



Promoting Gastronomy Tourism in Croatia: Comparing Food and Wine Experiences

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Abstract: *At a time when tourism destinations are looking at prospects to expand their offering, it is of significant importance to echo on opportunities these offer for gastronomy tourism development. This paper provides an overview of gastronomy and tourism as an attraction for tourism, beforehand moving on to the case of Croatia, whose geographical position in the South-east of Europe made it one of the ideal locations for gastronomy tourism developments. In attempting to at least partially answer the question of whether Croatia is portrayed and perceived as a destination with a rich gastronomy tourism offering, this research relies on content and semiotic analysis of the official Croatian National Tourist Board website in order to shed light on the modes in which representations of gastronomy tourism are included in the current tourism campaign. The research concludes with reflections on the overall importance of gastronomy tourism for the development of Croatia as an alluring gastronomy destination and highlights the role meaningful inclusions of representations of gastronomy tourism can play in contributing to strategically desirable shifts in the country's overall destination image.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As global tourism continues to grow and destinations face increasing competition, gastronomy and wine tourism may serve as the distinguishing factor in attracting tourists through unique local and regional intangible cultural heritage (Bessière, 1998; Hanžek & Sušić, 2020; Long, 2004). For many destinations, the art of food and wine-making is deeply ingrained in their identity and history, consequently forming an important element of the nation's image and brand (Richards, 2012). Gastronomy and wine tourism can further foster local economic development and revitalize primary industry engaging various sectors as tourism stakeholders (UNWTO, n.d.). This paper, therefore, specifically explores the promotion of gastronomy tourism in Croatia by comparing the promotion of food and wine tourism experiences. It also looks at how the destination promotes both food and wine as an important pull factor for year-round tourism. This is because an effective promotion of different forms of tourism, in this case, gastronomy and wine tourism, can be one of the key marketing strategies that can positively contribute to the further development of Croatia as a year-round tourism destination. Consequently, there is a need to explore how both food and wine experiences are projected in the existing promotional strategies, and, if needed, to show how gastronomy and wine tourism can further be used in making changes to the image of Croatia as a desirable gastronomy tourism destination.

The first part of the paper presents the key overview of gastronomy and wine tourism as an attraction factor for tourism and shows an increased demand for destinations rich in gastronomy (Hanžek & Sušić, 2020). The second part of the paper builds on this topic, focusing on gastronomy and wine tourism in Croatia specifically. It emphasizes the degree of inclusion of food and wine in

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existing promotion strategy, as well as explores the role that these might have in further development of Croatia as a desirable tourism destination. The data from the TOMAS survey (Marušić et al., 2020) showing attitudes and expenditures of tourists is also presented here, pointing at the significant importance that food and wine have for tourists traveling to Croatia.

After these, mostly theoretical and statistically informed parts of the paper, the promotion of gastronomy and wine tourism in Croatia is explored through an analysis of the official Croatian National Tourist Board (CNTB) website. Through these, research aimed to investigate the projected image of Croatia as a desirable gastronomy and wine tourism destination, and respond to the question of whether Croatia is perceived and presented as a destination with rich food and wine tourism offers. Thus, this part of the paper describes the methodology used in the research, which is exploratory post-structural content and semiotic analysis of selected typical examples from the current official CNTB tourism promotional campaigns website (CNTB, 2023).

This paper concludes with reflections on the importance of further use of gastronomy tourism in shaping the image of Croatia as an alluring gastronomy tourism destination, as well as the need for further inclusion of both food and wine in official tourism promotional materials published by the CNTB, that could, if used properly, further positively contribute to building an image of Croatia that moves away from sun and sea and creates the image of desirable gastronomy and wine tourism destination. These desirable long-term shifts in the overall destination image are argued that could, in their unique way, make an important contribution to ensuring that a wide variety of gastronomy tourism continues to be successful long into the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gastronomy and Wine Tourism as an Attraction Factor for Tourism

The Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC) of UNWTO (n.d.) defines gastronomy tourism as a type of tourism experience that revolves around food and related products and activities during travel. In addition to offering authentic, traditional, or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomy tourism may also encompass other related activities such as visiting local producers, participating in food festivals, and taking cooking classes. Wine tourism, or eno-tourism is a subtype of gastronomy tourism, that specifically focuses on visiting vineyards, and wineries, and engaging in wine-related experiences like wine tastings, consumption, and purchases, often right at the source (UNWTO, n.d.). Thus, as mentioned in the introduction part of the paper, gastronomy and wine represent an important part of the identity of tourism destinations, however, research on them as being an attraction factor for tourism remains limited in scientific research, especially in the context of Croatia as a tourism destination (Hanžek & Sušić, 2019, 2023).

