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Factors influencing tourist motivation to attend gastronomic events in Serbia: an empirical study

Faktori koji utiču na motivaciju turista za posetu gastronomskim događajima u Srbiji: empirijska studija

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Abstract

Gastronomic events enable tourists to gain authentic experiences based on local cuisine, cultural differences, lifestyles, destination creativity, and a unique atmosphere. The growing interest in gastronomic tourism is linked to increasingly saturated tourist demand and the desire for new experiences related to culture, tradition, and gastronomic heritage. The aim of this study is to analyse the motivations of tourists attending gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia and to examine whether statistically significant differences in their attitudes exist with respect to their socio-demographic characteristics. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed electronically, resulting in 160 valid responses. The results showed that tourists are primarily motivated by local food consumption and destination authenticity, while organic food, non-local cuisine, and culinary experts are less important in shaping tourists' motivation to attend gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia. Significant differences were found according to age and frequency of visits. The study also discusses theoretical and practical implications for future research.
Keywords**:** *gastronomy, gastronomic events, attitudes, motivation, Republic of Serbia*

Sažetak

Gastronomski događaji omogućavaju turistima da steknu autentična iskustva zasnovana na lokalnoj kuhinji, kulturnim razlikama, načinu života i kreativnosti destinacije, kao i jedinstvenoj atmosferi. Rastuće interesovanje za gastronomski turizam povezano je sa zasićenom turističkom potražnjom i željom za novim iskustvima vezanim za kulturu, tradiciju i gastronomsko nasleđe. Cilj ove studije je analiza motivacije turista, koji posećuju gastronomske događaje u Republici Srbiji kao i da se ispita postojanje statistički značajnih razlika u njihovim stavovima u zavisnosti od socio-demografskih karakteristika. Za prikupljanje podataka korišćen je strukturirani upitnik, koji je distribuiran elektronskim putem i uz pomoć kog je prikupljeno 160 validnih odgovora. Rezultati studije su pokazali da su turisti uglavnom motivisani konzumiranjem lokalne hrane i autentičnošću destinacije, dok su organska hrana, nelokalna kuhinja i kulinarski stručnjaci manje važni u formiranju motivacije za posetu gastronomskim događajima u Republici Srbiji. Značajne razlike su pronađene u zavisnosti od starosti i učestalosti poseta. Studija takođe razmatra teorijske i praktične implikacije u kontekstu budućih istraživanja.
Ključne reči*: gastronomija, gastronomski događaji, stavovi, motivacija, Republika Srbija*

1. Introduction

In recent times, travel has increasingly been initiated by tourists' desire to try local dishes prepared based on local ingredients that are characteristic for a particular destination (Sormaz et al., 2016; UNWTO, 2017). This type of travel enables tourists to enjoy new experiences created not only through food consumption, but also establishing contacts with the local community, learning, observing and acquiring new knowledge about ways of food preparation, and raising awareness about the necessity of nurturing the gastronomic tradition of a

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destination. Gastronomy as a multidisciplinary field, that is focused on the art of preparing, consuming and presenting food, and tourism are very complementary due to the existence of a wide range of ways of connecting them and creating new content, intended to attract many tourists and provide them with new and unique experiences. Therefore, the gastronomy of a certain destination is very often the main motivator for undertaking tourist trips (González Santa Cruz et al., 2019; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021; Vukolić et al., 2024). As such, it has a significant impact on the development of destination's tourist offer and successful competitive positioning on the tourist market (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020; Basle, 2023). In addition to consuming food, gastronomic travel also includes other activities such as visits to local farms and food producers, food festivals, participation in the food preparation process, etc. (UNWTO, 2019). One way of presenting local cuisine is through gastronomic events, which are open-air events that, in addition to the presentation, consumption and sale of food, include festive, entertaining and recreational activities for tourists and other types of visitors (Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Long, 2024). In addition to being part of the tourist offer, which can differentiate destinations from each other and enable them achieving competitive advantage in the tourist market, gastronomic events contribute towards nurturing the tangible and intangible heritage of a destination. Beyond the preparation, sale and consumption of food, gastronomic events also provide an opportunity to showcase other features of a destination, including local customs, music, traditional values and handicrafts. A significant advantage of gastronomic events is the possibility of organizing them throughout the entire year, which also ensures the influx of tourists to the destination. Gastronomic events as part of gastronomic tourism have significant potential for development due to the growing number of tourists who travel to different destinations with the aim of enjoying a gastronomic experience (Richards, 2021; Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024) and in various forms of organizing the events themselves, such as food festivals, fairs, etc. (Yalin, 2021).

