including product development, cooperation with stakeholders, quality management, and positioning (Kozak & Kozak 2016). The importance of understanding the perceptions of tourists with respect to traditional gastronomy, along with their implications for tourist satisfaction, intentions, and competitiveness, is extremely relevant to the management of green tourism (Nurmatov et al., 2021; Josimović et al., 2024).

Considering the above-mentioned research gap, this study aims to empirically investigate the role of traditional gastronomy in the context of green tourism in the Republic of Serbia, with emphasis given to tourist perceptions. In this context, this study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do tourists perceive the authenticity and importance of traditional gastronomy in the context of green tourism development?

RQ2: What are the relationships between gastronomic motivation factors and tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions?

RQ3: To what extent does traditional gastronomy affect the competitiveness of the destination and the development opportunities of green tourism?

By answering these questions, the present study hopes to contribute to the improvement of the understanding of the strategic role of traditional gastronomy in the processes of green tourism development.

2. Literature review

2.1. Green and sustainable tourism as a development framework

Today, tourism is in a state of rapid transition, driven by changing tourism patterns, greater emphasis on the environment, and the need for more sustainable development strategies. In this context, the idea of green and sustainable tourism plays a key role in contemporary tourism policies and practices, focusing on the sustainable management of resources, the preservation of identity, and the improvement of quality of life for residents. A large volume of literature confirms that sustainable tourism is not simply an alternative to mass tourism, but an imperative for future development (Elsehly & Elsayed, 2024; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Bakan, 2015; Ellis et al., 2018; Ioannides, 2012; Stokes, 2008; Nurmatov et al., 2021; Baum, 2006; Harrington et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2020; Kozak & Kozak, 2016).

In the broader framework of sustainable tourism, green tourism is characterized as a subcategory of tourism that strives to reduce the negative environmental impacts of tourism, promote the rational utilization of resources, and foster environmental responsibility among all participants in the tourism process (Dodds & Joppe, 2001; Vávrová & Čevova, 2025; Liu, 2003). Beyond the environmental dimension of sustainability, the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of sustainability are equally incorporated in the concept of green tourism, making it a complex and promising phenomenon in the field of tourism development. Therefore, the recent literature emphasizes the importance of the involvement of the local community in the successful development of green tourism (Ivanović et al., 2016; Riznić et al., 2017).

Green tourism is also strongly connected with responsible consumption practices, such as the use of local resources, reducing waste, and supporting environmentally friendly business activities. In practice, its development often involves the introduction of sustainability standards, certification systems, and policies that promote environmental responsibility at the destination level. This kind of approach not only helps protect the environment, but also contributes to the long-term competitiveness and stability of tourist destinations (Esponda Pérez et al., 2024; Elsehly & Elsayed, 2024).

2.2. Traditional gastronomy as a tourism resource and element of destination identity

Traditional gastronomy can be considered an important element in the development of green tourism. In fact, modern literature has begun to recognize gastronomy as an important element in the tourism identity of a destination, which has significant implications for the tourist experience (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). There has been significant evidence to suggest that the gastronomic offerings play an important role in influencing tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and intentions to return to the same destination. Traditional gastronomy, which is often associated with the cuisine of the indigenous people, has significant implications for the maintenance of cultural heritage (Pérez et al., 2024; Everett 2019; Tasić, 2018; Zelić et al., 2025; Blešić et al., 2025).

According to the literature, gastronomic tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of modern tourism. Modern tourists are increasingly inclined to travel with the aim of experiencing local cuisine, customs, and ways of life, with gastronomy acting as a tool of cultural communication between tourists and the resident population. In this context, traditional food is no longer perceived as a commodity but as part of the intangible cultural heritage that carries historical, social, and identity values of a given community.

2.3. Gastronomy and the principles of green tourism

The relationship between gastronomy and green tourism is described along various important dimensions in literature. First, the use of local and seasonal products minimizes the need for transporting food over long distances, thereby reducing the negative impacts of such practices. Secondly, the use of local products helps in the development of the local economy. On the other hand, traditional gastronomic practices are environmentally friendly, as such practices are less industrialized compared to contemporary ones. All these factors have a bearing on the sustainability of gastronomic practices (Agustiani et al., 2025). Another important dimension of the relationship between gastronomy and green tourism, as described in the literature, is that gastronomic products could make an important contribution to the preservation of biodiversity by incorporating various indigenous species. In this sense, gastronomy is not only an important tourism product, but it is also an important tool for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage (Jevtić et al., 2023). All these considerations have a bearing on the relevance of traditional gastronomy in shaping tourists' perceptions of sustainability and the development of green tourism.

