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# UNDERSTANDING THE YOUTH TOURISTS' MOTIVATION TO ATTEND RURAL GASTRONOMIC FESTIVALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Marijana Seočanac<sup>1</sup>

\*Corresponding author E-mail: [marijanaseocanac@gmail.com](mailto:marijanaseocanac@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the motivation of young tourists to attend gastronomic festivals in rural areas in the Republic of Serbia. In addition, it seeks to find out whether their motivation differs depending on their knowledge of and interest in gastronomy. The research was conducted on a sample of 125 respondents. The collected data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20), using descriptive statistics, the K-means clustering multivariate grouping technique, and nonparametric statistical procedures (Kruskal-Wallis H test and Mann-Whitney U test). The results have shown that the opportunity to try new and varied foods, as well as enjoying the atmosphere at the festival, are the main motives for young tourists to attend gastronomic festivals in rural areas in the Republic of Serbia. Additionally, it was discovered that the gastronomic motifs of young tourists are different and conditioned by their knowledge of and interest in gastronomy.

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## Introduction

In modern society, gastronomy is becoming increasingly important. Some authors even perceive gastronomy as a manifestation of the culture of one place (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). Such power that food has led to it becoming a tourism resource (Dancausa Millán et al., 2021), whose role is to promote and differentiate a tourism destination (Dixit, 2021). Numerous terms have been coined in the literature to explain the role of food in tourism, such as “food tourism” (Hall et al., 2003), “culinary tourism” (Henderson, 2009), “tasting tourism” (Boniface, 2003). One of the most widely accepted is the term “gastronomic tourism” which implies “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a specialist food production region are the primary

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1 Marijana Seočanac, Research Assistant, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, Vojvođanska 5a, 36210 Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia, Phone: +381365150024, E-mail: [marijanaseocanac@gmail.com](mailto:marijanaseocanac@gmail.com), ORCID ID (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7232-3624>)

motivating factor for travel” (Hall & Sharples, 2003, p. 10). Owing to the significant economic contribution it can provide, gastronomic tourism is considered particularly important for developing countries (Mgonje et al., 2017).

Although the true scale of gastronomic tourism in the Republic of Serbia is difficult to comprehend due to a lack of adequate statistics (Dimitrovski, 2016; Šapić et al., 2018), Stanišić et al. (2018) found that gastronomy is a significant tourism offer in the Republic of Serbia. Their research revealed that in 2017, a total of 241 gastronomic festivals were held. Gagić et al. (2013) also note that “a strong connection between tourism and gastronomy in the Republic of Serbia was...established through food and drink festivals” (p. 1056). Gastronomic festivals, as one of the forms of food festivals, promote local food, increase the number of tourists in the destinations where they are held, and provide an opportunity for tourists to connect with local culture and people (Viljoen et al., 2017). So, in addition to being a good way to promote the host region, gastronomic festivals are also a great opportunity for tourists to gain new experiences, enrich their knowledge, and enjoy local cuisine (Wu et al., 2014; Carvache-Franco et al., 2020). However, Robinson and Getz (2014) note that in the literature on gastronomic festivals, special attention is paid to supply, while demand is largely neglected.

Kumar (2019) points out that “local food is an important tourist attraction and central to the tourist experience, not only for those who have special interest in food but also for those who have a more casual attitude to food and eating” (p. 1). However, Pavlidis and Markantonatou (2020) note that the preferences of tourists differ significantly depending on their interest in gastronomy. Pérez-Priego et al. (2019) believe that for successful tourism management, classification of tourists based on their interest in gastronomy is needed. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) proposed a classification of tourists based on their attitude towards gastronomy. These authors found that there are three types of tourists. First, there are “experiencers” or tourists who are extremely interested in gastronomy and for whom gastronomy is crucial when choosing a destination. Then, there are the “enjoyers” or tourists who have a positive attitude towards gastronomy. For this type of tourists, gastronomy is important for the destination choice and pleasure, but not as important as for experiencers. Finally, there are the “survivors” or the segment that has the lowest interest in gastronomy. Kim et al. (2010) point out that the motivation of food tourists has become one of the most prominent research topics in the tourism literature. However, Su et al. (2020) think that current literature lacks an understanding of the motivation of different gastronomic segments of tourists, so further research is needed.