Events where food is consumed are very often organized in unconventional spaces or in open spaces with many participants, e.g. producers and exhibitors of food and other specialties, where in addition to economic effects, social interaction is achieved between visitors and people who present local cuisine. In this way, in addition to the authenticity of the gastronomic experience for tourists, a sense of importance and pride is developed for members of the local community. The primary difference between gastronomic and other types of events is that they are not under the direct control of the tourism industry (Sundqvist, 2023) due to being very often organized by various associations and local communities. In this way, local communities present local crafts not only in terms of promoting and selling gastronomic products but also displaying cultural creativity. In addition to tourists, gastronomic events provide the opportunity for local residents to establish social contacts with visitors, due to which this type of event can be interpreted in the context of gathering people in a certain space for the purpose of socializing, having fun, enjoying new flavours, etc. (Kesgin et al., 2022).

The gastronomic heritage of Serbia represents a significant potential for the development of various forms of activities for tourists throughout the country, with the possibility of profiling individual regions as gastronomic tourism destinations. Many gastronomic events are held in Serbia annually, and the main reason for this is the authenticity of different regions within Serbia, contributing to the creation of a unique offer and gastronomic experience for tourists (Zrnić et al., 2021; Boro & Dixit, 2025). In addition to quality food, the gastronomic offer of Serbia also combines local hospitality, a quality atmosphere in catering establishments, diverse and authentic drinks (wine, brandy, etc.), a specific way of preparing food using traditional means such as a grill or kettle (Zrnić et al., 2023). More than 70 gastronomic events are held annually in Serbia (Kilibarda et al., 2018), with the number being much higher due to their occasional organization in various destinations during the main tourist season (Tourist Organization of Serbia, n.d.-a; Tourist Organization of Serbia, n.d.-b; Zrnić et al., 2021). However, gastronomic events held in Serbia differ from each other in terms of continuity of their organization, duration, attendance, and the impact they have on the destination´s image. Gastronomic events that have been held for decades and that have an international character can certainly be distinguished (e.g., the Leskovac Barbecue Festival; the Zlatibor Prosciutto Festival, etc.) compared to street food festivals that are held during the weekend or during the time when a large number of tourists is present in the destination with the aim of presenting and selling local products to them. Travel motivation represents a complex and multi-layered concept, especially when observed in the context of the different types of tourism events in which tourists choose to participate. The purpose of this study is to determine the motives of tourists for visiting gastronomic events in Serbia. The aim of this study is to determine the profile of tourists who attend gastronomic events and to analyse the influence of their socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics on their motivation to visit gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

In the modern development of tourism, food is a very important driver of tourist travel (Kim et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020). The purpose of consuming food during travel goes far beyond just satisfying basic needs; it is about experiencing new tastes and specialties authentic to a particular destination (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2020). The gastronomic experience, which arises from consuming authentic food in a particular place, is directly linked to the economic development of a destination. Tourists who leave a destination satisfied with the gastronomic offer may wish to revisit or recommend it to other people (Stone et al., 2018). Additionally, tourists also tend to buy food as a souvenir from their travels, wanting to experience the same flavours after returning home. Food can be a motivator for tourist travel

