

# Assessing Innovation Potential in Slovene Culinary Events

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Due to the general scarcity of tourism innovation statistics and information sources in tourism, this analysis focuses on different types of successful micro-tourism organizations and employs case study methodology to study innovation potential in Slovene culinary events. After analysing current culinary and innovation research trends, four events web pages and their media coverage were analysed through a case study approach using qualitative content analysis. Three innovation attribute groups were formed, totalling 23 descriptors of innovation-related activities of the organizers and the events. In the results section, all the attributes are described for each studied case. The discussion section identifies common characteristics, particularities, and implications designated in relation to the innovation potentials of culinary events in Slovenia and in general.

*Key words:* tourism innovation, culinary events, national tourism promotion

## Introduction

A company that wants to remain competitive in today's market has to be (among other things) innovative. A company's ability to meet consumer expectations is largely dependent on its ability to develop and deliver attractive goods and services. Innovation is, therefore, a key factor for sustainable competitive advantage and, as such, one of the strategic endeavours for companies.

New trends in tourism are expanding rapidly because the complexity of the global tourism phenomenon is constantly affected by the abundant legacy and continuous development of the array of (sub)cultures, values, interests and concrete forms of human leisure. In such a complex environment, tourism providers must be able to detect new trends and offer intelligently designed, recognizable and memorable tourism products, which bring innovative benefits to them, their guests and their surroundings.

The coordination of the systematic promotion of innovation in Slovenian tourism is the domain of the Slovenian Tourism Board (STB) and its partners: the Directorate for Tourism at the Ministry of Economy and the University of Primorska's Faculty of Tourism Studies, among others. Since 2004, STB has rewarded the most innovative tourism achievements with the Sejalec (Sower) award. In addition, national tourism creativity and innovation are promoted through the Bank of Tourism Potentials in Slovenia (BTPS) web platform; BTPS Creator financial support for the most inventive ideas in Slovenian tourism, and several other measures (Križaj & Zakonjšek, 2011).

This paper analyses a specific layer of tourism innovations in Slovenia: culinary events. In its theoretical section, this paper analyses current culinary and innovation research trends, then presents the applied methodology and analysed units, followed by results

and discussion with practical implications and further research suggestions.

### Theoretical Background

There is a growing interest in the research of culinary tourism, community food systems, food sustainability, and related developments, as well as marketing and delivery activities (Kline & Lee, 2015). According to Getz and Robinson (2014), some of the most popular food-related events are farmers markets, cultural festivals, wine-food tasting events, food festivals, and visiting of upscale restaurants; with tourists' most favoured involvement in all of them being tasting authentic regional cuisine in local environments.

It comes as no surprise then that food preferences can play a significant role in tourist's destination choices (Mak et al., 2012) and that spending on food experience can represent as much as one-third of the total expenditure (Hall & Sharples, 2003), significantly affecting the local hospitality business sector and local food supply chains in destinations. Because of the synergetic effects, there is even a strong presence of professional and scientific discussions oriented towards strategies of event bundling. Such collaboration connects several events, organizers, event attendees and destination marketing organizations, which all affect event or festival value and outcomes (Xu et al., 2016). Yoon et al. (2010) have been analysing the linkage between quality, value, satisfaction, and loyalty of festival visitors. The results of their study identify quality attributes (food, program, souvenirs, facilities, and others) that contribute to satisfaction, loyalty and to the understanding of events design.

Mason and Paggiaro (2012) emphasize that culinary-related tourism offers have numerous beneficial effects on tourism destinations, including improved awareness, emotional connectedness, loyalty, greater cooperation and differentiation of the brand. Similar to the winescape concept that (rather than merely focusing on narrow wine tourism products) encompasses extended experience needs for the holistic leisure and holiday bundle (Bruwer & Alant, 2009), the festivalscape concept focuses on wider, functional and affective dimensions of festivals and similar events (Ryu & Jang, 2007).

If a destination decides to invest in the ever-stronger 'foodies' tourism segment and corre-

sponding recognition, Getz et al. (2015) suggest a model for a demand-side approach to food tourism planning and development. It consists of five inter-linked stages: market research, evaluating demand in a competitive environment, developing and testing new products, evaluating outcomes, and changing the marketing mix. The latter is driven by business optimization activities and by global influences in terms of new trends and new visitor segments from around the globe.

