

# Agritourism Farms as Stakeholders of Gastronomic Experience

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## Summary

The growth of interest in gastro tourism has been noticed over the last few years on a global scale, as well as in Croatia. The purpose of this work is to examine the state of agritourism farms in five counties of Eastern Croatia as stakeholders of original gastro-tourism experiences and to understand to which extent gastronomy and tourist experiences associated with it are being used as the means for positioning the tourist destination. The first part of this paper offers a theoretical approach to the phenomena of agritourism and gastro tourism in the context of creative tourist experience and the need for creating a surrounding that would encourage the tourists to co-create their own tourist experiences based on the gastronomy heritage and local culture of life and work. The empirical part of this work is based on the theory that the existing agritourism farms do not use the gastronomy offer as a prominent means of differentiating and positioning in the sense of creating a wholesome gastro-tourism experience, the fact that stems from the interview results based on the responses of ten examined owners of agritourism farms in the mentioned area. The empirical research data suggest that agritourism facilities do not give enough attention to the design of wholesome gastro-tourism experiences – which is an imperative of a modern gastro-tourism product in rural destinations – and that the examined area lacks an integral association of the overall destination offer in the sense of creating a gastro-tourism experience.

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## Key words

agritourism, creative tourism, experience economy, gastro-tourism

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## Introduction

Global tourism trends are growing from year to year at rates even higher than predicted by the UNWTO in its Long-Term Forecast from 2010 (UNWTO, 2011). Mass tourist travels form an integral part of the omnipresent globalization which, on the other hand, leads to new tourist preferences and travel motives due to globalization being recognized as a sort of a threat for preserving the identity of certain cultures (Scarpato and Daniele, 2003). New trends that have been noted on the demand side of tourism respect local culture and tradition, healthy lifestyle, authenticity and new experiences (Vrtiprah, 2006; Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; Aref et al, 2010; Gaztelumendi, 2012). The motive that attracts most tourists to certain destinations nowadays is the desire of familiarizing with the local culture and lifestyle and unforgettable and authentic experiences. During their vacation, tourists want to live to a greater or lesser extent as locals or hosts in the facilities where they are being accommodated (UNWTO, 2015). Intangible cultural heritage, culture of life and work and traditional heritage, which includes traditional agriculture and gastronomy, are becoming a very strong factor in attracting tourists to tourist destinations and individual hospitality facilities, considering the changes in tourist preferences (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Richards, 2012; UNWTO, 2012). Based on the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2020 and related to strengthening the competitiveness of Croatian tourist regions, five counties of Eastern Croatia - Virovitica-Podravina, Požega-Slavonia, Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem, among other Croatian regions, united to form the Touristic Cluster Slavonia (hereinafter referred to as the Cluster Slavonia) for the purpose of joint branding, positioning and development of a unique tourist offer.<sup>1</sup> This paper is a continuation of the author's research on the possibilities of positioning the Cluster Slavonia as a destination of gastro tourism based on rich gastronomic heritage and authentic tourist experiences related to it. In this work, the authors sought to point out the fact that gastronomy and related intangible heritage can be an integrative factor of all other components of tourism, thus representing a key factor in branding and positioning of mentioned region as a desirable destination that will attract tourists throughout the whole year (Bakan, et al., 2018). In contrast to the aforementioned paper from 2018, which discussed the possibility of developing tourism from the aspect of destination and the assessment of individuals from the hospitality sector on how gastronomy is used to position the destination, this paper focuses on agritourism farms as carriers of authentic tourism experiences. After considering the phenomenon of agritourism, following the previous author's research (Tubić, Bosnić and Blažević, 2013; Tubić, Bakan and Jaković, 2017; Bakan et al., 2018; Tubić, et al., 2018a) on gastro tourism and related tourist experiences in rural areas in the introductory part, the empirical part of this paper interprets the results obtained by interviewing ten owners of agritourism farms from the Cluster Slavonia region. The aim of the research was to determine the extent to which gastronomy and related tourist experiences were used as a means of positioning individual agritourism estates in the

market, but even more to determine the scope of the attention that the owners of agritourism farms gave to the additional elements of the wholesome gastro-touristic experience and whether there were elements of integral connection between stakeholders and cooperation in establishing a gastro-tourism value chain as an imperative to deliver a unique tourist experience.