There has been an evident shift in perceiving gastronomy and wine as an attraction for tourism since the recognition of gastronomy as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2011 (Lin et al., 2021). Kivela and Crotts (2006) and Van der Spiegel et al. (2012) argued that only several countries stood out for successful promotion of gastronomy as a pull factor for tourists even before the recognition of gastronomic heritage by UNESCO, these being Croatia with Dalmatian cuisine, and Malaysia with halal food. Therefore, traditional cuisine and wine-making become a cultural element of the identity of tourist destinations (Rinaldi, 2017). Consequently, tourist boards and tourism destination marketing and management organizations are interested in the

influence that these might have as one of the factors positively influencing tourism development (Richards, 2012). This adds to the further importance of understanding this phenomenon and paying attention to it in academia (Ramli et al., 2013).

As existing research points out, gastronomy and wine tourism have strong relevance as a catalyst for economic development and revitalization, positive impact on destination image development and represent the sign of identity and cultural legacy of tourist destinations (Lin et al., 2021). From the destination point of view, tourists seek local foods and wines to experience something different from everyday experiences. Local food and wine tasting is therefore considered to be a part of travel experiences (Lin et al., 2021). In responding to such demand, destinations need to design their offers to correspond to above mentioned needs to be able to use gastronomy and wine tourism in achieving these objectives thus building competitiveness in the international tourist markets. For example, UNWTO (2019) argues that gastronomy tourism is seen as an essential aspect of travel and culture, thus that food and culinary experiences have become a significant motivator for tourists, akin to visiting historical sites or cultural landmarks. Thus, it identifies that tourists are increasingly seeking authentic, local culinary experiences UNWTO (2019). Tourists are not just interested in the taste of the food, but also in the cultural and social aspects surrounding it. This includes an interest in the origins of ingredients, culinary techniques, and the social context in which the food is prepared and enjoyed. Furthermore, the UNWTO emphasizes the importance of marketing and promoting gastronomy tourism destinations, which is at the core of this research, identifying how these experiences are communicated and marketed through various channels such as websites in this case. The UNWTO (2019) argues that gastronomy tourism is not merely about eating it's an immersive cultural experience that involves history, tradition, and the social fabric of a place. It is an integral part of the overall travel experience and plays a significant role in destination marketing.

Gastronomy tourists, according to the UNWTO's (2019) *Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism: Sustainability and Gastronomy*, highlight the significance of the culinary experience, comparing it with the importance of visiting museums, enjoying music, or marveling at a destination's architecture. Recent studies point to a growing tourist profile, emphasizing a shift in travel motivation towards discovering and relishing the unique culinary character of the places they visit (Nilsson, 2016). Rather than merely sightseeing, these tourists seek interactive, immersive experiences that reflect the atmosphere, lifestyle, and gastronomic culture of the location. Today's gastronomy travelers strive to uncover the true essence of a place, valuing authenticity and local identity, not only in food but also in the surrounding social context (Nilsson, 2016). They express a keen interest in the origins of products, and culinary techniques, and view gastronomy as a way to connect socially to the destination (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Lin et al., 2021; Rinaldi, 2017). These tourists tend to spend more than the average traveler, have high expectations for authenticity, avoid uniformity, and are quite discerning in their choices (UNWTO, 2019). Thus, Daries-Ramon et al. (2019) offered a classification of gastronomy tourists through three categories: (1) survivors – tourists who do not see food as the main travel intention; (2) enjoyers – tourists for whom pairing different activities in the destination with food is the main objective; and (3) experiencers – tourists for whom food is the main intention for travel. Recognizing the vital role of gastronomy tourism in travel experiences, emphasizing authenticity and cultural immersion, will be examined within the context of Croatia in the subsequent section, highlighting its impact on destination marketing and travelers' pursuit of genuine cultural engagement.