Such globalization streams in (once truly local) authentic and regional cuisine systems can be understood as a threat to indigenous gastronomic identities but can also be explained as an incentive for the reinvention of and business opportunity for local gastronomic products and identities. Leaning on the world culture theory perspective, Mak et al. (2012) suggest that globalization can positively reconstruct or reinvent local gastronomic traditions and specialities.

This brings us to the phenomenon of tourism innovation and its potentials. In general, tourism providers are not considered to be very active inventors (Krizaj et al., 2014). They tend to be innovators searching to adopt and fully incorporate innovations that are new to the firm, maybe the region, but not necessarily to the global markets. Therefore, in tourism sector we usually encounter incremental (and mostly not radical) innovations upgraded from previous adoptions and knowledge (Hjalager, 2010; Camisón and Monfort-Mir, 2012). Camisón and Monfort-Mir (ibid.) argue that tourism innovations are ubiquitous, but they are not thoroughly identified via official instruments and inquiries that are mostly focused on other sectors and scales. This argument leads us to the speculation that there might be more innovations existing or detected in tourism, but that due to its multidisciplinary and complex characteristics, they might be hidden.

According to multi-perspective innovation literature (Johannessen et al., 2001; Sundbo et al., 2007), there are many viewpoints to be considered in order to gain overall insight into innovation phenomena in general. Camisón and Monfort-Mir (2012) suggest that innovations occurring at the specific tourism provider level might be inadequately assessed through national or regional level indicators. The authors also question whether general innovation analyses can seize the extensive variety of attributes

needed to describe the bundles of diverse services included in tourism (Tribe, 1997; Liburd, 2012).

The tourism industry includes a significant amount of small and medium-sized organizations that can contribute to the more than 90% national share of companies employing up to 100 employees and over 70% employing up to 20 employees (Smith, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011). Such smaller entities are more often than not limited in their innovative capacities and are therefore more dependent on the public sector’s development support initiatives. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to gather insights into such organizations’ evolution and delivery processes (Camisón and Monfort-Mir, 2012). These kinds of insights could help improve the corresponding policies. In practice, this is still not the case. European Community innovation surveys mostly cover organizations with more than ten employees, meaning that an important share of smaller entities, strongly dependent on public policies, can be excluded from the results they bring and from the needs they address.

**Method**

Due to the discussed general scarcity of innovation statistics and information sources in tourism (Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2011), presented analyses focused on micro-organizations and employed case study methodology to better understand innovation

in Slovene culinary events, following research guidelines and specifics advocated by Yin (2013). Four culinary events’ web pages and their media coverage were analysed through a case study approach using qualitative content analysis (Berelson, 1952), a technique frequently used in tourism research and innovation categorization (Baregheh et al., 2009).

The basic analytical approach followed the arguments of Krizaj et al. (2014) and Camison and Monfort-Mir, (2011) regarding mostly hidden tourism innovations and their basic common attributes. Three attribute groups were formed following the Zachman Framework ontology for conducting enterprise analysis (Molnar & Balint, 2015; Lapalme et al., 2015) and answering the innovation questions of Who, What and How, following Hamel’s (2006) innovation management implications and guidelines. The ‘Who’ section relates to standard demographic (organizational, size, location, capital source, age) attributes. ‘What’ seeks for the cases content description and its linking to the existing tourism segments and core business activities of event organizers. ‘How’ addresses the outcomes and reach of the analysed culinary events (Table 1).

The cases that have been chosen (based on the organizers’ (micro) size and their publicly perceived current or past innovative status in the Slovenian tourism sector) for the analysis are:

Table 1 Case study attributes

WHO	WHAT	HOW
Organizer	Type of event	Marketing channels
Organizational form	Duration	No. of participating providers
No. of employees	Frequency	Limitations of visitors
Origin of capital		National publicity Foreign publicity
Organizer’s age	Organizers’ registered activities	Scientific literature references
Event’s age	Event activities	Follow-up projects
Organizer’s region	Tourism segments	Parent project
Event’s region		Awards

- a) Odrta kuhna – Open Kitchen food market,
- b) Festival kulinarike - Culinary Festival,
- c) Festival čokolade - Chocolate Festival
- d) Ljubljanska vinska pot - Ljubljana Wine Route.