## Agritourism and Gastro Tourism - a Path for Extended Tourist Experiences in Rural Destinations

In times of an increased competition in the global tourism market but also different tourist preferences, many destinations are looking for a way to increase their competitiveness and to improve their positioning in the market. As it is noticeable that contemporary tourists are looking for authenticity, intimacy and a special experience, so the motivation of tourist moves from the tangible elements of the tourist offer to the intangible, i.e. experiential elements (Richards and Wilson, 2007; Binkhorst and Den Deckker, 2009; Richards, 2012; Jelinčić and Senkić, 2017). Tubić (2019) emphasizes that the contemporary tourist "does not want to be a theatre audience, but an actor", i.e. that he wants to actively participate in the direct delivery of the experience, a key element of a trip experience for him. Rural surrounding with all its features of life and work that completely deviate from the usual environments in which most of today's traveling population lives, has exceptional potentials and foundations for the development of authentic tourist experiences. Decommmercialization and sharing, which is visible in almost every sector of economy, the growing interest in content where a personalized approach prevails, family businesses, nostalgia and the trend of 'returning to the roots', further confirm these facts (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010; Kastenholz et al 2012).

## Agritourism: Terminological Definition

The seemingly simple task of terminologically defining the term agritourism turns into a serious and complicated scientific discussion. There are, namely, as many terminological definitions as there are authors who study the said subject matter. In their scientific and professional appearances, many authors (Carpio et al., 2008; Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock, 2010; Tew and Barbieri, 2012; Schilling et al., 2012; Barbieri, 2013 et al., 2013; Flanigan et al., 2014; Fagioli et al., 2014) point to the fact that there is no unique and standardized definition of the term agritourism. In the opinion of the author of this paper, this poses a serious scientific and professional setback, both in theoretical understanding, as well as in practical development. Given the large number of different terminological interpretations in the existing literature, the following definitions have been singled out according to the chronological order of origin:

- Agritourism is a form of tourism that includes tourism activities outside urban regions carried out by individuals whose main employment is in the primary or secondary sector of the economy (Iakovidou, 1997)
- Agritourism is a set of hospitality activities performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and members of their families, which must remain connected with and complementary to agricultural activities (Sonnino, 2004)
- Agritourism is a specific form of rural tourism in which the

<sup>1</sup> For more information see: Anonymous (2019a): <https://www.htz.hr/hr-HR/press/objave-za-medije/potpisan-sporazum-o-suradnji-na-kreiranju-i-promociji-turistickog-branda-slavonija> (accessed 01/02/2021), or: Anonymous (2019b): <https://www.poslovni.hr/hrvatska/prezentacija-slavonije-kao-cjeline-jedina-obecava-turisticki-skok-i-zeljeni-profit-361065> (accessed 01.02.2021.)

household must be integrated into an agricultural holding, inhabited by the owner, allowing visitors to participate in agricultural or complementary activities on the property or farm (Marques, 2006)

- Agritourism is a combination of agricultural activity and tourism that encourages short-term and long-term visits to rural areas or farms to enjoy, educate and / or actively engage in agricultural production and agricultural life (Yang et al., 2010)
- Agritourism is a recreational, educational or leisure activity that is programmed on any work farm or business entity related to an agricultural activity to attract visitors (Barbieri, 2013).

Agritourism is a form of rural tourism that involves temporary movement outside the tourist's usual environment of permanent residence, which includes short-term and long-term visits to active or passive agricultural, horticultural or other business entities in a rural area for education and entertainment and creates higher value for agriculture as a primary activity, which also brings added benefits and opportunities of economic, socio-cultural and environmental nature to business owners, the local community and the environment, while allowing tourists to gain unique personal experiences and experiences about agriculture and everyday life of the local population and the authentic rural climate in general (Tubić, 2019).

Focusing on previous theoretical and empirical knowledge in the academic and professional community of the Republic of Croatia, a small or modest database is evident, illustratively speaking. Several authors have written about agritourism in Croatia on a scientific-professional platform, namely Brščić (2005), Leko-Šimić and Čarapić (2007), Brščić et al. (2010), Baćac (2011), Tubić (2012, 2015) etc. However, the focus of the research topics of the existing papers is diametrically opposed to the topic of this paper<sup>2</sup>, which makes it an interesting theme and recommendation, as in this case, for further scientific upgrades and studies. In his doctoral thesis "Model of Rural Tourism Development of Continental Croatia", Tubić (2015) comes to the realization that the owners of rural family farms consider four attractive factors (average scores greater than 4.0) the most valuable factors to attract tourist consumers, i.e. that:

- the largest number of respondents, as many as 105 (98.13%), are of the opinion that the kindness and hospitality of the hosts is a fairly or very significant attractive factor for attracting consumers to the tourist economy or rural area (average score 4.82)
- a high average score of 4.48 indicates that silence and peace represent a fairly or very significant determinant of the rural tourist offer from the perception of 98 (91.59%) rural family farm owners
- a high percentage of respondents, 84.11% (90) and 86.92% (93), respectively, believe that the attractiveness of the location and the orderliness and originality of the tourist estate (average score 4.39), as well as rich, diverse and preserved natural resources (average score 4.37) represent a considerable or very significant attractive force for "rural" tourists when choosing a tourist destination

- a significant number of respondents, 88 of them (82.24%), position original gastronomy and oenology highly on the scale of attractive factors (average score 4.34).

Using appropriate statistical methods and techniques, Tubić (2015) emphasizes that the combined or authentic factors (index 4)<sup>3</sup> are perceived as the most important determinant of the rural tourist offer in the continental region of Croatia. In geographic and research terms, it is very important to point out that this (Tubić, 2015) is the most comprehensive research in Croatia and, accordingly, the prominent findings justify the conduct of this and any further research.

### Gastronomic Heritage - a Window into Discovering the Local Culture and Lifestyle of the Rural Population

The past few years saw a significant growth of gastronomy-based tourism and it has become one of the most dynamic and most creative segments of tourism. It is therefore evident that tourism and hospitality companies as well as destination management organizations have realized its exceptional importance as a means of diversifying tourism and encouraging the development of local, regional and national economies (UNWTO 2012; UNWTO 2017; Bakan et al., 2018). According to Hjalager (2017), growing gastronomic trends are, among others, the following:

- tourists want to be as close as possible to the source of food, i.e. food production
- gastronomic tourist destinations are building their image on preserving the gastronomic heritage (tangible and intangible) as well as on saving landscapes
- the association of different stakeholders in gastronomic tourist destination is being encouraged
- the use of new technologies in promoting the gastronomic offer is being promoted.

Taking into consideration the preferences of the majority of modern tourists, intangible experience elements which include tasting and consumption of foods and drinks are precisely those elements of the offer that contribute mostly to the authenticity and differentiation of certain tourist destinations and tourist-hospitality facilities (Binkhorst and Den Deckker, 2009). Regardless of the fact that the consumption of food and beverages stands as one of the basic tourist activities in any destination, gastronomy today is becoming one of the most important means of preserving the identity and means of familiarizing with the local culture as well as an important distinguishing element of positioning in the tourism market (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). Although the so-called "Gastro icons" or products by which individual destinations are recognizable in the wider area and globally are considered an excellent tool used in branding by many destinations, it is important to put a greater emphasis on the intangible elements of the gastronomic offer, such as traditional methods of production, forgotten recipes, customs related to the production and consumption of food and beverages as well as on storytelling (Sidali et al., 2015). For most tourists today, local food and gastronomic heritage are a gateway to learning about the

<sup>3</sup> The fourth factor (authentic factors) refers to the attractiveness of the location and the orderliness and originality of the tourist economy, the kindness and hospitality of the hosts and the original gastronomy and oenology (Tubić, 2015: 259).

<sup>2</sup> In terms of subject matter and research area

intangible local heritage and food and beverage culture (Hjalager, 2004). Authenticity is also an important element of experience for modern gastro tourists (Jang et al., 2011; Le et al., 2019) and local food and authentic ambience in which it is produced and consumed attract more and more gastro tourists, especially the ones that are referred to as "foodies". (Robinson and Getz, 2014). Socially and culturally aware tourists, like most tourists are today, appreciate the ethics and tradition in the production of small farmers, the traceability of foods from field to table, safety and hygiene of food, but even more the feeling that their tourist consumption contributes to the preservation of traditional agricultural production and rural areas (Miroso and Lawson, 2012; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2013; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). All things mentioned above give an additional argument to the fact that agritourism farms can become the bearers of a unique gastro-tourism experience and lifestyle of tourism in rural areas, especially those that engage in traditional agriculture, apply traditional recipes, cultivate traditional rural life and make this into an integrated gastro tourism product. Today, the tourism market offers very popular tailor-made gastro-tourism experiences, i.e. experiences especially tailored for small groups and individuals, which include visits and stays with the food producers as well as various joint activities with hosts such as cooking classes according to traditional recipes and ways of cooking, various creative workshops organized independently by the host or in cooperation with other stakeholders at the destination, foraging in the property environment and the destination with local guides, etc. (McLain et al., 2014; Biasco, 2020).