The aim of this paper is three-fold. First, the paper aims to examine the motivation of young tourists to attend gastronomic festivals in rural areas in Serbia. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation (2008), young tourists are an extremely important industry. Compared to other market segments, it is characterized by high spending power, significant tourist flow (accounting for over 20% of international tourist arrivals), low impact of pandemics, terrorism, or natural disasters on travel decisions,

desire to meet local people, explore new destinations, and get off the beaten track. Most of the research on gastronomic festivals so far has been conducted on a sample of older respondents, while young tourists were mostly neglected. However, a study by Dimitrovski et al. (2021), conducted in the context of slow food festivals, discovered that young tourists are also interested in gastronomic festivals and that their motivation differs significantly from the motivation of older tourists. The taste, experience, social status, change, people, family, and inspiration dimensions, which were discovered by Park et al. (2008) as the most important motives for visiting gastronomic festivals, will be used in this study to gain knowledge about the primary motives of young tourists to visit rural gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia. Another aim of the paper is to cluster young gastronomic festival attendees based on the criteria that Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) proposed. Finally, the aim is to investigate whether there is a difference in the motivation of young tourists to attend gastronomic festivals depending on which gastronomic cluster they belong to.

The current study provides insights on the motivation of young tourists to attend gastronomic festivals and adds to the current knowledge on motivation in tourism. The use of segmentation models in gastronomic tourism on the example of gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia, which has not been the subject of research so far, is another contribution of this study. By providing knowledge about the motives of young tourists to the organizers of gastronomic festivals, which they can use to better organize future events, thus, the study will have practical implications as well.

### **Materials and methods**

The target population for this study was millennial tourists who visited rural gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia. The empirical research was carried out among students of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, in the period from July to September 2021. The appropriate sample was considered adequate because the students correspond to the observed age group and come from different parts of the Republic of Serbia, which indicates the probability that the sample will consist of respondents who visited gastronomic festivals in various rural areas across the country. In this way, it was possible to obtain the appropriate sample in a relatively short time and with no research costs. Additionally, having in mind that Gastronomic Management is one of the study programs at the Faculty, it is expected that the segmentation of respondents based on their knowledge of and interest in gastronomy, necessary for the realization of the second research goal, will be facilitated.

The research was conducted online due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed in March 2019. A questionnaire consisting of three sections and 37 questions was prepared using Google Forms survey administration software. The first section contained questions about respondents' demographic characteristics; the second assessed their knowledge and interest in gastronomy; and the third section included questions about their motivation to attend rural gastronomic festivals, which were compiled based on relevant claims in the literature (Park et al., 2008). Respondents expressed their agreement with

the offered statements using the five-point Likert scale (1 – completely disagree, 5 – completely agree). The questionnaire was sent to students in July 2021, via email addresses obtained from the Faculty Student Services. Of the 400 surveys forwarded, 125 responses were recorded, giving a response rate of 31%. Since all questions in the survey were mandatory, there was no missing data.

The collected data was analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20). The adequacy of the sample was estimated based on the answers to the questions related to age and the rural gastronomic festivals visited. The average value was calculated for each statement related to the motivation of tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals. The internal consistency of each scale used in the research was examined with the help of Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

In order to segment the respondents based on their gastronomic preferences, the K-means clustering multivariate grouping technique was used. The number of clusters was determined based on the suggestions of Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016), and the basis for segmentation was the respondent's level of knowledge of and interest in gastronomy. A discriminatory analysis was used to confirm the correct grouping. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to detect significant differences between the observed groups, while the Mann-Whitney U test was used to detect between which groups a statistically significant difference in mean values exist. Descriptive statistics, i.e., frequency analysis, were used to represent the respondents who belong to each identified group. A nonparametric statistical procedure, the Kruskal-Wallis H test and the Mann-Whitney U test, was used to examine potential differences in motivational factors among the identified groups of tourists.

## Results and Discussion

In order to assess the adequacy of the obtained sample, the results related to the respondents' age and the rural gastronomic festivals they have visited so far were first analyzed. All respondents correspond to the demographic cohort that is the subject of the study. Answers to the question "*Which rural gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia have you visited so far?*" showed that the largest percentage of respondents visited the Cabbage Festival in Mrčajevci (40.8%), followed by the Smoked Meat Festival in Mačkat (27.2%), the Bacon Festival in Kačarevo (8.8%), the Srem Kulen Festival in Erdevik (7.2%), and the Sausage Festival in Turija (4.8%). These results showed that the sample consists of respondents who visited rural gastronomic festivals in different parts of Serbia, which is why the obtained sample is adequate for the realization of defined goals.