2.2. Gastronomy and Wine Tourism in Croatia

As [Kivela and Crotts \(2006\)](#) argue, gastronomy frequently acts as the catalyst for rejuvenating tourism in destinations facing various challenges. Croatia serves as a prime example, grappling with the monumental task of revitalizing its tourism industry after the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), wherein gastronomy played an essential role in its ongoing recovery efforts ([Kivela & Crotts, 2006](#)). Following these, the TOMAS survey ([Marušić et al., 2020](#)) results revealed the importance of gastronomy tourism in the context of reasons for visiting, an overview of information sources that tourists use in search of information for Croatia as a tourist destination, as well as an overview of tourist activities undertaken at the time of the stay in Croatia. These are as follows:

2.2.1. Motivations for visiting

As evident from Figure 1 below, for both Adriatic and Continental Croatia, gastronomy is one of the top ten motivators for visiting Croatia.

Ranking number	Adriatic Croatia	%	Ranking number	Continental Croatia	%
1	Sea	81,5	1	Nature	31,7
2	Nature	56,2	2	Touring, sightseeing	26,0
3	City break	23,8	3	City break	25,9
4	Touring	21,0	4	Sports and recreation	24,1
5	Sports and recreation	14,9	5	Business	21,7
6	Culture and arts	12,7	6	Culture and arts	15,7
7	Gastronomy	6,6	7	Hiking	9,8
8	Entertainment and Festivals	5,5	8	Countryside	9,6
9	Countryside	4,5	9	Gastronomy	6,6
10	Manifestations and events	4,2	10	Manifestations and events	6,3

Figure 1. Tourist's motivations to visit Croatia

Source. Adapted by authors from [Marušić et al., 2020](#)

Thus, the majority of tourists visiting Adriatic Croatia are primarily drawn by the allure of the sea, captivating over 80% of them, followed closely by nature, which motivates around 56% of tourists. Additionally, a range of other reasons, such as city breaks, touring, sports, culture, and art, also contribute significantly to the visits, though to a lesser extent. In the context of Adriatic Croatia, gastronomy is in the seventh place as a motivator to travel to Croatia. While looking at reasons for visiting Continental Croatia, nature stands out as the primary motivator for nearly a third of visits, with touring, city breaks, sports, business, and cultural aspects following, where gastronomy is in ninth place.

2.2.2. Overview of tourist activities while at the destination

Most tourists when visiting Croatia engage in swimming activities, followed by city sightseeing, visiting restaurants, exploring historical sites, visiting national parks or protected natural areas, shopping, going on organized boat trips, and a range of other sports, recreational, entertainment, and cultural pursuits including visiting wine roads and wineries. As evident in Figure 2 below, in Adriatic Croatia, swimming naturally takes priority, surpassing the national average. On the contrary, in Continental Croatia, visiting restaurants ranks highest among favorite

activities, followed by city sightseeing. Visitors in this region notably spend more time in restaurants, museums, galleries, exhibitions, and visits to national parks or protected areas compared to the national average. Guests staying in hotels are more actively engaged in almost all activities compared to those staying in other accommodation types and also spend more on average making them a desirable segment for gastronomy tourism.

Ranking	Activity	Sum %	Adriatic Croatia %	Continental Croatia %
1	Swimming	75,2	78,9	12,6
2	City sightseeing	52,8	53,5	40,4
3	Visiting Restaurants	50,4	49,9	58,7
4	Visiting heritage and cultural sites	22,9	22,8	23,7
5	Visiting national parks and nature parks	18,7	18,1	28,4
6	Shopping	15,2	15,6	7,9
7	Organized boat tours	14,4	15,1	1,7
8	Walking	14,1	14,1	13,6
9	Visiting museums, galleries and exhibitions	13,6	13,0	22,5
10	Jogging, running	12,5	13,1	2,9
11	Nightlife	11,2	11,6	5,5
12	Tennis	9,7	10,2	1,6
13	Visiting Wellness and Spa facilities	8,8	8,7	9,0
14	Diving	8,4	8,9	0,3
15	Visiting theme parks	7,6	7,9	2,4
16	Visiting events	7,4	7,4	6,7
17	Visiting wine roads and wineries	7,2	7,4	4,4
18	Fishing	6,2	6,4	1,3
19	Visiting theme roads	6,1	6,3	2,8
20	Visiting traditional events	5,4	5,4	5,8