### Integrated Gastronomic Product in Agritourist Estates

In order to establish a tourist value chain standard and to deliver a unique gastro-tourism experience based on the authenticity of the gastronomic heritage associated with intangible and tangible heritage as well as the lifestyle of the local community, the success of a gastro tourism product within agritourism farms will depend primarily on the cooperation of all family farm owners and other stakeholders (Jennings et al., 2009; Laws et al., 2011; Herrera, 2012; Lee, Wall and Kovacz, 2015). The management of gastro-tourism products should include, inter alia, the following:

- connecting the agritourism offer with other gastronomic attractions of a particular destination
- branding the local gastronomic culture as a means for achieving recognition
- ensuring and preserving quality and consistency (creating standards of quality and marking gastronomic facilities within agritourism estates)
- networking and integral association of agritourist estates
- converting gastro tourism into creative tourism so that visitors can learn about the culture of the place they visit through the co-creation of the experience (Bakan, 2015).

In order for a certain destination to position itself as a desirable and original gastro-tourism destination in a rural area, as stated by Sidali et al., (2015), the following features are desirable:

- integrity and association of stakeholders and destination's gastronomic attractions
- small farms with predominantly traditional agriculture and food production

- joint efforts of all stakeholders of the integral gastro-tourism product in preserving the traditional production and local lifestyle
- home-made and personalized gastro-tourism products,
- owners and employers of agritourism farms should be the main source for familiarizing with the local culture and life – guides, animators and story-tellers
- nurturing and keeping customs and traditions related to the production and consumption of foods and beverages that should be the basis for creating authentic gastronomic experiences and a way of getting closer to guests as well as a means for guests' immersion into gastronomic experiences.

Agritourism farms should connect amongst themselves as well as with other stakeholders that are logically connected into a meaningful gastro-tourism product such as thematic oenology and gastronomy tourism routes, gastro museums, joint organization of gastronomy festivals, exhibitions and fairs under the common brand, which all contributes to the recognizability of a gastronomic product itself, as well as the destination as a whole. In this case, a great importance for positioning and differentiation of the destination is given to the joint commitment of the owners of rural family farms to preserve, nurture and promote the tradition of agricultural production and gastronomy and heritage in all segments of life and work of the local community. By sharing family recipes, secrets and tricks in the production of gastro and oenology products, opening family kitchen doors and dining rooms and sharing meals at gatherings, the guests are immersed into the world of the local community with all the wealth hidden in the heritage of the destination where they decided to spend their vacation. This approach carries a strong message to modern tourists who really appreciate the fact that tourism sector and destinations as a whole build the specificity of their offer on preserving traditional small-scale production and traditional way of life, thus protecting them from decay. Experiences of staying on agritourism farms, the co-creation of experiences in every segment of a tourist product together with food and drinks that can be tasted and bought in their original form exclusively at a specific destination, are experiences that remain in the memory of tourists for a long time and become a way of spreading positive pictures of the destination long after the visit comes to an end.

### Methodology and Research Goal

This research was directed among the owners of agritourism farms, i.e. rural family farms in the area enclosed by the Cluster Slavonia to determine the extent to which gastronomy and gastronomic heritage are used as a means of differentiation and positioning in the tourism market as well as to determine to what extent and how the owners of agritourism farms use the same resources as a foundation for building unique and recognizable gastro-tourism experiences. The authors also sought to examine how the mentioned research subjects associate with other rural family farms and stakeholders from the tourism and hospitality market and other complementary sectors at the destination into an integrated gastro-tourism product in order to offer their guests a more complete experience of staying at the farm and its surroundings. The sample was selected by searching and analyzing the content that promotes the gastronomic offer on the websites

