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TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GASTRONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES: LESSONS FROM SERBIA

Abstract

Sustainable gastronomic tourism represents a unique opportunity to connect food, local gastronomy and ecotourism in order to create a holistic tourist experience. This study examines the attitudes of tourists on the promotion of sustainable tourism through awareness of nutrition and environmental conservation. The aim of the research was to examine the perception of gastronomy and its importance in the context of sustainable tourism in Serbia. The research was conducted during the year 2025 on a sample of 52 respondents, using a methodology that included a survey questionnaire and field data collection. Applying principal component analysis (PCA), two key dimensions of tourists' attitudes were identified: "Gastronomic knowledge and interest" and "Ecological and sustainable consumer awareness", which together explain 76.5% of the total variance. The obtained results show that respondents highly value gastronomic and sustainable practices in restaurants, especially those that involve the use of locally grown food, waste reduction and the use of recycled products. On the other hand, measures of a broader socio-ecological character, such as donations and payment of fees aimed at reducing the ecological footprint, received a somewhat lower level of support among respondents.

Key words: gastronomy, sustainable tourism, local food, Serbia

JEL classification: Z30, Q50

ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈА ТУРИСТА О ЗНАЧАЈУ ГАСТРОНОМИЈЕ И ПРАКСАМА ОДРЖИВОГ ТУРИЗМА: ИСКУСТВА ИЗ СРБИЈЕ

Апстракт

Одрживи гастрономски туризам представља јединствену могућност повезивања исхране, локалне гастрономије и екотуризма у циљу стварања холистичког

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туристичког искуства. Ова студија испитује ставове туриста о унапређењу одрживог туризма кроз свест о исхрани и очувању животне средине. Циљ истраживања био је да се испита перцепција гастрономије и њен значај у контексту одрживог туризма у Србији. Истраживање је спроведено током 2025. године на узорку од 52 испитаника, применом методологије која је обухватила анкетни упитник и теренско прикупљање података. Применом анализе главних компоненти (РСА) идентификоване су две кључне димензије ставова туриста: „Гастрономско знање и интересовање“ и „Еколошка и одржива свест потрошача“, које заједно објашњавају 76,5% укупне варијансе. Добијени резултати показују да испитаници високо вреднују гастрономске и одрживе праксе у ресторанима, посебно оне које подразумевају употребу локално узгојене хране, смањење отпада и коришћење рециклираних производа. С друге стране, мере ширег социо-еколошког карактера, попут донација и плаћања накнада усмерених на смањење еколошког отиска, добиле су нешто нижи ниво подршке међу испитаницима.

Кључне речи: гастрономија, одрживи туризам, локална храна, Србија

Introduction

Contemporary trends in tourism increasingly emphasize the importance of sustainability, local identity and authentic experiences that connect tourists with the destination in a wider context. In this context, sustainable gastronomy becomes a key element of the tourist offer because it simultaneously promotes local food products, cultural heritage and a responsible attitude towards the environment (Rinaldi, 2017). Tourists today, in addition to enjoying taste and food, are characterized by a conscious experience that reflects their values and contributes to the preservation of natural resources (Adongo et al., 2018). Knowledge about food and developed environmental awareness thus become important factors that shape the perception and choice of tourists when it comes to the gastronomic offer.

Accordingly, the research in this paper aims to examine how tourists perceive the importance of gastronomy, personal knowledge about food and the application of principles of sustainable restaurant practices. A special focus is placed on understanding attitudes about the importance of local food, recycling, energy efficiency and other measures that contribute to the preservation of the environment. The results of the research are expected to confirm the importance of gastronomy and the gastronomic experience for tourists, as well as that tourists perceive sustainable gastronomic practices as a significant factor of the further development of tourism.

The structure of the paper includes several related chapters. After the introduction, the theoretical framework on sustainable and gastronomic tourism follows; then the research methodology, the results of the factor analysis and the interpretation of the obtained findings are presented. At the end of the paper, concluding considerations and recommendations for the development of sustainable gastronomic tourism in Serbia will be presented.

Theoretical Background

Gastronomic tourism

Gastronomic tourism, as an increasingly dynamic segment of the wider tourism industry, connects travelers with the destination's cultural heritage through its gastronomy. This experience goes beyond the pure enjoyment of the taste and aesthetic experience of food, as it allows visitors to become familiar with traditional practices, techniques and authentic ingredients that shape the cultural and identity character of a certain area (Adekunle et al., 2024).