in several ways: physical motivation to assess the quality of food; opportunities to learn about local culture and traditions; building social interactions and establishing social relationships; and creating a certain prestige because tourists consume food in the same way as residents of the destination, as well as food that their close relatives do not have the opportunity to try (Fields, 2002). Given the multidimensional nature of gastronomy in the context of creating a desire for tourist travel, food travel motivation is one of a very common research topics in studies that highlight the importance of local food and drink for creating new forms of tourism, primarily in the context of gastronomic and wine tourism (Kim & Eves, 2012; Su et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023). Food travel motivation encompasses specific contexts and reasons for consuming local food while traveling (Zhou et al., 2025). Given the potential for local food to be included in various ways into the destination's tourism offer, research on food travel motivation has gained wider scope in recent years through the study of motivation for consuming local food (Testa et al., 2019; Gurbaskan, 2019; Moroșan et al., 2025; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021; González Santa Cruz et al., 2019), visiting markets (Castillo-Canalejo et al., 2020; Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2020), visiting gastronomic events (Chang, 2011), and revisiting gastronomic destinations (Chang et al. 2018; Thio et al., 2024). Food-motivated travel has a multidimensional character due to the more complex way in which food is viewed and its impact on building long-term loyalty towards gastronomic tourism destinations.

Food and food-related activities in tourism have been recognized as a special form of tourism – gastronomic tourism – in which the primary driver of travel is the desire to experience specific and authentic culinary experiences (Kim et al., 2010). In addition to the necessity of understanding the reasons for undertaking food-motivated travel, an important aspect of the analysis is the systematization of the motives for such travel. Su et al. (2020) attempted to analyse food travel motivation from the perspective of push-pull motivation theory to identify the key reasons for gastronomic travel among so-called foodie tourists. The authors determined that when it comes to food-motivated travel, the main push factors are primarily its taste, socialization, and cultural experiences. They further elaborate that the taste of food is the most important intrinsic travel motive for food-motivated tourists, and that cultural experiences and socialization imply the possibility for tourists to acquire new knowledge and build friendly relationships with new people by consuming local food. In this way, food becomes a means of establishing deep relationships between the culture of tourist and the culture of the local community to create a touristic and gastronomic experience. Highlighting the underrepresentation of studies on the influence of food on travel motivation and destination choice, Kim and Eves (2012) developed a scale to measure motivation for consuming local food at a destination. This scale included five key dimensions of motivation for consuming local food: cultural experience, interpersonal connection, excitement, sensory appeal, and health concerns. Levitt et al. (2019) analysed attitudes, intentions, and behaviour when planning a trip, three segments of tourists were identified based on the degree of involvement of food in motivation. Their findings showed that the largest proportion of tourists were moderately motivated by food. On the other hand, tourists who were significantly motivated by gastronomic offerings chose their holiday destination based on available food-related activities. The study of Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) focused on the relationships between motivation, experience, satisfaction and loyalty of culinary tourists participating in cooking classes. They demonstrated that an intensive and high-quality experience during cooking classes contributes to a higher level of satisfaction and greater loyalty to the destination. In addition, this study found a positive relationship between the motivation of culinary tourists and their satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. Other studies have also confirmed that the key travel motives for tourists who want to consume local gastronomic offerings are: authenticity of food preparation methods (Kim et al., 2019; Chen & Huang, 2019; Lunić et al., 2024), cultural experiences (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018; Zulkefli et al., 2024), sensory appeal and taste (Smith et al., 2010), and social contacts (Park et al., 2008; Goolaup et al., 2025). Motives for visiting gastronomic events are very diverse, however tourists are focused primarily on tasting locally prepared food (Kim et al., 2010). Krajíčková and Šauer (2018) conducted similar research on the example of a food festival in the Czech Republic, determining that the primary motives for such trips are experience and family, or the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends. In this sense, visitors to gastronomic events are motivated by the desire to build social relationships in a specific setting and with an accompanying program. On the other hand, one of the main motivations for visiting gastronomic events is the taste of food and drink and the enjoyment of it (Park et al., 2008; Hattingh & Swart, 2016; Van Zyl et al., 2023). The taste of food is an essential reason for visiting a particular event, but also the entire concept of the event is based on food, namely its preparation, consumption, promotion and sale. Motives for visiting gastronomic events can be classified as *physiological* (food consumption, recreation, entertainment, etc.), *social* (interaction with other people, strengthening community spirit, charitable activities, etc.), *personal* (new experiences, acquiring new knowledge, research, etc.) and *organizational needs* (food sales, support for the local community, recognition status, etc.) (Hattingh & Swart, 2016). When analysing the impact of the quality of certain attributes of a slow food festival on visitor satisfaction and future visits, Jung et al. (2015) pointed out that factors such as food, event program and entertainment content affect visitor satisfaction, while food quality affects the desire to return to the event. When applying push-pull motivational theory to analyse motivation for participation in gastronomic events, Smith et al. (2010) found that the event itself, its innovation and the possibility of socialization represent the main push motivational factors, while the quality of the food, accompanying and basic services are the most important pull motives. While the opportunity to consume food authentic to a specific geographical region is often the main motivation for attending gastronomic events, complementary attractions such as entertainment and