2.4. Gastronomy, tourist perceptions, and destination competitiveness in Serbia

Regarding Serbia, the literature highlights its rich and diverse gastronomic heritage, shaped by various cultures, historical periods, and geographical characteristics. Traditional Serbian gastronomy is characterized by a wide variety of authentic dishes, specific preparation methods, and local products. The quality and authenticity of gastronomic offerings can significantly influence tourists' satisfaction and their overall experience within a destination (Namkung et al. 2007; Vuksanović et al., 2016). The existing literature dealing with the development of tourism in Serbia emphasizes the need for the integration of gastronomy with other forms of selective tourism, such as rural tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, and ecotourism. In such an aspect, the traditional gastronomy is seen as an element that can extend the existing tourist season, increase the amount of tourist expenses, and increase the competitiveness of the destination in the existing market (Gagić et al., 2014; Petković, 2022). Previous studies indicate that tourists show increasing interest in local cuisine and authentic gastronomic experiences (Stone et al., 2019). However, the lack of standardization and promotion of gastronomic offer is considered an obstacle in the valorization of the existing gastronomic heritage. Authors point out the importance of the integrated approach that involves the recognition of gastronomy as part of the sustainable tourism strategy (Krasavac et al., 2024).

2.5. Research gap and conceptual framework

One of the important gaps identified in the current body of literature and research studies is the lack of sufficient empirical studies focusing on the perceptions of tourists concerning the role of traditional gastronomy as a part of the wider green tourism movement. Most of the studies and investigations have been limited to descriptive analyses of gastronomic heritage, whereas fewer studies have explored the relationship between gastronomy, sustainability, and tourist behavior (Vukolić et al., 2024; Stojanović, 2017). Meanwhile, recent studies have pointed to the fact that the competitiveness of tourist destinations depends on the ability to offer authentic, sustainable, and experiential tourism products, and traditional gastronomy plays a key role as a significant component of a recognizable tourism identity (Riznić et al., 2024). However, there have been limited empirical studies exploring the relationship between gastronomic authenticity, tourist satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and perceptions of green tourism development, especially concerning the Republic of Serbia.

As a response to the identified gaps, the current study proposes a conceptual framework of the role of traditional gastronomy as a determinant of tourists' perceptions and motivations, influencing their satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and perceptions of destination competitiveness as a part of the wider green tourism movement. This conceptual framework provides the theoretical base for the empirical analysis and results presented.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

The research design adopted in this research is a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between traditional gastronomy, tourists' perception, and the development potential of green tourism in the Republic of Serbia. The research is perception-based and analytical in nature, focusing more on testing statistically significant relationships between variables rather than offering descriptive research insights. A structured survey questionnaire is used as a primary data collection instrument in this research. The research design allows for an empirical investigation of relationships between motivational, attitudinal, and perceptual variables through statistical tests offered in SPSS software version 23.

3.2. Sample and data collection

The collection of the data was carried out from September 2025 to January 2026. The research utilized a non-probability convenience sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed online via email and direct sharing, targeting individuals in the Republic of Serbia who had previously visited tourist destinations and had experience consuming traditional gastronomic products. The total number of questionnaires collected was 102. However, after validation, only 95 remained valid for the inferential analysis of the research. The decrease in the sample size was due to the lack of complete information in the remaining questionnaires. Table 1 illustrates the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The level of education shows that most of the sample had a high level of education, such as a university or postgraduate degree. This is consistent with the research carried out in the study, as the research is based on sustainability awareness, gastronomic perception, and green tourism principles. The level of education is higher in people with sustainability concepts, and the sample was consistent with the research carried out in the study, which is based on sustainability principles.

The findings of the research should be considered with caution as the research utilized a non-probability convenience sampling method. The research is not based on the general population, and the findings of the research should provide insights into the informed tourists' views on sustainability-related tourism practices.