Odrta Kuhna is a food market that takes place every Friday, from late March to late October, between 8 am and 10 pm at the central market in Ljubljana. It consists of different traditional Slovenian and international cuisine providers. Organizers adhere to the ‘no competition’ concept, and thus the same dish should not appear on two different stands, which contributes to diversity and attractiveness of the event (<http://www.odprtakuhna.si/>, accessed 2 Oct. 2015).

The Culinary Festival takes place every year in November for two days in Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia, on the chosen culinary theme. The main purpose of the event is to present ambitious cooks and hosts, and to contribute to promoting culinary art and hospitality. The festival takes place at two levels: the first is the Theatre of Flavours in which participants create dishes on the indicated theme live in front of audiences. The second is the Gallery of Flavours in which the schools, pubs, restaurants, delicacy providers, and others present themselves (<http://www.festivalkulinarike.si/>, accessed in October 2015).

The Chocolate Festival is open for three days in April at Linhart Square in Radovljica and in Radovljica Manor. The festival includes producers of chocolate and providers of chocolate-related food and drinks from Slovenia and abroad. Chocolate products are available for tasting (paid with coupons on sale at the event) and products from the regular sale of participating chocolatiers are sold as well. In the manor, chocolatiers present the production processes of their products, while there are also performances and workshops for children and adults on Linhart Square (<http://www.festival-cokolade.si>, accessed in October 2015).

The Ljubljana Wine Route is held for one day in June in the centre of Ljubljana, hosting a number of Slovenian wine growers and wine makers, manufacturers of various delicacies and cultural workers from all over Slovenia. Tourist information centres, tourism service providers and cultural and ar-

tistic performers are included. The event comprises a comprehensive range of Slovenian wines and cuisine, cultural elements, and additional tourist services (<http://www.ljubljanskavinskapot.si/festival/>, accessed in October 2015).

In the Results section, all the Who, What, and How attributes are described for each case presented above. Following that, the Discussion section then identifies their common characteristics and peculiarities designated in relation to innovation potentials of culinary events in Slovenia and in general.

## Results

### Who

The ‘Who’ group of cases’ attributes addresses standard demographic (organizational, size, location, capital source, and age) issues, the first of them being the organizational form of the chosen events’ organizers. The forms were diverse: the holder of Odrta kuhna is a limited liability company, the organizer of the Festival of Chocolate is a public institution, while the Culinary Festival and the Ljubljana Wine Route organizer are the results of individual entrepreneurs. The numbers of employees are low: Odrta Kuhna organizer has only one employee, the Chocolate Festival organizer has three to four, and the last one has no employees at all (Table 2). Since these are all big and seasonal events, the low number of permanent employees is somehow understandable.

The terms of the organizers’ funding are also diverse, and it is difficult to find a common denominator among them. As we see in Table 1, the institution Odrta Kuhna is primarily financed with foreign capital; the organizers of the Culinary Festival Ljubljana and Wine Route do not have any, while the Chocolate Festival organizer is financed by public funds.

The age of the organizing institutions is compared with the age of the events in Table 3, the main reason being that many (smaller) innovative companies are in fact set up solely on the basis of the innovation (Bonte et al., 2007). From the age of organizers and age of the events themselves, we can see that the companies are older than the events in our cases. Because the events are seasonal and short, it is understandable that organizers are engaged in other activities; however, it would be possible that the selected events would be the starting point innovations in the development of the companies.

