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CULINARY EVENTS IN THE SLOVENIAN COUNTRYSIDE: VISITORS' MOTIVES, SATISFACTION, AND VIEWS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Maja Topole, Primož Pipan, Primož Gašperič, Matjaž Geršič, Peter Kumer



MATJAŽ GERŠIČ

Chefs from Ljubljana's JB Restaurant, the first Slovenian restaurant listed in *The World's 50 Best Restaurants* (ranked eighty-ninth in 2010), preparing dishes from local ingredients at the fourth Karst Savory Festival in 2018.

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Culinary events in the Slovenian countryside: Visitors' motives, satisfaction, and views on sustainability

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on five culinary events on Slovenia's Karst Plateau (Kras). It presents visitors' motives for attending these events, their satisfaction with them, and their views on sustainability. These traditional culinary events, which take place in the same gastronomic region, differ in their scale, theme, character, and history. A survey was conducted among 244 visitors, approximately 50% of whom had a university degree. The most important motives for their visit include local cuisine; experiencing something new, different, or special; and exploring natural heritage and especially cultural heritage. Visitor satisfaction is the greatest at boutique culinary events, where the main theme is highlighted more strongly than at large-scale culinary events. The main challenge in terms of the sustainability of culinary events is public transport access to the venues. Significant progress would be made by reducing the amount of disposable packaging made from non-sustainable materials. The key to successful culinary events is high-quality services and ingredients, where the word *local* is key.

KEY WORDS: culinary tourism, gastronomy, cultural heritage, sustainable destination, geography of food, Karst Plateau gastronomic region

Kulinarični dogodki na slovenskem podeželju: motivi, zadovoljstvo in ocena trajnosti z vidika obiskovalcev

POVZETEK: Prispevek obravnava pet kulinaričnih dogodkov na slovenskem Krasu. Z vidika obiskovalcev predstavi motive za obisk dogodkov, zadovoljstvo s prireditvami in oceno z vidika trajnosti. Tradicionalni kulinarični dogodki v isti gastronomski regiji se med seboj razlikujejo po obsegu, tematiki, značaju in zgodovini. Anketirali smo 244 obiskovalcev, od katerih je imelo kar okrog 50 % univerzitetno izobrazbo. Najpomembnejši motivi za njihov obisk so: 1) lokalna kulinarika, 2) izkušnja nečesa novega, nenavadnega, posebnega in 3) spoznavanje naravne, predvsem pa kulturne dediščine. Zadovoljstvo obiskovalcev je največje na butičnih kulinaričnih dogodkih, kjer je v primerjavi z množičnimi kulinaričnimi dogodki osrednja tema prireditve bolj poudarjena. Glavni izziv z vidika trajnosti kulinaričnih dogodkov predstavlja dostopnost prizorišč z javnim prometom. Precejšen napredek bi pomenilo zmanjšanje količine embalaže iz netrajnostnih materialov za enkratno uporabo. Ključ do uspešnih kulinaričnih dogodkov so kakovostne storitve in kakovostne prehranske sestavine pri čemer je ključna beseda »lokalno«.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kulinarični turizem, gastronomija, kulturna dediščina, trajnostna destinacija, geografija prehrane, gastronomska regija Kras

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1 Introduction

This paper examines how visitors experience culinary events on the Karst Plateau (Kras) by exploring their motives for attending individual events and their satisfaction with the services and products offered, the events' organization, the providers' attitude, and the appearance and cleanliness of venues. In addition, it examines how satisfied they are with the quality of accompanying activities, such as the presentation of the destination, the region, and its cultural heritage, available recreational and other activities, and what their views are on the events' sustainability. Data on the respondents' origin, age, sex, and education are also vital for better understanding their views.

This study explores the quality of culinary events and contributes to their improvement. In this way, the countryside surrounding the coastal tourism destination can become more attractive to tourists and better socioeconomic and environmental conditions can be provided for the local population.

1.1 Culinary events and culinary tourism

Culinary events are one-off events that complement the attractiveness of larger events, such as festivals. They aim to impress visitors with special dishes and unique settings. These events are exceptional if they have a multi-layered effect on individuals, arouse all their senses (i.e., taste, sight, hearing, and experience), and leave them with lasting memories. They broaden the attendees' horizons and provide them with a link between culture, landscape, and food (Smith 2007; Getz 2012). Attendees experience something similar to what Marcel Proust described in his novel *Swann's Way*: eating madeleines (i.e., a sensory experience) triggers an involuntary memory in an individual. Culinary experiences are often presented as »authentic«; that is, historically representative of a locale (Long 2013).

Culinary events enhance culinary tourism opportunities for destinations, and they play a crucial role in promoting regions and creating loyalty to food and wine products (Mason and Paggiaro 2010; Simeon and Buoincontri 2011, Topole and Pipan 2020). What is at the forefront of culinary events may not be the economic aspect, but empowerment of the local community and other social aspects, such as connecting stakeholders, preserving and transferring knowledge, conserving cultural heritage, strengthening identity, intergenerational dialogue, and so on (Bole, Šmid Hribar and Pipan 2017; Šmid Hribar, Razpotnik Visković and Bole 2021). As an element of local culture, food is part of rural capital and, from the perspective of tourism, it is attractive for visitors (Bole, Komac and Pipan 2013). The products of regional tourism emphasize the uniqueness of the region and its community, culture, and heritage (Ledinek Lozej and Šrmpf Vendramin 2020). Local dishes and culinary experiences differ from region to region, and so culinary events allow tourists to experience less well-known or unknown cultures and tastes. Food as part of culinary events enhances the profile of the destination (Bessiere 2001; Cai 2002; Hall and Mitchell 2005).

Traditionally, food as part of hospitality services has had a supporting role and development potential within the larger tourism industry (Šmid Hribar and Ledinek Lozej 2013). It was considered a necessary component of the tourism package. Recently, however, food tourism has been identified as a stand-alone activity or attraction offered in various manners by different organizers (Kumer et al. 2019). People have begun to travel to destinations specifically for the unique food products offered (Quan and Wang 2004). Food events bring positive economic impacts into a rural setting, even in a developing country, where resources can be limited (Hall and Gössling 2016).