Food as a travel motivator is still an under-researched area, especially when it comes to the factors that encourage tourists to choose trips based on gastronomic experiences (Kumar, 2024). Researchers agree that consumption values influence preferences, purchase decisions and perceptions regarding the cultural and social significance of traditional specialties (Dwivedi & Jha, 2024), a topic that is still not sufficiently covered in the literature. Recent research indicates that key actors in tourism are intensively committed to promoting safe and hygienically correct gastronomic events, supporting private businesses, developing culinary centers, improving infrastructure and promoting regional cuisines, thereby contributing to the development of gastronomic tourism and strengthening the local identity of destinations.

In the context of new trends, gastronomy plays an important role in green tourism, whose goals include nature conservation, cultural heritage protection, and the development of social responsibility (Hjalager, 2020; Okumus, 2021). Chefs and restaurateurs increasingly focus on the use of local and seasonal ingredients, which positively affects both the community and the environment, while also attracting tourists (Ellis et al., 2018; Sims, 2009). Using ingredients produced locally reduces energy and fuel consumption for transportation and, consequently, greenhouse gas emissions (Hall & Gössling, 2016; Filimonau & De Coteau, 2019). Moreover, such practices support local households and small producers, safeguard traditional recipes, and culinary techniques, and thus preserve intangible cultural heritage (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; López-Bellido et al., 2014).

Gastronomy is also widely recognized as an important generator of authenticity and sustainable tourist experiences, as local food symbolically reflects the identity of a place and meets the demand for authenticity in travel experiences (Sims, 2009). Research on younger populations shows that Generation Z perceives traditional cuisine as a bridge to the culture and traditions of a destination (Gheorghe et al., 2021). According to Gheorghe et al. (2021), gastronomic tourism is becoming increasingly attractive to younger generations, who view traditional cuisine as a way to connect with local culture and heritage. On the other hand, Hernández-Rojas et al. (2022) highlight the strong link between gastronomic experience and destination loyalty, confirming that high-quality and authentic gastronomy can have a decisive impact on tourists' repeat visits. The literature also points to the importance of linking gastronomy with sustainable practices. Hall and Gössling (2016) emphasize that local food contributes to reducing the ecological footprint of tourism through the use of seasonal and regional products. Similarly, Sims (2009) highlights that the "farm-to-table" concept connects tourism with agriculture, strengthening local communities and contributing to the diversification of rural economies.

In the context of green tourism, gastronomy is particularly significant, as it promotes the use of locally sourced ingredients, supports small-scale producers (Baysal

& Bilici, 2024), and encourages environmentally friendly culinary practices. Studies also highlight that tourists increasingly seek authentic food experiences that reflect local traditions while aligning with sustainable and responsible tourism principles, making traditional gastronomy a key driver of both cultural preservation and eco-conscious travel (Adekunle et al., 2024).

Sustainable gastronomy

In this context, the concept of sustainable gastronomy further reinforces these objectives by offering a green culinary approach that integrates environmental, cultural, and social dimensions of tourism. Green gastronomy represents a culinary approach focused on environmental protection, the nurturing of local culture, and the improvement of social well-being through the responsible use of food resources. This concept emphasizes the importance of using local products, environmentally friendly production methods, efficient waste management, and the preservation of traditional culinary heritage (Bajrami et al., 2025).

According to López-Bellido et al. (2014), green gastronomy is an integrated culinary practice that develops ecological awareness, supports the local economy, and preserves cultural heritage through sustainable food choices. Such an understanding not only influences the way food is produced and served but also has an educational role, as it raises consumer awareness about the importance of sustainability in everyday life (Agustiani et al., 2025).

Modern trends encompassing all spheres of life, including gastronomy, impose on hospitality establishments the need for creative and improved menus that meet tourists' expectations and desires. As guests increasingly pay attention to the origin and method of preparation of dishes, restaurateurs must adapt their offerings to new criteria. In contemporary times, gastronomy was often associated with the health impact of food, the representation of a region's cultural identity, and the harmonious pairing of dishes and beverages.

Green gastronomy also involves the application of environmentally friendly methods of food production, reduction of waste, and encouragement of recycling and composting (Filimonau & De Coteau, 2019; Agustiani et al., 2025). In this way, it can contribute to the preservation of natural resources, pollution reduction, and biodiversity protection (Hall & Gössling, 2016; López-Bellido et al., 2014). At the same time, the use of local ingredients promotes the safeguarding of culture and tradition, strengthening tourists' awareness of the importance of heritage and nature conservation (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sims, 2009; Dimitrijević, 2025). This enables visitors to connect more closely with the local community and its customs, enhancing both authenticity and sustainability of the tourism experience (Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022).