3.3. Measurement instrument and variables

The study employed a 32-item scale that attempted to measure the essence of traditional gastronomy, perceptions of sustainability, and the emergence of green tourism. Each attitude statement was measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree. The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on relevant studies in the fields of gastronomic and sustainable tourism (Riva et al., 2022; Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022; Elsehly & Elsayed, 2024), with certain items adapted to the geographical context of the Republic of Serbia.

The study grouped the scale into various conceptual groups of variables:

- Knowledge and interest in gastronomy (K1-K4)

- Gastronomy attitude (GA1-GA4)
- The importance of green practice aspects (IGP1-IGP6)
- Attitude towards green restaurants (A1-A6)
- Motivations to travel to destinations with green restaurants (M1-M...)
- Tourists' intention (TI1-TI3)

3.4. Data analysis procedure

The data processing was carried out with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics. In the next step, the data is analyzed at multiple stages. First, the descriptive statistics were used to identify the essential characteristics of the variables. Then, the reliability of the instrument used to measure the variables was assessed with the help of Cronbach's alpha. To understand the relationship between the variables, Spearman's rank correlation analysis was conducted.

4. Results of research

4.1. Sample profile

The total number of participants for the study was 95. After the process of data cleaning and validating, the results showed that the data were fully valid for the purpose of inferential statistics. Table 1 below shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Sample profile					
Characteristics	Description	%	Characteristics	Description	%
Gender	Male	37.3	Region of residence	Belgrade Region	26.5
	Female	62.7		Vojvodina Region	10.8
Age	18-25	37.3		Šumadija and Western Serbia Region	41.2
	26-35	15.7		Southern and Eastern Serbia Region	19.6
	36-45	12.7		Kosovo and Metohija Region	2
	46-55	21.6	Marital status	Single	32.4
	>55	12.7		In relationship	25.5
Average monthly income	<52.000 RSD	17.6		Married with children	27.8
	53.000-80.000 RSD	7.8		Married without children	8.8
	81.000-	16.7		Other	5.9
	>100.000 RSD	41.2			
	Prefer not to say	16.7			

Source: Authors

The sample consisted of females (62.7%) and males (37.3%). The most represented age group was 18-25 years (37.3%), followed by the 46-55 years age group (21.6%). In relation to educational attainment, most respondents had a bachelor's (40.2%) or doctoral degree (33.3%). The region with the most represented sample was the Šumadija and Western Serbia Region (41.2%), with 41.2% having a monthly income over 100,000 RSD.

4.2. Reliability analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement instrument was checked by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient with 95 valid cases.

Table 2. Reliability analysis results

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.961	32

Source: Authors

The results indicate a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.961$), confirming the reliability of the measurement instrument.

4.3. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to measure the level of central tendency and dispersion for the study variables. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of all the measured items based on the 95 valid responses.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of study variables

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
K1	95	5.1474	1.71953
K2	95	3.8526	2.15351
K4	95	4.4316	1.72376
GA1	95	4.4526	1.64232
GA2	95	5.2000	1.61509
GA3	95	5.5263	1.44283
GA4	95	4.6421	1.80964
IG1	95	4.0316	1.78321
IG2	95	6.0105	1.51934
IG3	95	5.8421	1.57990
IG4	95	6.2632	1.17790
IG5	95	5.6421	1.66258
IG6	95	5.7895	1.53605
A1	95	5.8947	1.39508
A2	95	5.6737	1.54673
A3	95	5.7263	1.52596
A4	95	4.8316	1.62855
A5	95	5.2526	1.60431
A6	95	4.9368	1.69988
A7	95	4.7789	1.68964
M1	95	5.2211	1.62546
M2	95	5.2947	1.49377
M3	95	5.3895	1.53189
M4	95	5.1474	1.64361

M5	95	5.2105	1.55669
M6	95	5.2632	1.53131
M7	95	5.5579	1.37389
M8	95	5.1579	1.53204
M9	95	5.6000	1.41722
TI1	95	4.5684	1.77244
TI2	95	4.7789	1.75147
TI3	95	4.7158	1.72382

Source: Authors

On the other hand, most of the variables have their mean values located above the midpoint of the seven-point scale, reflecting a positive attitude towards traditional gastronomy and the principles of green tourism. Higher mean values are found for the variables related to cultural identity and sustainability perceptions (i.e., IG and A constructs), whereas slightly lower values are noted for the behavioral intention variables.