of the county tourist boards of five counties joint into the Cluster Slavonia (Virovitica-Podravina, Požega-Slavonia, Brod-Posavina, Vukovar-Srijem and Osijek-Baranja). A similar approach is seen in some other authors eg. Brune et al. (2020), who investigated the relationship of local food and gastro-tourism experiences on agritourism farms in the USA. In our case, fifteen rural family farms were selected for examination by means of deliberate selection. In addition to the fact that they are singled out on the website as objects of authentic tourist offer and gastronomy, additional selection criteria were the following: *that they are registered as rural family farms and are significantly engaged in agricultural production, that the farm employs mostly family members, that they are located in authentic places where traditional agricultural production took place and that the architecture of the building and its surroundings rests on the foundations of traditional architecture and the appearance of a village.* For the purposes of empirical research, the authors have used a semi-structured in-depth interview. This method of data collection is a popular method in scientific research, and specifically in this research it has proven to be the most appropriate method given the possibilities of collecting or giving more detailed answers. After being contacted by phone, ten rural family farm owners from the mentioned area agreed to the interview, which represents 66.7% of the affirmative answers, i.e. 66.7% of the contacted research subjects expressed interest in participating in the research. The questions were structured into three groups. In the first group, the questions referred to the demographic structure of respondents, business length, experience and working hours, the fact to what extent owners use gastronomy as a means of differentiation and positioning of agritourism farm and how much they emphasize the specificity of the gastronomic offer and local gastronomic heritage in promotional and communicational channels. The next group of questions referred to the expanded offer of a gastro-tourism product, i.e. the elements of wholesome gastro-touristic experience according to the concept of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Richards, 2012; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011; Richards, 2015). The questions were focused on educational, entertainment and escapist elements of the experience because the review of the literature in relevant databases such as Web of Science dealing with this topic found that aesthetic elements of the experience are something that agritourism owners pay most attention to. See for example the research by Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007). The questions posed to the owners were *whether they offer additional experiences on their farms such as: workshops of traditional cuisine, food and wine tasting rooms; working on farm experience; educational content on traditional agriculture; traditional crafts workshops; experience of preparing pickled vegetables, jams and other traditional products; organizing events based on agricultural heritage (harvesting, fruit picking, foraging, patron saints days etc.); farm and memorabilia shops; rent your own fruit tree, vegetable bed, pick your own; the family table experience with storytelling; special events organizing (weddings, birthdays, family gatherings etc.); team building.* Respondents were asked to rate experiences according to their frequency in offer. The range of grades was from 1 to 5, where the grades were: grade 1 - "not offered at all" and grade 5 - "it's a standard offer which is specially promoted". The third group of questions referred to the interconnection and cooperation between agritourism farms and other stakeholders, such as: *Do you fill each other's capacities, do you buy products from each other, do you organize joint thematic events.* Respondents had to grade their statements from 1 to 5, where grade 1 represented "we don't

have cooperation at all" and grade 5 represented "we always cooperate". The research was conducted by means of a structured telephone interview in the period from November 2019 to January 2020, with questions prepared in advance.

## Discussion

The interview was conducted with three owners of rural family farms from Virovitica-Podravina County, two from Osijek-Baranja, Brod-Posavina and Požega-Slavonia counties, and one from Vukovar-Srijem county. In terms of ownership structure, six rural family farms are owned by men and four by women, two of whom are in the age groups of 31 to 40, two of them in the age group of 41 to 50 and two in the age group over 60, while four of the owners are in the age group of 51 to 60 years and none of the owners is between 18 and 30 years old. Seven respondents had no previous experience in tourism and hospitality by the time the rural farm was registered. Of the total number of rural family farms participating in the survey, seven have been operating between 5 and 15 years, two between 16 and 25 years, one over 25 years while none was registered in the last 5 years. Most of them (six), receive guests by appointment while four of them have regulated working hours within the working week and weekend. Regarding the use of gastronomy and gastronomic heritage, half of the interviewees stated that *"they use gastronomy as a means of promotion and a prominent element of the offer, but that it is not the main means of market positioning"*. Two of the interviewees claimed that *"gastronomy is the main and most prominent tool that they used to create their brand and market recognition"*, while three owners said that *"traditional food and beverage offerings are something they consider standard but do not particularly emphasize this in promoting their own estate nor do they think it should be the sole means of positioning their estate in the market"*. Although the sample of respondents was fairly small, it can be concluded that gastronomic heritage is not used sufficiently as a key tool for branding and positioning, which is contrary to numerous studies that have addressed this topic (UNWTO, 2012; Barreda, 2018; Spilkova and Fialova, 2013; Williams, Williams and Omar, 2014; Lin, Pearson and Cai, 2011). The conclusions that can be drawn from the respondents' answers regarding additional elements of the offer that contribute to an authentic and special gastronomic experience at rural family farms indicate the fact that in the observed area the recognizability and diversity of the catering and tourist offer still do not offer a gastro tourism experience in the true sense of the word, especially in the elements of the guest's co-creation of the experience and the creative elements of the tourist product. This can be seen in the fact that nine of ten respondents stated that *"it is rarely or never that they organize gastronomy workshops or traditional gastronomy courses on their estates"*; eight of them claimed that *"they do not or that they rarely offer the guests to participate in agricultural work and the production of traditional produce nor that they organize workshops connected with craftsmanship of traditional products"*. More than two thirds (seven respondents) said that *"they offer no educational content related to learning about traditional agricultural production and that they do not offer guests the experience of shared meals along family table with storytelling"*, while no respondent stated that *"they offer leasing of garden beds or trees to guests based on the principle "cultivate and process your own" or "pick your own"*. The research dealing with the motives and activities of gastro tourists, such as that by Brune et