1.2 Visitors' motivations

The decision to attend any tourist event is a result of multiple simultaneous motives (Crompton and McKay 1997). For many culinary events, leisure and social benefits appear to dominate among the motives (Getz et al. 2015). In comparison to non-food events, the attendees of food events are more motivated by the idea of finding something new. They are also motivated by an opportunity to socialize with people they know and other people (Crompton and McKay 1997; Weiler, Truong and Griffiths 2004; Blešić et al. 2014; Hattingh and Swart 2016). Compared to other non-food events, they are significantly less motivated by cultural exploration. Nicholson and Pearce (2001) state that food-related events in New Zealand attracted a lower proportion of visitors with specific interests compared to non-food-related events. Food-related

events were primarily viewed by visitors as a consumption and entertainment opportunity. Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008) studied the motivating factors for first-time visitors to the South Beach Wine and Food Festival in Miami Beach, Florida. The four most important factors are the desire to »taste new wine and food,« »enjoy the event,« »enhance social status,« and »escape from daily routines.« Smith, Costello, and Muenchen (2010) concluded that food, event novelty, and socialization were push motivations for attending a culinary event. These internal factors initiated a need by individuals to make a trip. This is also related to the emergence of the term *foodie* (Topole and Pipan 2020). Food products, support services, and essential services, on the other hand, are external factors and pull motivations for potential attendees. Krajičková and Šauer (2018) found that for two food festivals in the Czech Republic the most prominent motivations to attend were »to have fun,« »to relax,« and »to taste the favourite meal/beverage [sic].« Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008) point out that motivation not only depends on the theme of the event, but is also influenced by socio-demographic characteristics, the region, and the location of the event. For first-time visitors, tasting wine and food might be more important, but for repeat visitors learning more about food and wine might also be important.

1.3 Visitor satisfaction

Past findings show that food experiences at travel destinations contribute to tourist satisfaction (Bessiere 1998; Boniface 2003; du Rand, Heath and Alberts 2003; Frochot 2003; López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares 2012; Okumus et al. 2013; Privitera, Nedelcu and Nicula 2018). Consumer satisfaction is one of the main goals in marketing because it is a good predictor of purchase behavior (Erevelles and Leavitt 1992; McQuitty, Finn and Wiley 2000; Tsiotsou and Vasioti 2006). Tourist satisfaction has become a major research area and is the main factor for marketing strategists (Satish and Menezes 2001; Fallon and Schofield 2003; Kozak, Bigne and Andreu 2003; Tsiotsou and Vasioti 2006). In turn, food contributes significantly to tourists' satisfaction with the destination visited. For this reason, it is essential to link gastronomy to tourism because it attracts a very distinct tourist profile with a high economic potential (Ab Karim and Chi 2010; Jiménez Beltrán, López-Guzmán and Santa-Cruz 2016). The literature shows that the local gastronomy, the quality and price of food, and the atmosphere are the most important determinants of tourist satisfaction with a destination. The overall food service experience is an increasingly important factor of both tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction: it can greatly stimulate expenditure but can also cause serious financial losses (Nield et al. 2000; Fox 2007). Abdelhamied (2011) points out that various aspects such as parking space, wholesome and local dishes, and restroom cleanliness are key attributes for satisfied customers.

1.4 Visitors' views on the sustainability of events and their sustainability

Transport of food is an important part of sustainability. The quality of food that travels longer distances is lower compared to food of local origin. Fresh food is crucial for preparing high-quality dishes. Therefore, the modern trend is to bring a consumer closer to where the food was produced, and not vice versa (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016). This is especially important for culinary tourism.

Another transport-related sustainability aspect is stimulation of public transport use. Rural tourism can play an active role in promoting the use of public transport – and, conversely, public transport can foster rural tourism. This can have a positive impact on better accessibility for the rural population (Nilsson, Griggs and Visbeck 2016). Richards (2012) argues that tourists that are attracted by culinary experiences see their own transport as the least important factor in visiting a destination. Mode of transport is one of the characteristics that divides mass tourism from sustainable rural tourism, which stimulates walking and the use of bicycles by introducing biking and hiking routes (Regoli, Vittuari and Segrè 2011). Parking infrastructure is visitors' first introduction to the destination (Wijaya et al. 2013). Brunori and Rossi (2000) and Abdelhamied (2011) argue that clean and well-maintained parking lots result in consumers deciding to return to the destination (Hjalager 2002). To promote sustainable transport and reduce the amount of individual journeys by car, Jones (2017) suggested a series of measures for event organizers. She emphasizes the importance of incentives, bonuses, or rewards for attendees.

Waste management and recycling are also part of a sustainable approach to culinary tourism products (Richards 2002). One of the characteristics of rural ecotourism is the efficient use of resources connected with the quantity of waste; this should be decreasing, in contrast to mass tourism, where it continues to increase (Regoli, Vittuari and Segrè 2011). Recently, plastic waste has been the biggest problem (Barnes et al. 2009). According to Ryan et al. (2009), despite the promotion of biodegradable plastic, disposable packaging continues to be composed of regular plastic. Plastic products are very useful in gastronomy, but consumers are increasingly aware of their negative impact on the environment. Therefore, sustainable alternatives are more than welcome.

Canavari et al. (2011) report that, as part of the services offered in the countryside, culinary experiences are also suitable for disadvantaged groups, such as people with mental and physical disabilities. This type of service can be combined with various therapeutic activities (e.g., equine-assisted therapy) that cannot be provided in other environments. According to Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) and Vuksanović et al. (2019), there is a difference in attitudes toward culinary events between respondents depending on sex, age group, and education. For example, elderly respondents (51–60 years old) have a more positive attitude toward food and beverages than to everything else offered at the event. Zeppel and Hall (1991) and Glanz et al. (1998) argue that respondents with a higher level of education are more likely to consume local food and pay more money.

2 Methods

The study was conducted in the Karst Plateau gastronomic region in southwest Slovenia, above the Gulf of Trieste, which is one of Slovenia's twenty-four gastronomic regions (Bogataj and Letič 2017), of which each is homogenous, unique, and therefore distinctive (Bogataj et al. 2006). Due to its karst character, the region has no running surface water, which made life quite difficult, especially in the past. Nonetheless, people have lived there throughout history and developed a rich tangible, intangible, and social culture. This historically homogenous area was divided between Italy and Yugoslavia after the Second World War. In the coastal area, economic development was successful, whereas in the surrounding karst countryside it came to a halt due to the changed geographic situation. The situation improved in 2007 with the opening of the border through the Schengen regime (Pipan 2008).

The research methods used included observation and on-site questionnaires with participants in the culinary events. An eight-page structured questionnaire was employed with a set of eighteen questions extracted from literature studying attendees' impressions of food events; four were multiple-choice questions, seven were open-ended questions, six were combined, and one was answered on a scale.