The abbreviations show in Table 3 represent different groups of variables included in the questionnaire. More specifically, K (K1-K4) refers to respondents' knowledge and familiarity with traditional gastronomy, GA (GA1-GA4) reflects their attitudes toward traditional gastronomy and its cultural significance, IG (IG1-IG6) relates to perceptions of green practices and sustainability, A (A1-A7) captures attitudes toward green restaurants, M (M1-M9) represents motivations for visiting such destinations, while TI (TI1-TI3) indicates tourists behavioral intentions.

4.4. Distribution of responses for item M1

To understand the perspectives of the respondents with respect to the cultural dimension of green gastronomy, the distribution of the responses to item M1 has been analyzed.

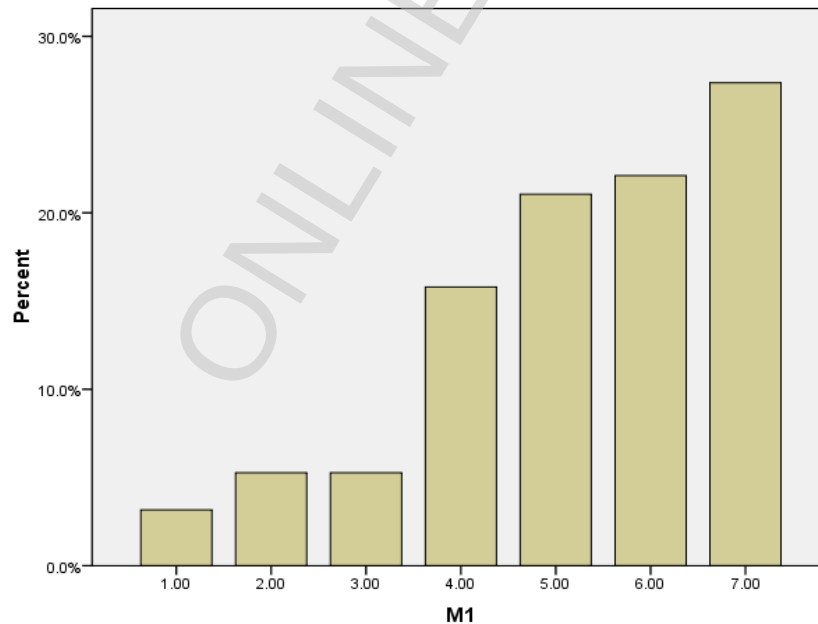


Figure 1. Distribution of responses for item M1: “Green restaurants provide a unique opportunity to learn about local culture”

Source: Authors

This is shown in Figure 1, where the responses are mainly clustered in the upper range of the seven-point scale, indicating a largely positive perception of the role of green restaurants in the promotion of local cultural knowledge.

4.5. Distribution of responses for item K1

To further investigate the perceptions of the respondents regarding the potential of the destinations, the distribution of the responses to the items under K1 were analyzed.

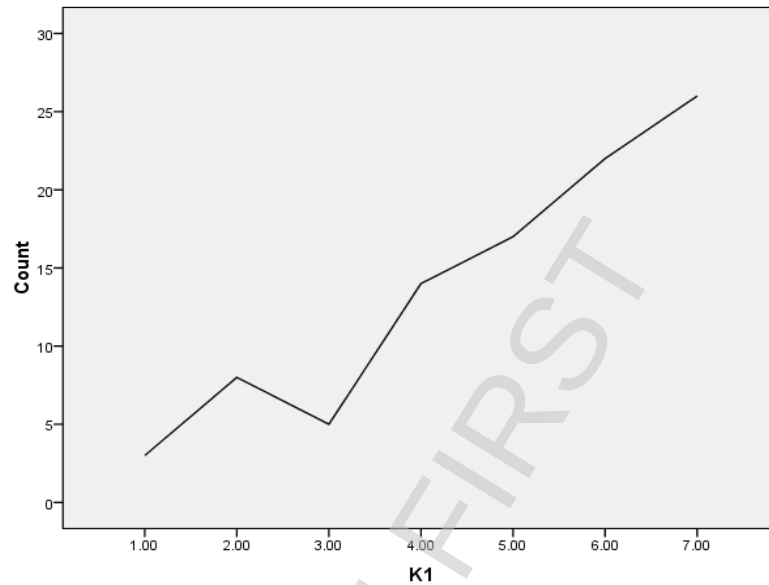


Figure 2. Distribution of responses for item K1: “The Republic of Serbia has significant potential for green tourism development based on traditional gastronomy”

Source: Authors

As indicated by Figure 2, answers are grouped mostly on the higher end of the seven-point scale, which reflects a high overall belief in Serbia’s potential for developing green tourism related to traditional gastronomy.