The Importance of Sustainable Gastronomic Tourism for Serbia

Serbia, as a country rich in tradition and culture, has a strong foundation for the development of gastronomic offerings in all its regions. Historical circumstances that shaped people's diets and habits serve as a source of engaging culinary narratives that can attract visitors. Tourism and hospitality play a vital role in Serbia's economy, which makes it necessary to follow modern trends and continuously improve offerings. An increasing number of restaurants in Serbia are turning toward green tourism practices—relying on local ingredients or even producing part of the food themselves. This represents a significant

advantage, as Serbia, in addition to its natural beauty and preserved environment, can also offer authentic local products through the lens of sustainability and eco-approaches (Pavličić, 2023). However, research addressing the intersection of gastronomy and sustainable or green tourism in Serbia remains relatively scarce.

Existing studies mainly emphasize the role of traditional cuisine in rural and cultural tourism development, particularly through gastronomic events, wine routes, and village households (Vujko et al., 2020; Gajić et al., 2025). This highlights the need for more systematic research that would explore how traditional gastronomy can be strategically integrated into green tourism models to enhance both sustainability and destination competitiveness.

Recent research expands this foundation: Paunić et al. (2024) examine the “gastronomic identity” of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, highlighting factors like cultural heritage and gastro-tourism events that foster sustainability. Similarly, Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. (2024) focus on the Srem region, underscoring authenticity, event quality, and food offerings as critical factors for tourism development. Additionally, Stojić et al. (2025) explore how pairing local food and wine enhances sustainability in hospitality highlighting environmental and economic benefits of reduced food miles and authentic experiences.

In the context of Serbia and the region, research (Vujko et al., 2020) indicates that traditional cuisine has considerable potential in the development of rural tourism, particularly through gastronomic events, rural households, and wine routes. However, it is emphasized that there is a need for more systematic promotion and the integration of gastronomic resources into green tourism in order to achieve greater recognition in the international market.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Participants. The research was conducted during August 2025 on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The sample included 52 respondents of different gender and age structures, thus ensuring diversity in terms of demographic characteristics and level of experience in the field of tourism and gastronomy. Tourists were first asked if they were interested in traditional gastronomy, and then they started giving answers. The research was conducted through a survey questionnaire, which was distributed through direct contact at tourist locations. The relatively small number of participants is a result of the exploratory nature of the study and the short data collection window, yet the responses provided a sufficient basis for descriptive analysis of attitudes, opinions, and experiences related to sustainable gastronomy.

Data Collection Procedure. A structured survey questionnaire was used as the basic research instrument. The questionnaire was designed with the aim of examining tourists' knowledge of food, their environmental awareness and perception of sustainable gastronomy. It consisted of closed questions rated using a seven-point Likert scale (Hossain et al., 2024), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Choosing a seven-point scale proved to be the optimal approach because it provides a balanced relationship between measurement precision and ease of answering. The seven-point scale allows a fine enough discrimination between the respondents' attitudes, without burdening the participants with too many options (Russo et al., 2021). Also, research

has shown that mean values on seven-point scales have a stronger correlation with empirically observed levels of significance compared to five-point scales, that is, seven-point scales result in stronger connections with statistical indicators (Dawes, 2002).

Study Description. The survey instrument was adapted from previously validated research tools (Gheorghe et al., 2021; Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022) and carefully adjusted to reflect the specific socio-cultural and gastronomic characteristics of Serbia. The SPSS (v.23) software package is used for testing in this study.

Research Results

The results of the research provide insights into the demographic profile of respondents, the reliability of the applied measurement scales, and tourists' knowledge, motivations, and perceptions of traditional gastronomy in the context of sustainable tourism practice in Serbia. The analysis begins with the demographic characteristics of the sample, followed by the evaluation of measurement reliability, and finally explores the attitudes of tourists toward gastronomy and sustainable practices. After the demographic analysis, PCA analysis will be performed to confirm the relationships and groupings between the observed variables.