The questions can be divided into four thematic categories. The first category focused on establishing the motives for attending culinary events, assessing their quality, views on the affordability of what is offered at these events, and visitor satisfaction. The second category was connected with the ecological aspect, which indirectly affects visitor satisfaction. It explored the respondents' views on waste recycling, avoiding plastic, public transport arrangements, and so on. This was covered by a special question answered on a scale. The third category examined the methods of informing visitors about specific events, the distance from their permanent residence, and the type of transport they used to travel to the event. The fourth category included questions related to the respondents' demographic characteristics (sex, age, and education).

The questionnaire was tested between May and June 2018 among geography researchers with extensive experience with such a method. The survey was modified based on their comments and suggestions. Four trained researchers surveyed visitors at five culinary events using an on-site intercept procedure. Two of them conducted the survey at each event over the course of the entire day. The goal was to collect perspectives on the event that were as comprehensive as possible. However, many visitors stayed at the event for only part of the day or a few hours, and so not everyone had a comprehensive experience of the event. Visitors were approached randomly, seeking a balanced distribution between the sexes and avoiding distributing questionnaires to more than one person in a group. The respondents within groups were not selected; they volunteered on their own or were designated by the group to answer the questions.

Table 1: 2018 culinary events on the Karst Plateau included in the analysis.

Event	Location	Date	Organizer	No. of visitors (estimated by the organizer)	Year first held	Main theme
9 th Karst Plateau Lavender Festival / <i>9. festival sivke na Krasu</i>	Ivanji Grad	June 30 th – July 1 st , 2018	Ekotera d. o. o.	Large-scale event; 2,000–2,500	2010 (first field sown with lavender in 2008)	Lavender-related activities (growing and harvesting lavender and using it in the beauty industry, crafts, and cuisine)
48 th Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival / <i>48. praznik terana in pršuta</i>	Dutovlje	August 11 th –12 th , 2018	Sežana Sports, Tourism, and Leisure Department	Large-scale event (one of Slovenia's best-known and largest culinary events); 8,000	1970	Teran Wine and prosciutto
4 th Karst Savory Festival / <i>4. praznik kraškega šetrja</i>	Kačiče–Pared	September 9 th , 2018	Andrejka Cerkvenik, Belajevi Herbal– Ethnological Farm	Boutique event; 300	2013	Promoting the use of winter savory in cuisine and elsewhere in an innovative way
Opening of Karst Cuisine Month / <i>Otvoritev Meseca kraške kuhinje</i>	Štanjel	October 6 th , 2018	Planta Society (restaurants and inns from the Karst Plateau) and the Komen Karst Society	Boutique event; 300–400	1996	Introduction to Karst Cuisine Month: sampling traditional Karst dishes and drinks prepared in a unique and modern way
Štanjel Wine Festival (part of the Karst Martinmas Celebration) / <i>Praznik vina v Štanjelu – del Martinovanja na Krasu</i>	Štanjel	November 10 th , 2018	Komen Karst Society (and Sežana Sports, Tourism, and Leisure Department)	Large-scale event; 6,500–7,000	2014	Presenting Karst wines, with a minor emphasis on Karst dishes

The goal was to survey at least fifty visitors at each event. This number was achieved or even exceeded at all events except the Karst Savory Festival, where only thirty-four surveys could be conducted due to the intense activity at the boutique event. A total of 244 surveys were conducted.

3 Results

3.1 Motivations for attending culinary events

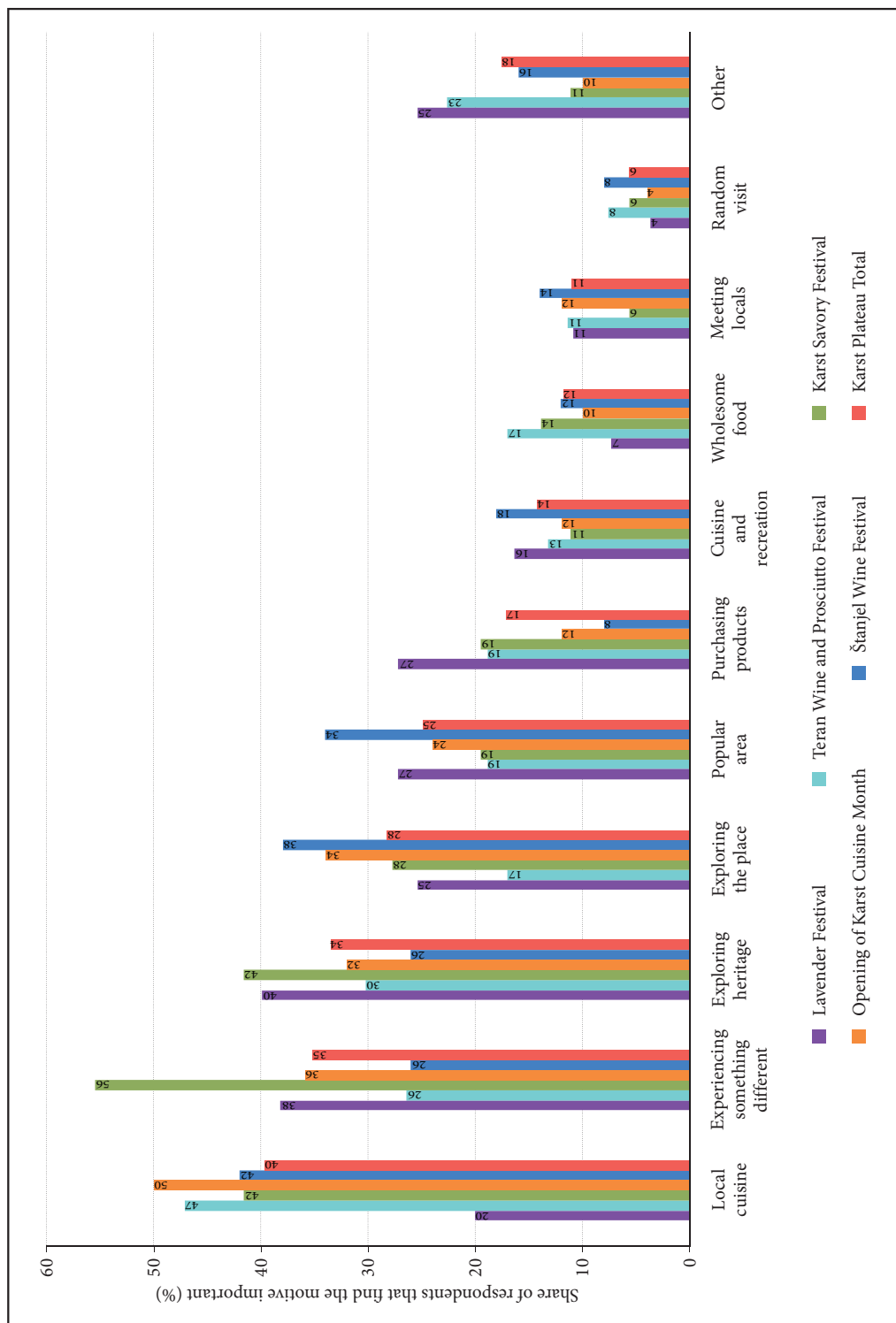
Taking into account all events on the Karst Plateau, respondents reported three main motives for visiting these destinations: local cuisine (40%), experiencing something new, different, and special (35%), and exploring natural and, first and foremost, cultural heritage (34%; Figure 1). Respondents could select more than one answer. Local cuisine proved to be a major motive in four events, with the Karst Plateau Lavender Festival standing out in terms of predominantly non-culinary motives. Without the Karst Plateau Lavender Festival, the share of respondents that prioritized the local cuisine motive would have been 45%. Exploring new places (28%) and visiting a popular area (25%) were also fairly important motives, whereas the remaining motives reported by the respondents were significantly less important in percentage terms (e.g., purchasing products: 17%, recreation (hiking, running, and cycling): 14%, the opportunity to enjoy wholesome food: 12% – with an above-average share recorded at the Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival and the Karst Savory Festival – and meeting locals: 11%). Six percent of respondents ended up at the event by coincidence because they were drawn by the crowds.