4.6. Correlation analysis

Spearman’s rank correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between gastronomic motivation variables M1-M9 and tourists’ behavioral intention variables TI1-TI3.

Table 4. Spearman’s correlation coefficients between gastronomic motivation and behavioral intention variables

		M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	TI1	TI2	TI3
M1	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.890**	.683**	.781**	.746**	.650**	.623**	.482**	.521**	.584**	.644**	.614**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M2	Correlation Coefficient	.890**	1.000	.782**	.831**	.793**	.692**	.665**	.474**	.529**	.566**	.633**	.557**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M3	Correlation Coefficient	.683**	.782**	1.000	.813**	.791**	.529**	.682**	.567**	.543**	.526**	.492**	.453**

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M4	Correlation Coefficient	.781**	.831**	.813**	1.000	.895**	.686**	.702**	.570**	.483**	.607**	.611**	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M5	Correlation Coefficient	.746**	.793**	.791**	.895**	1.000	.714**	.681**	.557**	.514**	.667**	.634**	.598**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M6	Correlation Coefficient	.650**	.692**	.529**	.686**	.714**	1.000	.708**	.479**	.467**	.552**	.601**	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M7	Correlation Coefficient	.623**	.665**	.682**	.702**	.681**	.708**	1.000	.636**	.582**	.490**	.459**	.491**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
M8	Correlation Coefficient	.482**	.474**	.567**	.570**	.557**	.479**	.636**	1.000	.498**	.427**	.394**	.452**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
M9	Correlation Coefficient	.521**	.529**	.543**	.483**	.514**	.467**	.582**	.498**	1.000	.369**	.367**	.430**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
TI1	Correlation Coefficient	.584**	.566**	.526**	.607**	.667**	.552**	.490**	.427**	.369**	1.000	.877**	.832**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
TI2	Correlation Coefficient	.644**	.633**	.492**	.611**	.634**	.601**	.459**	.394**	.367**	.877**	1.000	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
TI3	Correlation Coefficient	.614**	.557**	.453**	.600**	.598**	.635**	.491**	.452**	.430**	.832**	.872**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Authors

On one hand, the analysis results reveal statistically significant positive correlations among the examined variables. Specifically, the correlation coefficients vary from moderate to strong. In addition, strong positive correlations were found between motivational variables and intention-related constructs. Specifically, it is observed that high levels of gastronomic motivation correspond to high levels of behavioral intentions regarding sustainable tourism.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is a coherent and analytically consistent pattern. The descriptive statistics suggest that, in general, there are positive perceptions of traditional gastronomy as an important part of tourism development in a culturally significant and sustainability-oriented way. The graphical distribution of the data confirms that there is strong agreement on the importance of green restaurants and the potential for green tourism development in Serbia based on traditional gastronomy. Additionally, statistically significant positive correlations between gastronomic motivation and behavioral intention variables suggest that tourists who are more motivated to engage in traditional gastronomic experiences are more likely to participate in sustainable tourism and have intentions to return.

Overall, the empirical data suggests that traditional gastronomy is not only an important part of the cultural landscape, but it also has the potential to be an important part of the strategic landscape, influencing sustainable tourism and its development. The empirical data that has been collected in this research serves as an important part of the foundations for the managerial and strategic implications that are discussed in the next section.

5. Discussion

The research objective was to examine the role of traditional gastronomy in terms of green tourism development in the context of the Republic of Serbia, with a special emphasis on tourists' perceptions, motivation, and behavioral intentions. The results provide empirical evidence to support the strategic role of gastronomy in green tourism development.