Table 2 Form of the organization and its size

Event	Organizer	Organizational form	No. of employees	Origin of capital
Odperta kuhna	Olam, d.o.o.	limited liability company	1	Foreign capital
Culinary Festival	Poslovno svetovanje, Radomir Stojanovič, s.p.	sole proprietor	0	No capital
Chocolate Festival	Javni zavod Turizem Radovljica	public institution	3-4	Public capital
Ljubljana Wine Route	Poslovno svetovanje, Radomir Stojanovič, s.p.	sole proprietor	0	No capital

Source Bizi.si business directory

Table 3 Age of organizers and events

Event	Organizer	Organizer's age (years)	Event's age (years)	Organizer's region	Event's region
Odperta kuhna	Olam, d.o.o.	6	2	Primorska	Osrednjeslovenska
Culinary Festival	Poslovno svetovanje, Radomir Stojanovič, s.p.	9	7	Osrednjeslovenska	Osrednjeslovenska
Chocolate Festival	Javni zavod Turizem Radovljica	6	4	Gorenjska	Gorenjska
Ljubljana Wine Route	Poslovno svetovanje, Radomir Stojanovič, s.p.	9	5	Osrednjeslovenska	Osrednjeslovenska

Source Bizi.si business directory

Geographically speaking, organizers come from different regions, which is not reflected in the location of events. While each institution comes from a different region (Primorska, Gorenjska, Osrednjeslovenska), the concentration of events is in the central Osrednjeslovenska region (Table 5), specifically in the capital Ljubljana, where three of the four events are located. The exception is the Chocolate Festival, which takes place in Radovljica. This festival's location is based on a rich chocolate legacy, since chocolate products have been produced in nearby Lesce since 1922. The Lesce chocolate tradition is also a reason to place the Festival of Chocolate in the immediate vicinity with the purpose of synergetic effects for wider Gorenjska region recognition.

### What

Apart from their size, we can see that the organizers are quite diverse. Similarly, their engagements in a diverse set of activities and projects are evident also from the Ajpes national register of companies' business activities (SDK<sup>1</sup>), which in the case of the Festival of Chocolate organizer is 'Other unclassified leisure activities' (SDK R93.299) (Table 5). The organizer of Odperta Kuhna is working in the field of 'Non-specialized sale of various products' (SDK G46.190), and the organizers of the other two events are in the category of 'Other business and management consultancy' (SDK M70.220). None of them declare its core business activities to be in the SDK I category, which covers 'Tourism and hospitality'.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ajpes.si/Registri/Drugo/SKD> (accessed 8 Oct. 2015).

If it is more difficult to find similarities of the organizers, it is easier to do so for the comparison of events (Table 4). All four cases are time-limited services, which in three cases last from one to three days, while Odrpta kuhna runs every Friday for ca. 30 weeks. Regarding content, all four events are tourist events marketed either as fairs or as festivals.

In relation to the performed activities and related tourism segments, the events are similar (Table 5). The activities of Odrpta kuhna are related to catering, fairs, entertainment and cultural activities; the

activities of the Culinary Festival are catering, cultural activities and sales; the activities of the Festival of Chocolate are sales, cultural activities and catering services; and the activities of the Ljubljana Wine Route is fair activity, sales and catering.

According to the tourism industry segments, these events may, of course, be assigned to culinary or food tourism, although they also include components of other tourism activities (Table 5). A common feature is that these are events in which participating providers present and sell their culinary products.

Table 4 Type, duration, and frequency of events

Event	Type of event	Duration	Frequency
Odrpta kuhna	Fair	Each Friday	March–October
Culinary Festival	Festival	2 days	Once per year
Chocolate Festival	Festival	3 days	Once per year
Ljubljana Wine Route	Fair	1 day	Once per year

Table 5 Organizer’s registered activities, event activities and tourism segments

Event	Organizers’ registered activities	Event activities	Tourism segments
Odrpta kuhna	G46.190 – Non-specialized sale of various products	Catering Fairs Entertainment Cultural activities	Culinary Festivals Cultural City
Culinary Festival	M70.220 – Other business and management consultancy	Catering Cultural activities Sales	Culinary Events Festivals Cultural
Chocolate Festival	R93.299 - Other unclassified leisure activities	Sales Cultural activities Catering	Culinary tourism Festivals Cultural Local
Ljubljana Wine Route	M70.220 – Other business and management consultancy	Fair activity Sales Catering	Culinary tourism Events Festivals Cultural City Local

The differences are that Odrpta kuhna and the Culinary Festival providers prepare their products on site, while the Chocolate Festival and Ljubljana Wine Route are mainly focused on the sale of already prepared culinary products. The Chocolate Festival and Ljubljana Wine Route also have strong local regional components, since the events are largely dedicat-

ed to the promotion of the location/destination. At Odrpta kuhna and the Culinary Festival, there are many foreign providers, while at the Chocolate Festival only in the previous year has this number started to increase significantly. Finally, the Ljubljana Wine Route almost exclusively carries local providers.