Figure 2. Tourist's activities while in Croatia

Source. Adapted by authors from Marušić et al., 2020

More specifically, if examined in the context of gastronomy tourism, visiting restaurants together with visiting wine roads and wineries together make 57,6%. Tourist activities in Adriatic Croatia follow overall ranking with 57,3%, while gastronomy tourism surpasses all other activities in Continental Croatia, ranking in the first place with 63,1%. These results all together allude to the importance that gastronomy has for tourists who visit Croatia. While, as evident from the earlier discussed tourist motivations, gastronomy is in seventh or ninth place before tourists arrive, once they are in Croatia, gastronomy increases the importance and increases ranking to one of the top three activities. This could be because Croatia is still perceived as being a sea and sun tourist destination, and is not as yet perceived as a gastronomy destination. Because of this, it is important to research the portrayal of Croatia as a gastronomy tourism destination, which this research does.

2.2.3. Overview of sources of information

Sources of information that tourists use to search for information undergo substantial shifts due to technological advancements, making tracking crucial for those involved in information dissemination within the tourism sector. As seen in Figure 3 below, the primary information source for tourists traveling to Croatia is the Internet for 55% of tourists, for Adriatic Croatia 56%, compared to slightly less for Continental 48% (Marušić et al., 2020).

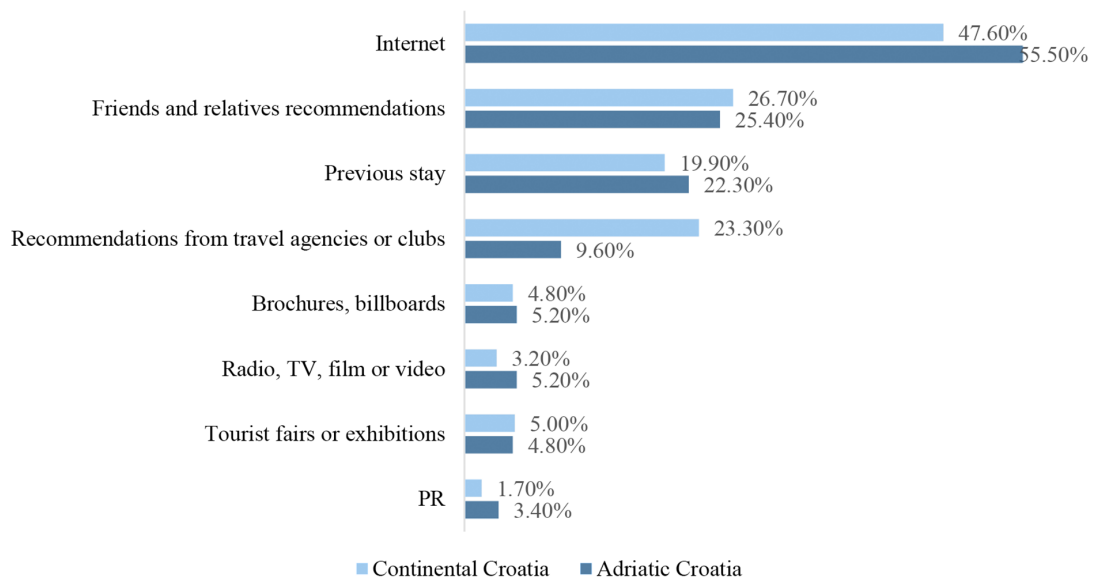


Figure 3. Sources of information used by tourists to search Croatia as a tourist destination