The demographic profile of respondents shows a predominance of younger generations and highly educated participants, which is consistent with findings that younger cohorts, particularly Generation Z, demonstrate a stronger orientation toward authentic and environmentally responsible tourism practices (Gheorghe et al., 2021; Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022). The reliability of the applied scales was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which indicate high internal consistency and support the validity of subsequent interpretations.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

	Frequency (%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	46.2
Female	53.8
<i>Age (year)</i>	
18-25	51.9
26-35	19.2
36-45	13.5
46-55	11.5
>55	3.8
<i>Education</i>	
Secondary/high school	17.3
University degree	51.9
Master's degree	21.2
PhD	9.6
<i>Region</i>	
Belgrade	11.5
Vojvodina	5.8
Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia	63.5
Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia	19.2

<i>Monthly income</i>	
<52.000 RSD	21.2
53.000-80.000 RSD	11.5
81.000-100.000 RSD	23.1
>100.000 RSD	23.1
no statement	21.2

Source: Authors' calculation

When it comes to the demographic statistics of the respondents (Table 1), it can be seen that 52 respondents from the territory of the Republic of Serbia participated in the research. The sample was balanced in terms of gender (53.8% women and 46.2% men). The most numerous age group consisted of respondents aged 18 to 25 (51.9%), while the participation of those over 55 was the least (3.8%). Most of the participants have higher education (51.9% university degree, 21.2% master's degree, 9.6% doctorate, while 17.3% completed high school). The largest number of respondents comes from the Šumadija Region and Western Serbia (63.5%), while the smaller number comes from Southern and Eastern Serbia (19.2%), Belgrade (11.5%) and Vojvodina (5.8%).

Table 2: Reliability statistics

Question group	Cronbach's alpha
Knowledge	0.869
Importance of green practices in restaurants	0.911

Source: Authors' calculation

The reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Nannally, 1978). The results indicate that both question groups have high internal consistency (Table 2). Specifically, the "Knowledge" scale achieved a value of $\alpha = 0.869$, while the "Importance of green practices in restaurants" scale reached an even higher reliability level ($\alpha = 0.911$). Both coefficients exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating that the items within each scale are mutually consistent and adequately measure the observed constructs. The obtained values, which range between 0.80 and 0.95, point to very good to excellent reliability, without indications of potential item redundancy (George & Mallery, 2003). Accordingly, both scales can be considered reliable measurement instruments for further analysis.

Table 3: Knowledge and motivation of the gastronomy of the Republic of Serbia (%)

	Frequency (%)
<i>How well do you know the food and cuisine of the Republic of Serbia?</i>	
- I know very well	
- I know well	15.4
- I know moderately	32.7
- I don't know at all	46.2
	5.8

<i>Have you ever traveled solely with the aim of experiencing the local cuisine of a destination?</i> - Yes - No	40.4 59.6
<i>Can a positive gastronomic experience motivate you to visit that destination again?</i> - Yes - No	94.2 5.8

Source: Authors' calculation

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the majority of respondents have a moderate to good knowledge of the gastronomy of the Republic of Serbia. The largest percentage of respondents (46.2%) assessed that they know Serbian food and cooking moderately, while 32.7% stated that they know them well, and 15.4% very well. A smaller number of participants (5.8%) stated that they do not know local gastronomy at all. When it comes to the motivation for travel, 40.4% of the respondents stated that they traveled solely for the gastronomic experience, while the majority (59.6%) had not yet done so. However, almost all participants (94.2%) stated that a positive gastronomic experience would motivate them to visit a certain destination again, which confirms the importance of gastronomy as an important factor of tourist loyalty and repeat visits. The obtained results are in accordance with previous research that indicate the growing importance of gastronomy as a motivational factor in tourism. Namely, earlier studies have confirmed that positive gastronomic experiences significantly influence the formation of an emotional bond with the destination and can represent a key incentive for repeat visits (Kovalenko et al., 2023). Similarly, research conducted by Kumar (2024) and Okumus et al. (2020) shows that culinary is increasingly becoming the main motive for travel, especially among younger generations who strive for authentic and sustainable experiences (Guzel & Apaydin, 2016).