Regarding RQ1, it is evident from the results that tourists view traditional gastronomy as an important part of the green tourism experience. The descriptive statistics reveal a high level of positive evaluation of traditional gastronomy in terms of its role in promoting culture and sustainability. The graphical representation of responses to M1 also suggests that tourists view green restaurants as a site for cultural engagement. This is in line with previous studies that emphasize the role of gastronomy in terms of destination differentiation and cultural preservation (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Vuksanović et al., 2016). About RQ2, it is evident from the results that there are statistically significant positive correlations between gastronomy motivation variables (M1 to M9) and behavioral intention variables (TI1 to TI3). The results reveal a high level of positive correlation between gastronomy motivation and behavioral intention variables. This is in line with previous research that emphasizes the role of gastronomy in terms of its potential to influence tourists' satisfaction and loyalty (Krasavac et al., 2024; Josimović et al., 2024). As far as the answers to Research Question 3 (RQ3) are concerned, the respondents agree to a large degree that the Republic of Serbia indeed has a significant potential for the development of green tourism, focusing on traditional gastronomy (K1). This, combined with the positive links between motivation and intention variables, implies that traditional gastronomy could indeed represent a key competitive resource for the country (Vávrová & Čevová, 2025).

Overall, the discussion implies that traditional gastronomy, apart from being a cultural attribute, also represents a key attribute for the decision-making process, affecting sustainable tourism behaviors and perceptions of the destination's potential. These results contribute to the extension of the current literature by linking authenticity, motivation, and green tourism positioning, specifically in the context of a transitional tourism system.

6. Conclusion

The present study aims to explore the importance of traditional gastronomy from the wider perspective of green tourism development in the Republic of Serbia, focusing on the perceptions, motivations, and behavioral intentions of tourists. According to the empirical results, there is a strong indication that traditional gastronomy is generally perceived as a significant and valuable component of tourism experience, as far as the cultural and sustainability dimensions of tourism are concerned. More specifically, the empirical results revealed a positive and significant relationship between gastronomic motivation and behavioral intention, indicating the importance of traditional gastronomy as a significant experiential determinant of the tourism experience. On the other hand, the strong consensus concerning the green tourism development opportunities of the Republic of Serbia, as far as the role of traditional gastronomy is concerned, highlights the importance of gastronomy as a significant

instrument for enhancing the competitiveness of the destination. Thus, the importance of traditional gastronomy, as far as the wider context of green tourism development is concerned, becomes more evident.

The current study adds to the empirical literature by exploring the relationship between authenticity, motivation, and perceptions of green tourism, as related to the notion of transitional tourism. The current research substantiates the claim of traditional gastronomy being a cultural and a strategic resource for the promotion of new sustainable tourism.

6.1. Managerial implications

The implications of the research findings are substantial for destination managers, policymakers, and tourism practitioners working on the development of green tourism strategies. First, the overall positive perceptions of traditional gastronomy imply that destination management organizations (DMOs) should not only recognize the importance of gastronomy as an additional service but should also consider it an essential part of the green tourism brand strategy. The second implication is related to the high correlation between gastronomic motivation and intention, which implies that destination managers should take into consideration the fact that investments in high-quality gastronomic experiences may directly affect tourists' intentions for revisiting the destination. Finally, the high level of perception of Serbia's opportunities for green tourism development based on traditional gastronomy suggests that policymakers should take advantage of the opportunities for strategic alignment of tourism development plans, rural development plans, and cultural heritage preservation plans in the interest of increasing the competitiveness of the destination. Overall, the research findings imply that traditional gastronomy should be incorporated into the process of developing sustainable tourism strategies as a value-creating element.

6.2. Limitations and future research

Despite the study's achievements, it is important to recognize that studying has a few limitations. Firstly, the use of a non-probability convenience sampling method limits the study in terms of generalization, as the sample may not represent the larger population of tourists, despite providing insightful information on tourists' perceptions. Future research should consider using a probability-based approach in collecting the sample, as well as an expanded sample size. Secondly, the use of perceptions and attitudes as a basis for study, as well as collecting information from tourists at a single point in time, limits the study in that it is unable to capture any changes in perceptions that may occur in the future. A longitudinal study would provide a better understanding of the effect of gastronomic engagement on sustainable tourism behavior in the future. Finally, though the study employed reliability and correlation tests in examining the relationship that exists between various constructs, future research may consider employing more sophisticated model-based research, such as structural equation modeling (SEM) and path analysis, in examining the causal effect that exists between constructs such as authenticity, satisfaction, sustainability perception, and competitiveness.

Finally, the future research might broaden its scope to other destinations besides Serbia and conduct comparative research. Such comparative research will help to gain a broader understanding of the role of traditional gastronomy within a number of green tourism development schemes.

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