When asked how important cuisine was as a motive to travel to the event, only 9% of respondents replied that it was their only reason to attend the event. Just under a third (32%) reported that cuisine was the most important reason but that they also needed other things to attract them to the event. Respondents for whom food was among the more important reasons to attend the event primarily highlighted the importance of authentic, fresh, home-made, affordable food prepared in a traditional, original way. For 56% of respondents, cuisine was not the primary motive, but nonetheless a welcome addition to the event. Thus, the majority of respondents (i.e., 97%) were more or less interested in cuisine, with only a good 3% reporting that it was completely irrelevant to them; these 3% ended up at the event because they accompanied someone else or by coincidence. Among all the events, the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month has the strongest culinary character, with the strongest emphasis on tasting and exploring karst dishes and drinks. However, this event is also attended by the largest number of people not interested in cuisine (6%). They primarily come for the accompanying activities, which they reported among the important motives for attending the event (Figure 2).

3.2 Satisfaction with culinary events

A good third of respondents (35%) will primarily remember the event for its main theme (Table 1). Among all respondents, 15% were impressed by the event as a whole, and a further 12% were impressed by both the main theme and ambience. A similar share (12%) praised the organization, the organizers' friendliness, and the atmosphere alongside the main theme. Seven percent of respondents will remember the event for its deficiencies or for having had a negative experience. The same share will remember special and random episodes unrelated to cuisine. Nine percent of all respondents could not define what they would remember about the event. It is encouraging that, alongside other impressions, the main theme will be positively remembered by nearly four-fifths of the respondents; this share amounts to a full 94% at the Karst Savory Festival, whereas at the Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival it is the lowest (i.e., 56%).

Just over half of respondents (52%) were satisfied with the event and did not feel that anything was missing. Their satisfaction was greater with boutique event organizers, who provide unique ambiances and culinary experiences and a link to local cuisine, offer high-quality and wholesome food of local origin produced in a traditional, sustainable way, and are innovative (Figure 3). Around 69% had no comments on the Karst Savory Festival and 64% no comments on the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month, whereas with other, more large-scale events, this share varied between 39 and 50%. In contrast to large-scale events, which



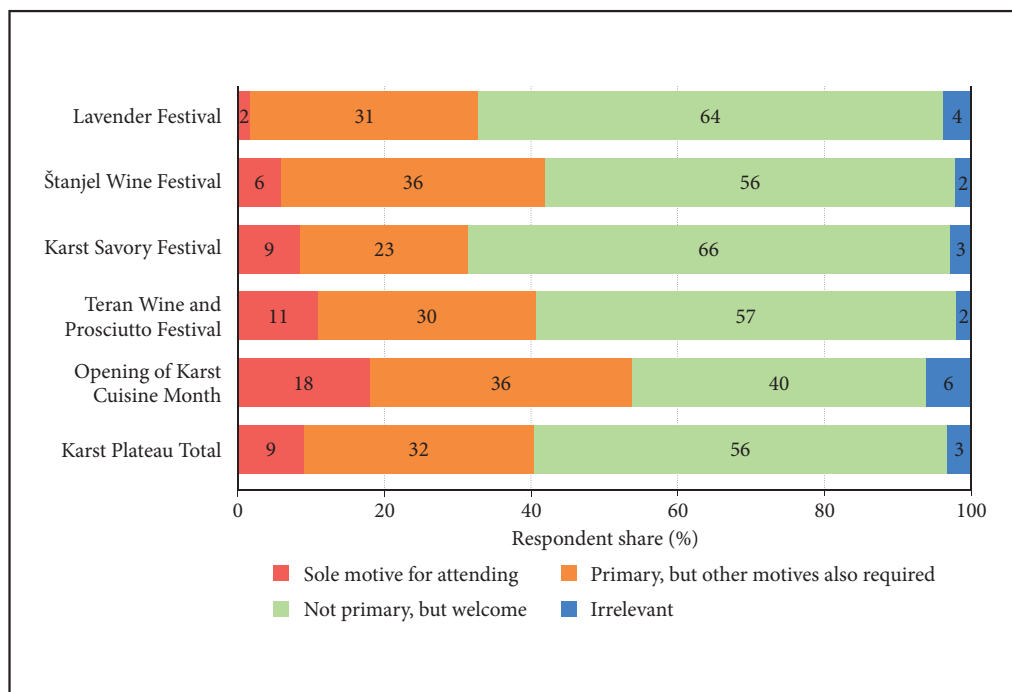


Figure 2: Importance of cuisine as a motive to visit culinary events (n = 244).