The motivation of young tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals was examined with the help of seven dimensions proposed by Park et al. (2008). The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each scale is over 0.8, which, according to the authors Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and DeVellis (2012), indicates a high level of internal consistency of the scales. Based on the obtained results (*Table 1*), it was discovered

that the taste dimension, and especially the elements “the opportunity to try new foods” and “the opportunity to try various foods”, are the most important motives for young tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals. These results agree with the results of Krajičková and Šauer (2018), who found that for visitors of gastronomic festivals, the opportunity to try new food, rather than a favorite dish, is the main motive for visiting this type of festival. After the taste dimension, the most important motive for the respondents was experience. For young tourists, as expected, the opportunity to “enjoy the atmosphere at the festival” and “have fun” are extremely important reasons why they visit gastronomic festivals. Dimitrovski et al. (2021) identified that the quality of food and the program content of the event are the main drivers of satisfaction for young tourists who attend slow food festivals. On the other hand, social status and, above all, “gaining popularity among friends and family” are the least important motives for attending rural gastronomic festivals. These results are in contrast to the study by Krajičková and Šauer (2018), conducted during two events in the Czech Republic, which found that social status is an important component of students’ motivation to attend gastronomic festivals.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of motivation for attending rural gastronomic festivals

		Dimensions	Mean	Ranking
<b>Taste</b>	Cronbach’s alpha (0.847); Mean (4.34)	Consumption of a favorite dish	4.22	7
		Opportunity to try new food	4.51	1
		Opportunity to try a variety of foods	4.43	2
		Opportunity to find food for future consumption	4.21	8
<b>Experience</b>	Cronbach’s alpha (0.837); Mean (4.28)	To satisfy curiosity	4.06	13
		To have fun	4.36	4
		To enjoy the atmosphere at the festival	4.40	3
		To enjoy the environment / location where the festival takes place	4.30	5
<b>Social status</b>	Cronbach’s alpha (0.828); Mean (2.72)	That my friends think I went to an exciting event	2.12	27
		To gain popularity among friends and family	1.82	28
		To visit an event I can tell others about when I get home	3.18	24
		To share my knowledge of the festival with others	3.75	20
<b>Change</b>	Cronbach’s alpha (0.894); Mean (4.01)	To escape from the daily routine	3.95	15
		To relax	4.02	14
		To get rid of boredom	3.86	16
		To enjoy the day outside	4.20	9

		Dimensions	Mean	Ranking
<b>People</b>	Cronbach's alpha (0.864); Mean (3.61)	To observe the people around me	3.17	25
		To meet new people	3.85	17
		To meet people who have the same interests as me	3.82	19
		To make new business contacts	3.59	21
<b>Family</b>	Cronbach's alpha (0.877); Mean (3.92)	To spend time with family / friends	4.19	10
		To be in a new environment with family / partner / friends	4.25	6
		To help my family learn more about gastronomy	3.38	23
		To help my family enjoy the festival	3.84	18
<b>Inspiration</b>	Cronbach's alpha (0.892); Mean (3.76)	To exchange ideas with professionals	3.52	22
		To meet a famous chef	3.16	26
		To expand my knowledge of gastronomy	4.10	12
		To develop my cooking skills	3.85	17
		To get new ideas / recipes	4.17	11

Source: Authors' calculations

In order to examine whether there is a difference in the motivation of the respondents depending on their knowledge of and interest in gastronomy, first, the respondents were divided into clusters. Clusters identified based on respondents' knowledge of and interest in gastronomy were named according to Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen's (2016) suggestion as "survivors", "enjoyers" and "experiencers". The first segment, or survivors, consisted of 15.2% of respondents and included respondents with the lowest ratings of knowledge and interest in gastronomy. The largest segment (53.6%) consists of enjoyers, or respondents who showed moderate knowledge and interest in gastronomy, while those who have the greatest knowledge and interest in gastronomy, or experiencers, make up 31.2% of the sample. Discriminant analysis, which revealed that 96.8% of respondents were correctly classified, confirmed the validity of the performed segmentation. Based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for examining the normality of the distribution, the normality of the sample distribution has not been proven. For this reason, nonparametric tests were used to examine differences in knowledge and interest in gastronomy between clusters. The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that the mean values differed significantly among the observed groups, while the Mann-Whitney U test with Bonferroni correction of alpha value found that there was a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.017$ ) between each identified gastronomic cluster (Table 2). These results show that young tourists who attend rural gastronomic festivals differ according to their level of knowledge of and interest in gastronomy.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of identified clusters