al., (2020), authors who studied the preferences of tourists on six agritourism farms in the USA regarding consumer behaviour towards local food, points to the fact that escapist experiences such as self-harvesting, cooking, etc. are emphasized as some of the most memorable parts of staying on agritourism farms, i.e. that they greatly contribute to the overall satisfaction and encourage the desire to return to the destination due to the love of local food. Furthermore, from the work of the authors Testa et. al., (2019) which contains research conducted in Tuscany regarding the motivation and behaviour of tourists according to the motivational scale developed by Kim and Eves (2012), it is evident that tourists assess their motivation to visit agritourism farms through five dimensions: 1) *Cultural Experience* (which inspires them to experience different culture); 2) *Excitement* (which fulfills their needs to practice exciting experiences during their stay); 3) *Interpersonal Relations* (which expresses their desire to meet new people and get away from routine relationships); 4) *Sensory Appeal* (according to local food experience); 5) *Health Concerns* (related to pure local ingredients and food); they also added two additional dimensions to the resulting literature studies, 6) *Tourist's Prestige* (which enriches them intellectually) and 7) *Social and Environmental Sustainability* (which expresses their solidarity with local farmers and gives support to the local community). In terms of motivation to come to agritourism farms in Tuscany the respondents highlighted the dimension of social and environmental sustainability in the first place, followed by health concern, cultural experience and excitement dimension. As Fanelli (2020) further states, the owners of agritourism farms should be storytellers, i.e. key interpreters of their heritage and all attractions related to the tourist experience of both their farm and the destination as a whole. This is especially emphasized when considering that the wholesome gastro-tourist experience, or the "third generation gastro-tourist experiences" (Richards, 2015: 10) as stated by the authors López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Canizares (2012) can very well influence the overall guest satisfaction and, consequently, the choice of destination and, which is very important today – an indirect advertising of the uniqueness of the destination through modern communication channels. Taking Hungary as an example, Csurgó et al., (2019) state that offering local food and beverages alone is not a strong enough factor in the long run to attract new tourists to the destination. When it comes to the respondents from our subject research, it is evident that they emphasize the additional elements of gastronomic experience in the offer of tastings of homemade and traditional products from the area, which was pointed out by seven of respondents as an element of the standard offer they promote, as well as organization of various events, business and family gatherings, pointed out by six of the respondents. The potential and evaluation of additional experiential content related to gastronomic culture and heritage on agritourism farms globally requires additional attention of both scientists and practitioners (Kline et al., 2016), which can be emphasized also on the example of examined area. An overview of all responses of the surveyed owners with the matter mentioned above is given in Table 1 at the end of the article. A similar, not very favorable situation is visible in the results related to cooperation and association of rural family farms into an integrated tourism product in the area that was the subject of the research. The vast majority of the respondents (eight of them) said that "they do not cooperate at all with other stakeholders in the creation and organization of joint gastronomic events", one respondent