How

From the publicly available data, we were able to assess events' performance in four different ways: their publicity, number of attending providers, event's follow up projects and received acknowledgments.

The organizers are promoting their events in a similar fashion as all of them have an associated website, and they are all present on social networks and in the traditional media (Table 6), from which available data about participants was gathered. We can evaluate the publicity of the events through their presence in Slovenian and foreign media, as well as through mentions in the professional literature. According to the references in the Slovenian media, the

events do not differ much, as they are all frequently mentioned in national media, such as the mainstream television channels and newspapers. Less coverage is found in foreign media; several mentions were found for the Ljubljana Wine Route, but none for the Chocolate Festival (Table 7). Only the Ljubljana Wine Route was found in the professional literature: in Tourism - Scientific and Professional Journal (Jurinčič and Bojnec, 2010) and in the Journal of Applied Economics and Business (Petrevski and Deleva, 2014).

The general innovative inclination of the events and their organizers can be assessed through their follow-up projects. Two organizers have been active

Table 6 Marketing channels and participants

Event	Marketing channels	No. of participating providers	Limitations of visitors
Odperta kuhna	Website	More than 100 different providers per season (ca. 30 on one Friday)	Unlimited
Culinary Festival	Social media	N/A	Limited
Chocolate Festival	Advertising in traditional media	20 Slovene and 5 foreign providers	Unlimited
Ljubljana Wine Route		N/A	Unlimited

Table 7 Publicity

Event	National media	Foreign media	Scientific literature
Odperta kuhna	Dnevnik, Visit Ljubljana, RTV SLO, Zurnal24, Napovednik, Delo, Slovenske novice ...	InYourPocket.com, Trip advisor, Kongres Magazine*	/
Culinary Festival	Napovednik, Delo, POP TV, BTC, Visit Ljubljana, Dnevnik, Eventim ...	Eventful, Kongres Magazine, 10times.com	/
Chocolate Festival	RTV SLO, Zurnal24, Delo, POP TV, Napovednik, Gorenjski glas, Slovenske novice ...	/	/
Ljubljana Wine Route	Visit Ljubljana, Dnevnik, RTV SLO, Napovednik, POP TV, Slovenske novice, Delo ...	Kongres Magazine, Local Life, Inyourpocket.com, Bufolin, Tripadvisor, Citiesdirect, Antipalace	Petrevska in Deleva (2014), Jurinčič in Bojnec(2010)

\* Kongres Magazine is published in the English language by Slovene company, but it is intended for global audience; its editorial board is international.



Table 8 Spin-off projects, parent projects, and awards

Event	Follow-up projects	Parent project	Awards
Odprta kuhna	Beer and Burger Festival; expanding core festival to other cities	/	Sejalec Jakob
Culinary Festival	/	Wine festival	/
Chocolate Festival	/	/	/
Ljubljana Wine Route	St. Martin's Wine Route	/	/

in the placement of new follow-up projects. The organizers of *Odprta kuhna* have started to reproduce the event in several other cities, and created the Beer and Burger Festival (the first such specialized type of event in Slovenia). The Ljubljana Wine Route added St. Martin's Wine Route and Culinary Festival as a follow-up project (Table 8).

Of all the events, only *Odprta kuhna* has been awarded on the national level; the event won the *Sejalec* award for the most innovative Slovenian tourism product and the *Jakob* award for excellence and quality in tourism in the Alpe Adria regions in 2014 (Table 11).

**Discussion**

The analysis of four selected Slovenian culinary events shows that their organizers share relatively similar traits. All of the events are performed by micro/small firms or organizations, which have not been established because of the introduced event/innovation; the development and delivery of the studied event is just one of their activities. Since all four events are or were perceived as innovative projects in the Slovenian or even wider media region, it is (according to the introductory chapters) expected for them to be developed further. Some of the projects in question are already being followed-up in their organizers' new endeavours but in publicly available data, they mostly share a lack of further 'core' development of the events themselves.