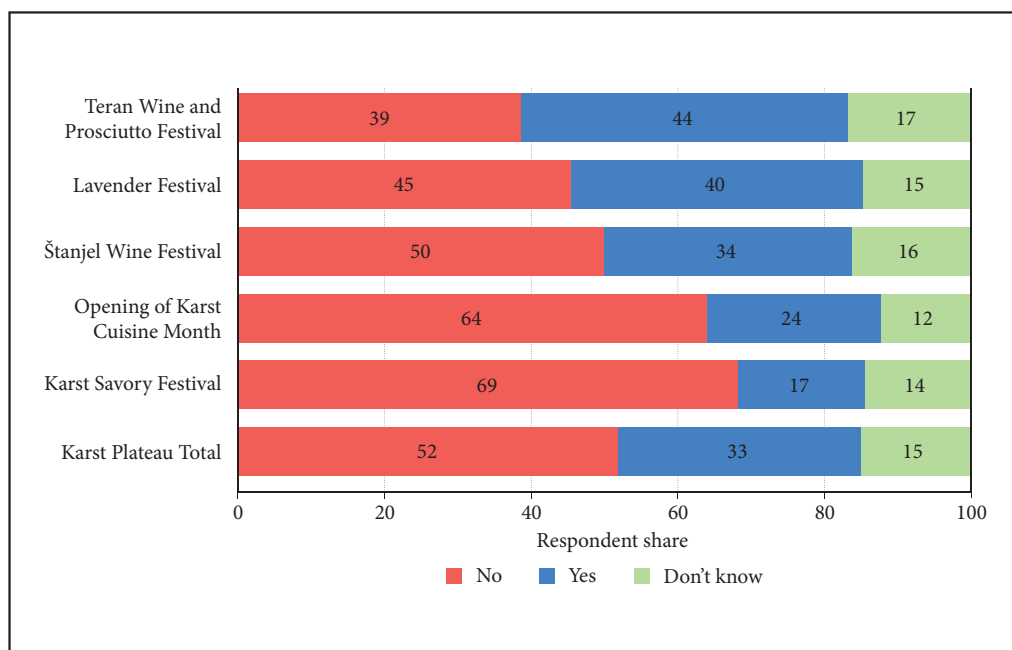


Figure 3: Respondent replies to the question of whether they felt something was missing or noticed any deficiencies in the event's organization (n = 244).

are usually only held once a year and last one day (or a maximum of one weekend), boutique event organizers hold a variety of smaller events from spring to late fall. For example, the various events, workshops, educational walks and excursions, tastings, and musical-culinary events held at the Belaj Farm make up the Herb Festival at the Meeting Point of the Karst Plateau and the Brkini Hills, which Topole and Pipan (2020) present in detail. In turn, the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month is a presentation of farms on the Karst Plateau, which for the entire month offer karst dishes that focus on a different selected ingredient every year.

Taking into account all events, 15% of respondents had no opinion about their quality, and a third (33%) suggested improvements. This third felt that the event needed a more diverse selection of (especially local) food and drinks, an improved or expanded program (better ongoing information on activities, more compact activity, and more local music), and higher-quality technical support (better parking areas, more signs along the road showing the way to the venue, better venue equipment, including for bad weather, and more signs at the venue itself) (Figure 3).

The visitors surveyed largely learned about the events online or from their friends, whose recommendations persuaded them to make the trip. Namely, satisfied visitors are key to promoting individual events.

In evaluating the selection of food and drinks offered at the event, the respondents were also asked to share their views on the organizational and ecological aspects. According to them, the selection of food and drinks is at the forefront at these events (3.9 out of 5). This is especially evident at the Karst Savory Festival (4.2), the Štanjel Wine Festival (4.1), and the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month (4.0).

This is followed by arrangement of parking areas and traffic, waste recycling, cleanliness and the number of restrooms, use of ecological materials, and drinking water accessibility (3.6–3.2). With most events, public transport accessibility was ranked the lowest (2.8) (Figure 4).

Respondents greatly value high-quality services and products, and they are willing to pay more for fresh homemade products. In turn, they greatly dislike unfairly high prices. They are willing to pay more than €25 for superior-quality food and service (42%), a high-quality additional program (20%), a dish requiring more demanding preparation (19%), and more complex event organization (12%).

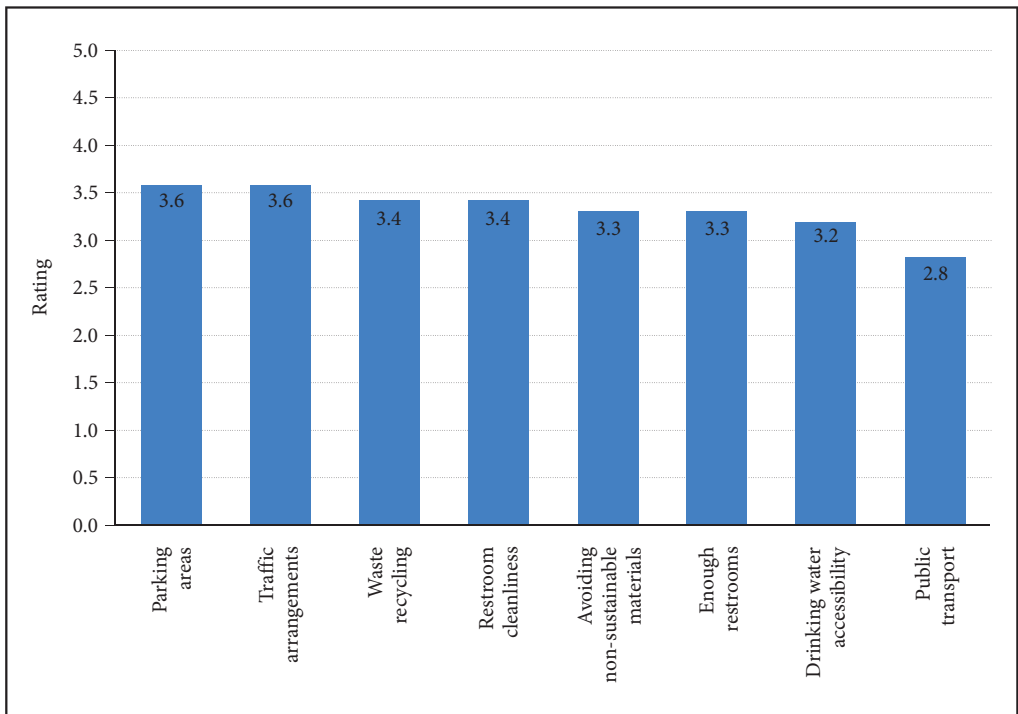


Figure 4: Respondent satisfaction with five culinary events on the Karst Plateau in terms of sustainability (n = 244).

3.3 Sustainability aspects

Among all the events, the Štanjel Wine Festival was ranked highest in waste recycling (3.8 out of 5), and the respondents were least satisfied with recycling at the Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival (2.5 out of 5). The same applies for single-use materials: respondents believe the Štanjel Wine Festival offered the most biodegradable materials compared to other events (4.2 out of 5). Karst Cuisine Month, held by the same association, was close behind (4.1 out of 5). The Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival was least sustainable in terms of use of materials (2.0 out of 5).