**Table 1.** Gastrotouristic experiences on agrotourism farms

Experiences	Grades (number of answers)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Workshops of traditional cuisine	3	6	1		
Food and wine tasting rooms		1	2		7
Working on farm experience	6	2	1	1	
Educational content on traditional agriculture	6	1	1	2	
Traditional crafts workshops	7	1	1		1
Making of pickled vegetables, jams and other traditional products experience	4	1	4	1	
Organizing evants based on agricultural heritage (harvesting, fruit picking, foraging, patron saints days etc.)	5		3	2	
Farm and memorabilia shop		2	3	1	3
"Rent your own fruit tree, vegetable bed,..."	10				
Family table experience with storytelling	4	3	1	2	
Special events organizing (wedings, birthdays, family gathering etc.)	5	1	3	1	
Team building	1	2	5		2

Source: the authors' research

Notice: Respondents had to rate experiences according to their frequency in offer. The range of grades was from 1 to 5, with the following interpretation: *grade 1* – "not offered at all", *grade 2* "rarely offered", *grade 3* – "only for organized and pre-announced groups", *grade 4* – "on guest request" and *grade 5* – "it's a standard offer which is specially promoted"

said that "they very rarely cooperate" while the last one said that they sometimes cooperated with other stakeholders on this issue. Moreover, half of the respondents said that "they do not design joint programs with other owners of rural family farms beyond the standard offer of their farms", and other three stated that they did so very rarely. What the majority of respondents (seven of them) pointed out as the subject of good mutual cooperation is the "mutual purchase of traditional agricultural gastronomic products, wine and other beverages for the purpose of offering on their own farms". An overview of all responses of the surveyed owners with the assessments of mutual cooperation with other rural family farm owners and other stakeholders from the observed area is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Cooperation and networking between agrotourism farms and other stakeholders

Statements	Grades (number of answers)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Joint advertising		8	2		
Sending guests to each other		4	6		
Cooperation on filling capacities in occasion of larger groups of tourists		4	4	2	
Joint design and organizing programs and activities beyond the standard offer of the facility	5	3	1	1	
Buying traditional products from each other			1	2	7
Joint organizing of special events ( gastro festivals, workshops, themed evants...)	8	1	1		

Source: the authors' research

Notice: Respondents had to grade statements according their cooperation with other stakeholders. The range of grades was from 1 to 5, where grades meant: *grade 1* – "we don't have cooperation at all", *grade 2* – "rarely", *grade 3* – "sometimes", *grade 4* – "often" and *grade 5* – "always"

## Conclusion

The area encompassed by Cluster Slavonia is recognized as a tourist region with a special gastronomic experience associated with a rich intangible and tangible heritage due to various promotional activities, primarily by tourist boards (DMO-s) of all levels, from local and regional up to Croatian national tourist board. This is indicated by the presence of gastronomic subjects in almost all means of communication with the tourist market and the commitment, in this case of rural family farm owners, to the preservation and offer of original Slavonian dishes and drinks. Although the experiences of other countries, as well as numerous professional and scientific literature – as emphasized in the theoretical part of this paper – indicate that the classic gastronomic offer of agrotourism farms is not enough for a comprehensive and original tourist experience of modern tourists, the results of the research for the purpose of this article show that there is still a lack of the much-needed "upgrade" of the basic resource with experiential and creative elements. Modern gastro tourists are looking for additional facilities that will enrich their tourist experience. In order for a destination to build a market position as a gastro-tourist destination in the true sense of the word, joint action of all key stakeholders in tourism is needed, which includes additional education of agrotourism owners related to wholesome gastro-touristic products design, association and cooperation within micro clusters at the level of agrotourism farms and other stakeholders such as traditional crafts, local experts of traditional heritage, folklore societies and other associations. The research works by other authors related to the preferences and motives of modern gastrotourists, some of which are emphasized in this paper, comparing them with data obtained through interviews

with owners of agrotourism farms conducted for this paper, can be used as a good basis for additional development activities in order to create original tourist products adapted to modern gastrotourists in the area covered by the Slavonia Cluster. What should undoubtedly be done in the future is to conduct research on targeted segments of the tourism market regarding the motives for visiting agrotourism farms and expectations regarding the original gastro-tourism experiences in the mentioned area. In this future transformation, rural family farms in observed area can and must play the leading role as facilities with a close connection to the original values offered by traditional, small-scale agricultural production, a rich intangible heritage which includes gastronomy and the storytelling related to it, as well as a personalized guest approach. This requires additional efforts in associating and a joint integrated market appearance of primarily agrotourism farms but also other stakeholders at the destination in order to make a wholesome and original gastro-tourism product that will build its identity on gastronomy associated with rich elements of cultural heritage that each of the observed destinations indeed possesses.

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