Source. Adapted by authors from Marušić et al., 2020

This is followed by recommendations from friends and family, trusted by 25% of tourists, irrespective of their stay location, followed by previous experiences, accounting for 22% in both regions. Additionally, tourists seek information sources through recommendations from different travel agencies or clubs (10%), and here this applies more to tourists visiting Continental Croatia (23%) than Adriatic Croatia (10%). The Internet sees equal usage across diverse accommodations, with Spaniards notably prominent as frequent users, while guests from Bosnia and Herzegovina utilize it the least (Marušić et al., 2020). A significant portion of guests arriving for business or personal visits declared they didn't require pre-arrival information (Marušić et al., 2020). Finally, tourists gathering information via the Internet extensively explore online travel agency websites (61%), along with social media, tourist board websites, and accommodation facilities or offices. This is why, in the context of this research, we explore the mode in which gastronomy tourism is represented within the official Croatian National Tourist Board (CNTB) website. As proposed by the UNWTO (2019), one of the possible ways to examine the success of gastronomy tourism destinations is to evaluate the marketing efforts focused on gastronomy tourism. An examination should be conducted to analyze the marketing channels and strategies employed by the destination's management entity and relevant public and private organizations that impact the destination UNWTO (2019). Specifically, promotion channels for gastronomy tourism within the destination, which encompass elements like the official website should be taken into account. Therefore, the next section explains the research methodology and method used in this research that follows the above directions, after which it offers research results and discussion.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1. Promotion of Gastronomy and Wine Tourism in Croatia: An Analysis of the Official Croatian National Tourist Board (CNTB) Website

Within this research, the question of the overall image of Croatia in the context of presenting itself as a gastronomy tourism destination through food and wine is discussed. It is done so through an analysis of the official tourism promotional campaign published by the CNTB. In partially addressing this question, this research uses exploratory post-structural content and

semiotic analysis of typical examples found as a part of the official CNTB website (CNTB, 2023). The website has been taken for analysis as most visitors have access to the official website and “Full of Life” campaign in search of more information about Croatia as a tourist destination.

Furthermore, the methodology and method used within this research applies qualitative research that is grounded in social constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Figure 4 below shows the methodological approach that was followed while conducting this study.

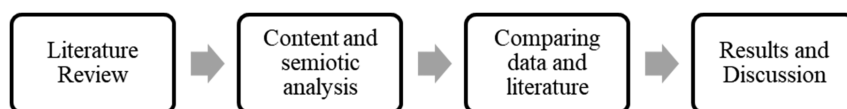


Figure 4. Qualitative method approach for data collection

Source. Own research

Thus, this inductive qualitative analysis explores the visual and textual content of the current CNTB website to reveal the relative (absence) of an adequate volume of representation of food and (or) wine activities in signifying Croatia as a gastronomy tourism destination through the most accessible marketing communication tool of the CNTB, being its website. Through this relatively innovative methodological approach, this research reveals the advantages and disadvantages of the current campaign in the context of whether Croatia is presented as the destination with a rich offer of food and wine, the question that is at the same time extremely important to ask should CNTB wants to further build the brand of Croatia as an important gastronomy destination, and the role that these might have in future strategic marketing approach to destination branding.

This research therefore moves away from the traditional approach of exploring tourism promotional materials through perspectives of critical social and cultural studies, looking at it from the perspective of visual studies in the field of marketing (see Oswald, 2015). Such approaches to research can have a positive impact on understanding the processes of branding and help in future marketing strategies for destinations (Oswald, 2015), especially in the context of integrated marketing communications.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Promotion of Gastronomy Tourism: Comparing Food and Wine Tourism Experiences

The official CNTB website consists of the landing page, and three separate sections: *where to go*, *what to do* and *travel info*. These sections have been analyzed in the context of the representation of gastronomy tourism, specifically looking at the difference between the representation of food and wine. The research explored visual elements, textual elements, navigation layout, interactive elements, and cultural context to see whether (and how) food and wine had been mentioned through the narrative of local culinary and wine tradition. Figure 5 below shows an overview of semiotic and content analysis of the gastronomy and wine tourism of the official CNTB website.

While the landing page should introduce tourists with a snapshot of what Croatia as a tourism destination has to offer, gastronomy is underrepresented within the themes that emerge on the landing page of the official CNTB website. There is only one small image almost at the bottom of the website showing a group of friends opening wine bottles and eating cheese, accompanied by text

food & drink (see Figure 6). Interestingly, the word *drink* is used while presenting wine. There are no interactive elements nor the cultural context in which food or wine is presented mentioning local tradition, culinary and wine traditions. Furthermore, the section *where to go* is divided into the subsections of *Destinations* and *attractions*. The only signifier connected to gastronomy tourism in the subsection *destinations* is part of one sentence that states “abundant and varied gastronomy” (CNTB, 2023). All the rest examined elements such as visual elements, navigation and layout, interactive elements and cultural context are entirely missing from the representation of gastronomy.