Table 4: Response statistics

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
K1	52	1.00	7.00	5.3654	1.54703
K2	52	1.00	7.00	5.0577	1.88298
K3	52	1.00	7.00	4.8654	1.72671
I1	52	1.00	7.00	5.9615	1.66817
I2	52	1.00	7.00	5.8846	1.55493
I3	52	2.00	7.00	6.1538	1.24278
I4	52	1.00	7.00	5.5385	1.68571
I5	52	1.00	7.00	5.6346	1.60915

Note: Questions with K - refer to knowledge and questions with I - refer to importance (K1 - How important is it that the gastronomic experience leads to the overall satisfaction of your trip?; K2 - I am interested in food and cuisine in general; K3 - I have good knowledge about food and cooking in general; I1 - It is important for restaurants to reduce energy consumption and the amount of waste; I2 - It is important that restaurants use biodegradable or recycled products; I3 - It is important that restaurants serve locally grown food; I4 - It is important that restaurants donate to environmental projects; I5 - It is important that restaurants pay fees to reduce their environmental footprint).

Source: Authors' calculation

The descriptive statistics of the respondents' knowledge (K1–K3) and perceptions of the importance of sustainable gastronomic practices (I1–I5) are presented in Table 4. The results indicate that participants generally have a moderate to high level of interest in and knowledge about gastronomy, with mean scores of 5.37 (K1), 5.06 (K2), and 4.87 (K3) on a 7-point scale. This suggests that respondents are engaged with the culinary aspects of tourism, particularly in relation to overall trip satisfaction and general interest in food (Sims, 2009).

Regarding the importance of sustainability measures in the gastronomic experience, participants rated practical, direct sustainability practices the highest. Serving locally grown food (I3; $M = 6.15$) and reducing energy consumption and waste (I1; $M = 5.96$) were considered most important, followed by the use of biodegradable or recycled products (I2; $M = 5.88$), and other direct practices such as supporting local initiatives (I5; $M = 5.63$) which is consistent with previous findings on the growing ecological awareness of consumers in hospitality contexts (Han & Hyun, 2017). In contrast, activities with a more indirect socio-ecological impact, such as donations to environmental projects (I4; $M = 5.54$) and paying environmental fees (I5; $M = 5.63$), received comparatively lower importance ratings.

In order to investigate the latent dimensions that shape the perception of knowledge about gastronomy and the importance of ecological and sustainable practices among tourists, PCA - Principal Component Analysis is carried out. PCA enables the identification of latent factors that group similar attitudes and perceptions of respondents, facilitating further interpretation of the relationship between knowledge, motivation and environmental awareness in the context of sustainable gastronomy.

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.804
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	297.273
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' calculation

PCA goodness-of-fit check of the data showed that the conditions were met. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy was 0.804, which is considered a "good" level (Kaiser, 1974) and indicates that the sample is sufficient to conduct PCA. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(28) = 297.273$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that there were significant correlations between the variables and that the data were suitable for factor analysis. These results confirm that PCA is a justified method for further investigation of the latent dimensions of knowledge and environmental awareness among respondents.

The results of PCA (Total Variance Explained with Initial Eigenvalues) show that the first component explains 58.03% of the total variance, and the second 18.48%. After Varimax rotation, the first two components together explain 76.51% of the variance, indicating that the two latent dimensions sufficiently summarize the main patterns in respondents' attitudes. The first component reflects knowledge and interest in gastronomy, while the second represents ecological and sustainable awareness.

Table 6: Rotated factor coefficients (Component Matrix)

	Component	
	1	2
K1	0.615	0.619
K2	0.749	0.511
K3	0.66	0.597
I1	0.789	-0.363
I2	0.818	-0.307
I3	0.757	-0.038
I4	0.863	-0.344
I5	0.811	-0.363

Source: Authors' calculation

The results of the rotated factor matrix show the distribution of the variables by two main components. Variables K1–K3 (knowledge and interest in gastronomy) and I1–I5 (importance of ecological and sustainable practices) have high loadings on the first component, which indicates the existence of a dominant factor that unites respondents' attitudes towards gastronomy and sustainability. Varimax rotation enabled a clear separation of factors, and convergence was achieved in three iterations.

Figure 1: Scree Plot

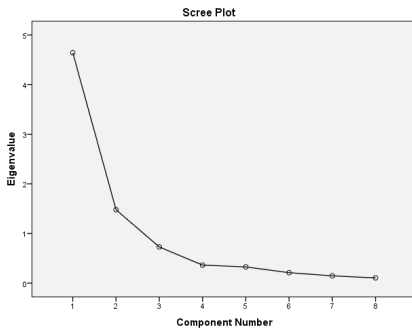
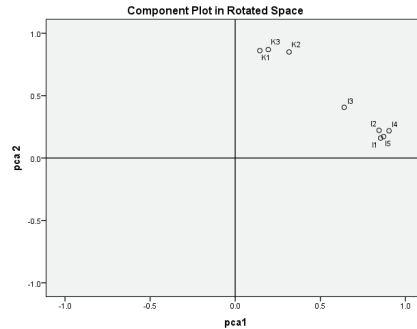