*Odprta kuhna* has its new follow-up Beer and Burger Festival of related local providers, which (according to the first media responses) is a step in the right direction and is (again, as *Odprta kuhna*) an event that is a novelty for Slovenia. However, since *Odprta kuhna* by itself is perceived as a very dynamic project, from which users might expect ongoing va-

riety and innovation, the organizer will also have to maintain the same fresh principle of *Odprta kuhna* in the future. The first step has been done already: they are expanding the event to several other Slovenian cities. On the other side, the Chocolate Festival's core is the tradition, and the innovation factor could be a bit less important (at least from the product point of view), while its process and market innovation efforts (Krizaj, 2014) would still be relevant.

The Culinary Festival is heavily involved in other related events, and even though the event does not publicly indicate the specific potential or current motivation for further development, it probably has enough organizational and promotional support to keep it running in a successful way in the future. The organizers draw up a new thematic frame each year, but the festival is not tied to a specific tradition, nor has it developed follow-up projects or large-scale improvements.

From the media reach perspective, the Ljubljana Wine Route is a successful event, since it receives substantial foreign media exposure, as well as serving as an example of good practice found in the professional literature. An essential trait of the Ljubljana Wine Route is its importance in the promotion of Slovenia, since the event aims to present Slovenian cuisine, while the Culinary Festival is mostly focused on the presentation of general culinary specialities and skills.

Comparing the relative innovation potential among all four projects, we can confirm that *Odprta kuhna* has justifiably received (the only) two national tourism innovation-related awards. Their event occurs weekly for more than half of each year. They have managed to convince several upscale restaurants to offer street-food style versions of items from their sophisticated menus. They have expanded to



several cities; they have created an (also) successful follow-up project; and they are starting to gain recognition as a stand-alone Slovene/Ljubljana attraction among domestic and foreign 'foodies' audiences.

As stated at the beginning, in the age of globalization and the world's rapid connectedness and technological progress, tourism providers are confronted with enormous opportunities, while operating in a highly competitive environment, as potential tourists choose from the increasingly homogenous offer from the whole world. One effective way to attract visitors on the levels of individual companies and the nation are attractive (incremental or radical) tourism innovations of the highest quality. However, today's innovations can rapidly lose their attraction status in the near future as users get used to the product while global competitors can be creating similar attractive offers as well. Thus, tourism providers in general have to ensure tempting marketing, high-quality delivery, continuous development and smart expansion of their core offer.

Since tourism is one of the most important sectors of the Slovenian economy, the responsibility for its development and maintaining competitiveness should not be left solely to the providers. The studied cases demonstrate substantial innovation potential, but they remain nonetheless fairly focused on the domestic market(ing). Their basic impact remains local (including serving and inviting foreign tourists that are already in Slovenia) while Slovene cuisine might contribute even more to a greater recognition of the country and also to generating more positive effects for the national tourism industry. Therefore, the main implication of this paper is that (according to current global trends) such events could therefore be more closely integrated into national strategies, and more focused support should be offered. As shown in the case analysis, the organizers of such events are micro-enterprises, which usually lack the necessary national-level organizational strengths for the continued development, promotion and delivery of tourism innovation to the global community. Already from the existing results, similar smaller tourism providers can obtain basic insights into examples of 'permanent innovation' approaches together with a wide array of promotion and activities of the analysed cases.

As for the limitations of the presented research, only a small fraction of Slovene tourism providers and events was analysed, leaning on the theoretical foundations about eventual hidden tourism innovations and suggested approaches towards thorough analyses of smaller tourism providers and segments. In the eventual succeeding research steps, a number of innovation attributes using publicly available data can be expanded to further develop the applied non-obtrusive research approach. The outcomes could be aligned with other similar segments, towards such events in other countries; and also towards the results of standard questionnaire surveys for all culinary events stakeholders. Particular attention should be given to analyses of correlations between such 'micro' events and national promotion and recognition, and benefits for all patrons involved in the emerging 'foodiescapes'.

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