Gastronomic inclination	Clusters			Kruskal-Wallis H	
	Survivors	Enjoyers	Experiencers	x <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
How would you rate your knowledge of gastronomy?	1.74	2.73	4.38	90.491	0.000
How would you rate your interest in gastronomy?	1.89	3.69	4.67	71.366	0.000

Source: Authors' calculations

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents belonging to each cluster is shown in *Table 3*. The sample consists mostly of female respondents (81.6%), and the gender ratio is very similar in all three clusters. The Kruskal-Wallis H test did not identify statistically significant differences in the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents among the clusters. The results showed that the largest percentage of respondents (52%) visit rural gastronomic festivals once a year. Among the observed clusters, a statistically significant difference in terms of the intensity of rural festival attendance was found (Kruskal-Wallis H = 21.008,  $p = 0.000$ ). The analysis showed a higher frequency of respondents who visit rural gastronomic festivals more than three times a year in a group characterized by greater knowledge of and interest in gastronomy. In the cluster consisting of respondents who showed the lowest knowledge of and interest in gastronomy, 84.2% of respondents visit gastronomic festivals just once a year.

**Table 3.** Sociodemographic profile of respondents within the identified clusters

Characteristics	Clusters			Total (N = 125)	Kruskal-Wallis H	
	Survivors (N = 19)	Enjoyers (N = 67)	Experiencers (N = 39)		x <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
Gender					5.813	0.055
Male	10.5%	13.4%	30.8%	18.4%		
Female	89.5%	86.6%	69.2%	81.6%		
Education					0.010	0.995
High school graduate	15.8%	23.9%	20.5%	21.6%		
Associate degree	0%	1.5%	10.3%	4%		
Bachelor's degree	84.2%	64.2%	53.8%	64%		
Master's degree	0%	9%	12.8%	8.8%		
PhD degree	0%	1.5%	2.6%	1.6%		
Employment status					4.925	0.085
Employed	0%	19.4%	17.9%	16%		
Occasionally employed	5.3%	13.4%	12.8%	12%		
Unemployed	10.5%	7.5%	0%	5.6%		
Student	84.2%	59.7%	69.2%	66.4%		

Characteristics	Clusters			Total (N = 125)	Kruskal-Wallis H	
	Survivors (N = 19)	Enjoyers (N = 67)	Experiencers (N = 39)		$\chi^2$	Sig.
How often do you visit rural gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia?					21.008	0.000
Once a year	84.2%	55.2%	30.8%	52%		
Two times a year	0%	26.9%	15.4%	19.2%		
Three times a year	15.8%	11.9%	17.9%	14.4%		
Four times a year	0%	1.5%	7.7%	3.2%		
Five times a year	0%	4.5%	2.6%	3.2%		
From 6 to 10 times a year	0%	0%	7.7%	2.4%		
More than 10 times a year	0%	0%	17.9%	5.6%		

Source: Authors' calculations

Analysis of the motivation to attend rural gastronomic festivals among the identified clusters using the Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed that the clusters differ significantly in terms of the four dimensions of motivation (*Table 4*). The Mann-Whitney U test with Bonferroni correction of alpha value ( $\alpha = 0.017$ ) was used to determine which clusters have statistically significant differences. It was found that experiencers, or cluster consisting of respondents who have the highest level of knowledge and interest in gastronomy, is statistically significantly different from other clusters. Compared to the enjoyers cluster, they reported significantly higher values for the dimensions of taste ( $p = 0.002$ ), experience ( $p = 0.000$ ), people ( $p = 0.002$ ), and inspiration ( $p = 0.002$ ). This indicates that this segment of tourists primarily sees rural gastronomic festivals as an opportunity to try new and varied foods, satisfy curiosity, meet people with similar interests, gain new business contacts, exchange ideas with professionals, and expand their knowledge of gastronomy. On the other hand, survivors, or cluster consisting of respondents with the lowest level of knowledge and interest in gastronomy, compared to a cluster of experiencers, recorded a significantly lower value for the inspiration dimension ( $p = 0.010$ ). This cluster, compared to the cluster of tourists with the highest knowledge of and interest in gastronomy, significantly less motivates the opportunity to expand their knowledge of gastronomy, exchange ideas with professionals, develop cooking skills, etc. These results are consistent with numerous studies (e.g., Pérez Gálvez et al., 2017; Nicoletti et al., 2019; Pérez Gálvez et al., 2020; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021) that found that tourists' gastronomic motifs for visiting a particular destination are different and conditioned by their interest in gastronomy.