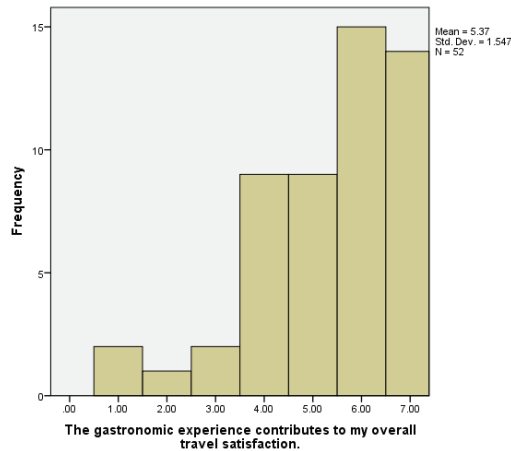
Figure 2: Component plot in rotated space



Source: Authors' calculation

For the final visual result, it is important to display both the Scree Plot and the Component plot in rotated space (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Based on the images shown, two components were observed, which together explain 76.5% of the total variance. In the first component, statements I1–I5, which refer to the ecological and sustainable practices of the restaurant, have a high loading. This factor reflects the opinion of the respondents on the importance of environmental responsibility of catering facilities. The second component related to interest and knowledge about gastronomy and cooking reflects the respondents' personal involvement and motivation towards gastronomy.

Figure 3. Contribution of gastronomic experience to travel satisfaction



Source: Authors' calculation

Finally, Figure 3 additionally shows the value of the gastronomic experience in contributing to overall travel satisfaction. The distribution of answers ($M = 5.37$; $SD = 1.55$) shows that the majority of respondents give high marks, which indicates that gastronomic experiences have an important role in forming a positive impression about travel.

Conclusion

Gastronomy has the potential to become a cornerstone of sustainable tourism development, offering value not only through taste but also by preserving nature, strengthening cultural identity and supporting local economies. The results of this study indicate that visitors attach the greatest importance to sustainability practices that have a direct and tangible impact on their gastronomic experience, such as serving locally grown food, reducing waste and using recycled products. Broader socio-ecological initiatives, although positively perceived, received relatively lower levels of support. These results suggest that tourists prioritize practical and visible sustainability measures that simultaneously enhance authenticity and environmental awareness.

It is also important to note that respondents value sustainability measures directly related to their personal gastronomic experience, such as serving local food and reducing waste. This is in line with Sims (2009), who emphasizes that consumers perceive local food as an authentic part of the tourist experience, as well as Han and Hyun (2017), who confirm the increasing importance of environmental awareness in hospitality decision-making. Findings are in line with previous research stressing the importance of local food as a driver of authenticity and sustainability (Sims, 2009; Hall & Gössling, 2016), while recent national studies confirm that satisfaction with local gastronomy in Serbia increases significantly when authenticity and eco-friendly practices are emphasized (Conić et al., 2025; Vukolić et al., 2024).

Also, the results show that gastronomy plays an important role in the formation of overall travel satisfaction. The majority of respondents believe that the gastronomic

experience is an important element of the tourist experience, while the smaller part does not attach such importance to this aspect.

The obtained results indicate that the gastronomic experience significantly contributes to the overall satisfaction with the trip. The distribution of the data shows that the majority of respondents give high marks, which reflects the general consensus on the importance of gastronomy in improving the tourist experience. This suggests that culinary elements, such as local food and restaurant experiences, represent a significant dimension of tourist satisfaction. A smaller number of respondents expressed a lower level of agreement, indicating that, although there are individual differences, gastronomy is widely recognized as an integral part of travel satisfaction.

Despite these insights, the study has limitations. The sample size is relatively small and confined to a single country, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, while a mixed-methods approach was used, no deeper qualitative analysis was conducted to explore tourists' motivations and experiences in greater detail. Future research should therefore involve larger and more diverse samples, comparative studies across regions, and the perspectives of local producers and hospitality providers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of traditional gastronomy in sustainable tourism. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating how sustainability is intertwined in tourists' evaluation of gastronomic experiences. These findings can offer practical guidance for tourism stakeholders and inform them about the development of sustainable tourism strategies.

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