	Visual elements		Textual elements		Navigation and layout (sections to further search topics)		Interactive elements (such as maps, menus, virtual tours)		Cultural context (mentioning local tradition, culinary and wine tradition)	
	food	wine	food	wine	food	wine	food	wine	food	wine
Landing page	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
WHERE TO GO										
Destinations:	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cities	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Islands	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Regions	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Counties	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Attractions:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beaches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Culture&Heritage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nature	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UNESCO	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+
WHAT TO DO										
Activities	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Activity holiday	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nautical	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Food&Drink	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+
Health&Wellness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Culture&Arts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Top events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cultural events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Musical events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Culinary events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sports events	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special Projects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Croatia Feeds	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+
EDEN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Small and family run hotels Croatia	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Experience all Croatia has to offer	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Living Like a Local	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Figure 5. Overview of semiotic and content analysis of the gastronomy and wine tourism of the official CNTB website

Source. Own research

This subsection is further subdivided into the following categories: *cities*, *islands*, *regions*, and *counties*. In the category *Cities*, out of all represented cities through 240 images, only six of them (2,5%) show vineyards from the bird perspective. None of them show food, or wine bottles, wine production or wineries. There are no interactive maps, virtual tours or representation of

gastronomy in a cultural context. The only signifier of gastronomy is in the text saying “culinary treats”, however, it lacks any further explanation. Furthermore, in the section *islands*, none of the images show food or wine, the only signifier to gastronomy is one part of the sentence in the text that says “abundance of gastronomy”. In section *regions*, again none of the images show food or wine, the only signifier to gastronomy is part of the text saying “diversity of nature, heritage, culture and gastronomy”. Lastly, section *counties* again have no images showing food or wine, however, mentions gastronomy in text in cultural context through text saying “areas with different cultural patterns, natural characteristics, gastronomy delicacies, and lifestyles.”

Another section is *attractions*, being subdivided into the categories: *beaches*, *culture and heritage*, *nature* and *UNESCO*. The main *attractions* page has none of the representations of food, wine, or any other signifier for gastronomy tourism. The same applies to sections *beaches* and *nature*, and, even more interesting, section *culture and heritage* also does not mention food, wine, or gastronomy in any context, especially in regards to mentioning local tradition, culinary and wine tradition, which would somewhat be expected. Finally, in the *UNESCO* section there is one image showing food, leading to a page that explains the Mediterranean diet as a Croatian intangible cultural heritage, where, apart from this one image that shows food, wine is only mentioned in the text through the sentence “..as long as you are in good company and have a glass of fine wine...As the old Dalmatian saying goes, a fish is to be washed in three liquids – the sea, oil, and wine – so try and resist this important delicacy that’s part of global cultural heritage!” However, no further or detailed explanation of wine, food, or gastronomy in a cultural context has been made.

The next section is *what to do?*, where the same image that was used before again represents gastronomy tourism accompanied by the text “...savor unforgettable dishes”, as seen in Figure 6 below. There is also a section that leads to further research, which then leads to (under the section *food & drink*) further expiration of Croatian food and wine. It is interesting that, despite the focus solely on wine, the word that is used instead of wine is *drink*. To reach this section, visitors need to spend quite a lot of time trying to find it on the website.



Figure 6. Representation of gastronomy on the official CNTB website

Source. CNTB, n.d.

Once reached, it then leads the reader to get to know Croatian specialties, gastronomy regions, wine roads, tasting, olive oil and Halal food. Finally, the rest of the sections, health&wellness and culture&arts have no mention of gastronomy. Furthermore, under the section events, there is a common text for all subcategories that encompasses only two words that signify gastronomy and these are "... there are no sounds, movements, pictures, tastes, aromas, traditions that have not been included in a certain large or small manifestation". There are no visual elements, nor any other signifiers of gastronomy tourism. Despite there being a section *culinary events*, it remains empty, with no information on any culinary event.