The Štanjel Wine Festival (4.4 out of 5) also ranked highest in offering sustainable transport in order to travel to the event. They were the only ones offering public transport (a special train line from Ljubljana and a circular Karst Bus Line). In the desire to contribute to sustainable mobility, the Belaj Farm, hosting the Karst Savory Festival, already provided transport from the nearest train station in Divača in the past, but this met with a poor response from visitors because it was too time-consuming.

It is difficult to arrange public transport to culinary events because visitors come from different places. Among the respondents, 83% drove to the event, 8% came in groups with chartered bus transport, and only 5% used public transport. They resort to less sustainable solutions because public transport is very poorly developed in the Slovenian countryside and therefore there are only a few options to choose from. The only exception is the Štanjel Wine Festival, for which a special train was available (from Ljubljana to Štanjel and back via Sežana). The train was used by 16% of respondents, 12% came by charter bus, and two-thirds still drove to the event. Nonetheless, one of the event organizers (i.e., the Sežana Sports, Tourism, and Leisure Department), estimates that the train was selected by a negligible number of all visitors to the Karst Martinmas Celebration, which the Štanjel Wine Festival is part of: approximately 180 out of 6,500 to 7,000. Due to a failure to reach an agreement with Slovenian Railways, this option was no longer available in 2019. The only constant in transport ever since the beginning of the Štanjel Wine Festival in 2014 has been the circular bus route between wine cellars or open-door farms on the Karst Plateau. It has been very well accepted by visitors and therefore the event organizers plan to keep this practice in the future. Less certain is the further provision of the train line from Ljubljana to Štanjel because it is not competitive in terms of duration; it is more than 2 times longer than going by car (cca. 2 hr 30 min compared to 1 hr 10 min). Only passengers that look for entertainment and experience on the way (a music event, socializing with other passengers, admiring the landscape, and so on) are interested in it, but at the same time these also demand greater comfort on the train.

Respondents were most satisfied with restroom cleanliness at the Štanjel Wine Festival and Karst Savory Festival, whereas they were the least satisfied with restroom cleanliness at the Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival.

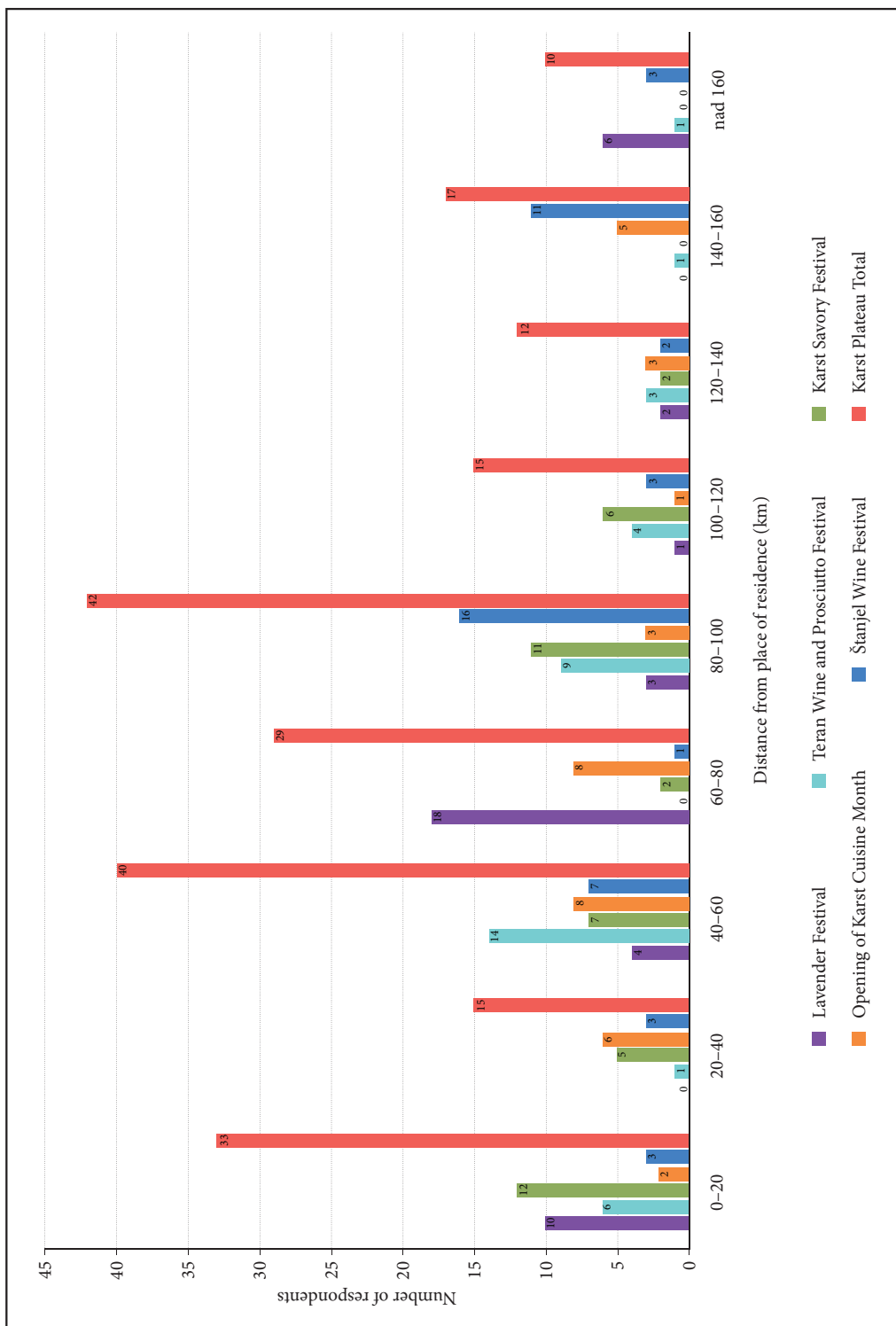
All the organizers were ranked relatively low in terms of free drinking water provision. The organizers of the Štanjel Wine Festival and Karst Savory Festival scored highest in supplying free drinking water (such as at fountains) and marking them clearly.