**Table 4.** Dimensions of motivation for attending rural gastronomic festivals by clusters

Dimensions	Clusters			Kruskal-Wallis H	
	Survivors	Enjoyers	Experiencers	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Taste	4.14	4.21	4.67	10.101	0.006
Experience	3.97	4.15	4.67	14.221	0.001
Social status	2.63	2.57	3.01	2.258	0.323
Change	3.95	3.84	4.33	5.986	0.050
People	3.39	3.40	4.06	8.500	0.014
Family	3.86	3.83	4.10	3.365	0.186
Inspiration	3.40	3.59	4.22	11.746	0.003

Source: Authors' calculations

## Conclusion

Gastronomy is an extremely important part of the tourism offer of the Republic of Serbia. Gastronomic tourism has numerous implications for the destination, from increasing the number of tourists to creating a tourism destination brand (Jovičić Vuković & Terzić, 2020; Čavić & Mandarić, 2021; Čavić et al., 2021; Božić & Milošević, 2021). Gastronomic festivals, as part of gastronomic tourism, are reviving the rural areas where they are held, and their number is increasing from year to year. Although gastronomic festivals are mostly viewed as events of interest primarily to older tourists, this paper indicates that young tourists are also very interested in gastronomic festivals in Serbia. The current study revealed that the opportunity to try new and varied food, as well as to enjoy the atmosphere at the festival, are the main motives for young tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals in Serbia. Additionally, this study found that the observed group of tourists can be segmented according to their level of interest in gastronomy, so their motivation can be viewed from the perspective of tourists who have high, moderate, and low knowledge of and interest in gastronomy. The study found that motivation varies among clusters. For example, the results showed that young tourists with high interest and knowledge of gastronomy are most motivated by the opportunity to try new and varied foods, meet people with whom they share similar interests, and gain new knowledge and professional contacts, while these motives are significantly less pronounced among tourists with low interest and knowledge of gastronomy. This segmentation can be extremely useful for the organizers of rural gastronomic festivals because it provides an opportunity to learn the characteristics of their visitors and accordingly create appropriate content.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical implications are reflected in the fact that this study contributes to understanding the motivation of young tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals in Serbia, which has so far been rather neglected in the literature. Also, observing the motivation of tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals through gastronomic clusters proposed by Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) can be considered another theoretical contribution of this paper. On the other hand, the current study also provides significant knowledge to the organizers

of rural gastronomic festivals, which can be used for the better organization of future events and promotional activities as well. Having in mind that this study revealed the young tourists' motivational factors for attending rural gastronomic festivals in Serbia, by highlighting these motives in promotional activities, the desired cluster of young tourists can be attracted (e.g., by emphasizing that a rural gastronomic festival offers the opportunity to meet a famous chef, the experiencers cluster could be attracted).

This study has several limitations. The relatively small sample size, caused by the inability to conduct field research (due to COVID-19 restrictions) and the time period when the research was conducted (during the summer holidays when students are less likely to check email), can be considered the first limitation of this paper. Then, the limitation of the study is the fact that the respondents were only students of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, who, due to preparation for their future profession, have good knowledge of gastronomy. This led to the segment of respondents with the lowest knowledge of and interest in gastronomy consisting of only 19 respondents. Future research should be conducted on a larger sample, which, in addition to students of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, should include other young tourists in Serbia as well. This will allow for a more thorough examination of the motivation of the "survivors" cluster, as well as the motivation of other clusters. In future studies, it would be interesting to include the results of research conducted through personal interviews with young festival attendees, which will provide a broader picture of the motivation of young tourists to attend rural gastronomic festivals in the Republic of Serbia.

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### **Conflict of interests**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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