Finally, the last section of the website is dedicated to a special project that CNTB is doing. One of these is *Croatia feeds*, representing the only example of the inclusion of food and wine in the project. If examined a bit deeper, wine again has very little attention, apart from the vineyards portrayed from the bird's perspective, there is no deeper connection to wine as a culture or tradition. Food is in this case more represented than in any other place on the webpage, as evident in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Representation of gastronomy on the CNTB website: section Croatia feeds

Source. CNTB, n.d.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It would be beneficial to conduct similar research taking into account for example presence of gastronomy tourism themes on official social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and others. Additionally, video-sharing platforms like YouTube, and photo-sharing platforms including Instagram, Pinterest, or Flickr should also be taken into account. Furthermore, printed publications, audiovisual materials, and tourism brochures are also fruitful data to analyze representations of destinations in the context of gastronomy tourism. Initiatives and activities carried out within the destination to promote gastronomy tourism, including participation in events, trade shows, familiarization trips, the development of specialized tourism products, and more. The

visibility and representation of the destination within the catalogs of major gastronomy tourism operators. More so, future research projects could attempt to highlight differences between Croatian and similar wine tourism destinations in other parts of Europe (and broader).

6. CONCLUSION

This paper dealt with the issue of promoting Croatia as a tourist destination with a rich offer of gastronomy tourism, focusing on both food and wine. The paper began with a review of the literature related to gastronomy and wine tourism as an attraction factor for tourism, the paper highlighted the importance of Croatia's geographical location and accessibility to wider European markets as a significant advantage for the development of gastronomy tourism.

After that, the paper analyzed the existing statistical data on tourism in Croatia in the context of tourists' motivations to visit Croatia, activities undertaken while in Croatia, as well as sources of information used by tourists to search Croatia as a tourist destination. Using innovative visual qualitative research methods, this paper subsequently tried to answer the question of whether Croatia is perceived as a destination with a rich offer of gastronomy tourism. Findings from the analysis of the official CNTB website indicate that gastronomy tourism (and related categories such as food and wine) is very scarcely included and promoted on the website. Food and wine are relatively rarely represented compared to the representation of coastal and summer motives. This leads to the conclusion that Croatia as a tourist destination continues to be promoted primarily as a coastal summer destination, and has a big potential to go further in placing itself on a map of being a gastronomy destination as well. Figure 8 below summarizes recommendations referencing categories of the website that were previously explored through the research.

Main recommendations for better inclusion of gastronomy:

- Tell the story of Croatian gastronomy through all the existing sections of the website;
- Give equal importance to both food and wine, as wine is almost non-existent in the current representation of gastronomy tourism;
- Produce and integrate interactive elements (such as maps, menus, and virtual tours) as they are currently non-existent;
- Use the existing section on the website called *culinary events* to inform tourists on this topic, as it is currently empty;
- Integrate gastronomy with the cultural context by mentioning local culinary and wine traditions;
- Rethink the use of the word “*drink*” that is now used to talk about wine, and use the word “*wine*”;
- Approach the development of gastronomy tourism in a strategic and integrated way, possibly following [UNWTO \(2019\)](#) guidelines for the development of gastronomy tourism.

The scientific contribution of this work can be seen on two levels. First, it contributes to existing studies of gastronomy tourism and contributes to the expansion of possible methodological approaches in the scientific field of marketing tourism. Considering that websites of tourist boards are still mostly researched through the prism of critical social and cultural studies, this work is innovative because it uses visual research methods with the aim that the findings of the analysis can potentially contribute to the possible future development of promotional campaigns and thus to the development of the destination image and brand. Therefore, there is also the possibility of a more efficient integration of marketing communications with the destination strategy, so that the destination image and brand can be effectively adapted, if necessary.

Therefore, a more effective future representation of Croatia, as far as integrated marketing communications are concerned, is not only a primary summer coastal destination but also a rich gastronomy destination, offering a wide range of traditional food and wine. These could indirectly have a positive impact on the overall development of the gastronomy tourism offer. The continuous future development of both already existing and newer forms of gastronomy tourism (such as, for example, focus on wine tourism) could contribute in its unique way not only to economic activities and economic development of Croatia as a gastronomy tourism destination but also to the wider quality of social and of cultural life in areas of wine and food production.

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