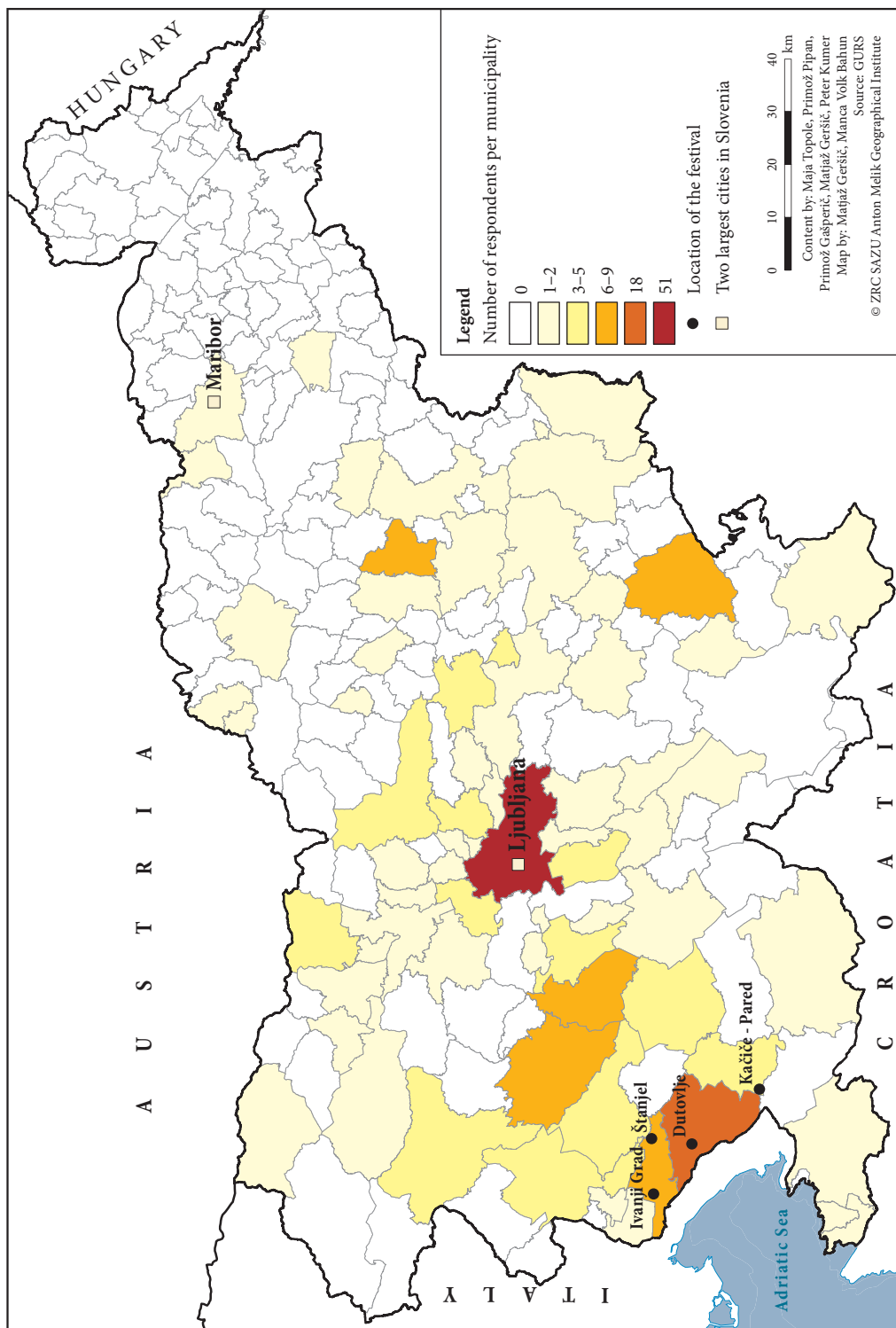
3.4 Visitor structure and place of residence

The group between forty-six and sixty years old predominated among the respondents (39%), and those under thirty accounted for the smallest share (14%). An above-average share of respondents sixty-one or older (i.e., 28%) was recorded at the Karst Savory Festival and of those under thirty at the Štanjel Wine Festival (22%). Most of the respondents (almost 50%) in all events have a university education, followed by a secondary education (29%). The highest share of university-educated respondents participated in the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month (64%). Some respondents (31) refused to disclose information on their education, age, and place of residence. In general, respondents from places that are not very far away and allow them to make a one-day trip predominated. The majority (i.e., 80%) came from places over 50 km away, and 41% even came from places over 100 km away. They are willing to travel that far to explore a less familiar culture or a less familiar or unknown region (Figure 5, Figure 6).

Figure 5: Distance between culinary events on the Karst Plateau and respondents' place of residence (n = 213). ► p. 118

Figure 6: Municipalities that respondents to culinary events on the Karst Plateau came from (n = 213). ► p. 119





4 Discussion

4.1 Main motives: local cuisine, expecting something new, cultural heritage

Most respondents (58%) attend events that are thematically very diverse, with food not being the only reason for attending. Getz et al. (2015) and Yuan et al. (2005) came to similar conclusions.

Crompton and McKay (1997) and Nicholson and Pearce (2001) state that, compared to other non-food events, attendees of food-related events are less interested in cultural exploration, but our results show that interest in cultural content is among the three most important motives for attending a culinary event, especially for those from faraway places. These people have a stronger desire to experience something new and unusual, and they wish to avoid the everyday routine. More opportunities for this are provided at boutique culinary events.

Most respondents do not wish to be more actively involved in food preparation; they simply want more tasting and training in the form of workshops. Similar was established by Čela, Knowles-Lankford, and Lankford (2007), Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008), and Hattingh and Swart (2016).

According to Getz et al. (2015), entertainment and socializing are among the predominant motives. In this case, however, only 4% of respondents expressly mentioned socializing as a motive, even though most came to the event with their partner, with other couples, with their family, or in a large organized group (e.g., as a society). Cuisine and socializing are largely more important motives, especially for those that come from places nearby, up to only 20 km away. The share of these was only 15%, and for them other motives are less relevant. In contrast, motives such as experiencing something special or exploring cultural heritage are important for those that come from far away and are unfamiliar with the target area. More demanding and satisfied visitors like to return, and for them it is improving knowledge about food and wine that counts. The findings by Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008) thus also apply to the Karst Plateau. This is particularly valid for specialized culinary events like the Karst Savory Festival. The factors of education status of the participants are considered one of the most important. Participants with at least a university education (almost 50%), and from higher-income social groups prevail at the gastronomic events. It appears that people are willing to travel longer distances to participate in an event (Krajíčková and Šauer 2018). More than half (56%) reported that they would also be willing to stay overnight in the area; this applies to culinary events in general. Especially visitors from places farther away are willing to pay more for high-quality food or improved programs, food preparation, and organization, which agrees with Leones, Colby and Crandall (1998) that people traveling farther spend more at the destination to justify the travel expenses. We cannot confirm this because the respondents were not asked about their income or how much they spent at the event.

It is vital for event organizers to know in detail the motives that attract visitors. Only in this way can they meet their expectations about the selection of food and drinks offered, their diversity, authenticity, quality, and how they are served, and about a fair and friendly attitude. Considering that only 9% of respondents attended the event only for the cuisine and that others need additional motives to attend culinary events, the accompanying program must also be prepared with great care: a cultural program, a presentation of the place or area, activities typical of the region, products offered at stands, and a sports program. Other authors (Weiler, Truong and Griffiths 2004; Park, Reisinger and Kang 2008; Smith, Costello and Muenchen 2010; Getz et al. 2015; Hattingh and Swart 2016) also established that, in addition to visitors interested in food, culinary festivals are also attended by many other people with completely non-culinary motives.

4.2 Visitor satisfaction is influenced by more than just the selection of food and drinks

Food contributes significantly to tourist satisfaction, and hence tourism should be connected with gastronomy (Ab Karim and Chi 2010; Jiménez Beltrán, López-Guzmán and Santa-Cruz 2016). The culinary events studied on the Karst Plateau prove this because most respondents came to the event due to its culinary theme (Figure 1). However, only 9% reported that cuisine was the only reason for attending. Others required additional motives (Figure 2).

The respondents confirmed the findings of Nield, Kozak, and LeGrys (2000) and Fox (2007) that local gastronomy, the quality and price of food, and ambiance influence tourist satisfaction the most. Because consumer satisfaction is very important (Morgan, Attaway and Griffin 1996; McQuitty, Finn and Wiley

2000) and affects marketing (Erevelles and Leavitt 1992), the organization of culinary events on the Karst Plateau should take into account that more demanding visitors seek a more diverse selection of local (home-made) food and more opportunities for tasting traditional dishes and dishes prepared in new, innovative ways. In addition to ambiance, they are also interested in a high-quality complete cultural program originating in Karst tradition. This requires the following from the event organizers: good technical organization and sustainable behavior, successful connection and coordination of stakeholders, and good managerial skills of their leader (Šmid Hribar, Razpotnik Visković and Bole 2021). Visitor satisfaction is enhanced by sufficient signs showing the way to the venue, carefully planned traffic and people coordinating parking, appropriate distance and arrangement of parking areas and access points, info points with helpful staff, information signs with a schedule of activities or regular loudspeaker announcements, well-arranged stands, marked and clean restrooms, marked waste bins, proper waste management and instructions for recycling, clean public transport stops, and availability of public transport. Satisfaction is further influenced by the use of environmentally friendly packaging, accessibility of drinking water (not in plastic bottles), and first aid availability.

All the events on the Karst Plateau take place outdoors, and so one of their weaknesses is poor adaptation to bad weather. Bad weather influences the quality of the services and products offered, and the general atmosphere, and results in a critical opinion among visitors and a smaller number of providers and visitors. Therefore, even more thorough preparations for potential rainy weather are required.

4.3 Certain sustainability aspects are still insufficiently observed

Some Karst events still have room for improvement in sustainable behavior. In general, respondents ranked the selection of food and drinks relatively high (3.9 out of 5), but one-third nonetheless felt greater diversity of local and especially home-made food and drinks was missing, including stews and soups. The more critical among them were aware that there is primarily a need to present the local environment and local products and intangible qualities that are key for promoting the region. Among other things, they highlighted that dishes from elsewhere, such as Bled cream pastry (*blejska kremna rezina, kremšnita*), Balkan rolled kebabs (*čevapčiči*), and so on are completely unnecessary in the selection of Karst food presented. The same applies to the selection of handicrafts offered at stands and the accompanying program. The emphasis should be on the Karst tradition. The range of products offered should be better connected with the event's theme, which should present the local traditional crafts and cuisine.

A weakness of tourism on the Karst Plateau is the poor public transport accessibility of the event venues. As many as 83% of respondents came to the events studied by car. An example of a better practice in this regard is the Štanjel Wine Festival, where train service from Ljubljana was offered in combination with a circular bus route. In this connection the revival of the Karst railway, which was discontinued after the Second World War, may be worth considering. Event organizers strive to introduce ecological improvements, but these are still insufficient; the use, selection, and availability of sustainable packaging materials received a score of only 3.3 out of 5, and recycling was only rated 3.4 out of 5.

4.4 Limitations of the study

Most respondents lacked extensive experience in attending culinary events. Two-thirds revealed their favorite culinary experience up until then, a few individuals did not remember anything that would be worth mentioning, and 7% did not have a previous culinary experience because that was the first time they had attended a culinary event. Those with more experience (41%) mentioned a variety of culinary events across the globe, including elsewhere in Europe and Slovenia (e.g., street food in Tokyo or Sri Lanka, a restaurant in Paris, outdoor food service in Heiligenblut, Austria, and so on). The only thing that came up several times was the *Odprta kuhna* food market in various Slovenian towns (6%), but this was only mentioned by respondents with less culinary experience. The Karst Plateau Lavender Festival was included in the survey because cuisine was expected to play a major role in this event, but it later turned out that other aspects were more important. The programs offered at the Teran Wine and Prosciutto Festival and the Opening of Karst Cuisine Month were partly compromised by rain. The results of surveys conducted with visitors of large-scale culinary events on the one hand and boutique events on the other are difficult to compare because respondents have different criteria. In general, participants in boutique events are more demanding and have stricter criteria.

5 Conclusion

This paper presents the findings of an analysis of 244 people surveyed at five culinary events on the Slovenian Karst Plateau during the summer of 2018. Local cuisine is a very important motive that draws people to these events, which provide an opportunity to promote the region and its cultural heritage.

Only 9% of respondents stated that cuisine was the only motive for attending the culinary event. For just under one-third, cuisine is the most important reason, but they need additional stimulation. For 56% of respondents, cuisine is a welcome addition, but not a primary motive for attending. The most important motives for attending culinary events include the following: local cuisine, experiencing something new, different, and special, and exploring natural and, first and foremost, cultural heritage. Cuisine and socializing are important for only 15% of respondents, who tend to come from nearby places, only up to 20 km away.

Respondent satisfaction is the greatest at boutique culinary events, where the main theme is highlighted more than at large-scale culinary events. More demanding visitors (almost 50% of respondents had a university degree) seek a greater diversity of local sustainably produced food and more opportunities for tasting traditional dishes and dishes prepared and served in a different, innovative way. They are also interested in a combination of cuisine and local culture (e.g., dance, music, and presentation of the place).

The visitors also evaluated the events in terms of sustainability. The main weakness highlighted was the poor public transport accessibility of the venues. They also think there is still significant room for improvement in selecting the packaging used; plastic disposable packaging still tends to be overused at these events.

The success of promoting a specific region and expanding the area it draws visitors from primarily depends on the quality of services and food ingredients, the uniqueness of culinary events, and experiences that cannot be expected anywhere else.

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