music programs, local handicrafts, and local hospitality can enhance visitors' interest and encourage repeated visits to food and beverage festivals across various destinations.

People of different socio-demographic characteristics may have diverse reasons for visiting gastronomic events (Rezaei et al., 2018; Kılıçhan & Köşker, 2020; Carvache-Franco et al., 2025). When it comes to the gender of tourists/visitors, Sengel et al. (2015) determined that men are more motivated in relation to women to revisit a certain destination to consume authentic food, while women are more willing to try unfamiliar foods when compared to men. According to Alshammari et al. (2019), men and women visit gastronomic events for the fun and atmosphere of the event, although men are more likely to visit to escape from everyday obligations, while women are more interested in making new friends and spending quality time with loved ones. Analysing the motivations of visitors to the international food festival in Çanakkale (Turkey), Duran and Hamarat (2014) concluded that women attend food festivals to spend time with family and learn about new cultures through food, while men, as in the previous study, attend them to escape from everyday life. Given the above, the authors set the following hypothesis:
H1 Gender has a statistically significant effect on the motivational factors influencing tourists' visits to gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia.

According to a study on wine festival motivation of young people in the USA, Dodd et al. (2006) emphasized that the younger population pays more attention to fun, excitement and socializing with friends as motives, but they also attach greater importance to the taste of wine compared to older event visitors. As Rezaei et al. (2018) pointed out by analysing the influence of demographic characteristics on the motivation to visit traditional festivals, the older population over 45 years of age visits food festivals for socialization and support for the local community and tradition compared to people younger than 45 years of age. The younger population up to 25 years of age most often visits gastronomic events for fun, i.e., for pleasure, while people up to 50 years of age visit for so-called enlightenment (Kılıçhan & Köşker, 2020). Significant differences in the motivation of visitors to gastronomic events, who are of different age, were determined on the example of a festival held in Turkey (Bilecik). The research results showed that people over 30 years of age visit traditional events for new experiences more often than people over 50 years of age (Okuyucu & Kılıç, 2019). Therefore, the authors formed the following hypothesis:
H2 Age has a statistically significant effect on the motivational factors influencing tourists' visits to gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia

Krajíčková & Šauer (2018) determined in their study that education has an influence on the factors that create the desire to visit food and beverage festivals, emphasizing that the differences in the motivation of visitors with different education levels relate primarily to the inspirational segment of the event, i.e., meeting culinary experts, acquiring knowledge, collecting ideas, etc. People with a higher level of education (college and more) visit traditional festivals more often due to escapism and to gain knowledge, i.e., achievements, when compared to people with primary education (Okuyucu & Kılıç, 2019). People with a higher level of education tend to have an established habit of expanding their knowledge and progressing in various fields, which is why they are also expected to seek opportunities to fulfil their educational needs through gastronomic events. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formed:
H3 Educational level has a statistically significant effect on the motivational factors influencing tourists' visits to gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia

Previous experience, which is formed based on the frequency of attending gastronomic events, can influence future motivation and the way of spending time during the event. People who visit food festivals for the first time tend to spend significant amounts of money, while those who have already attended a particular festival become loyal to the event through longer visits and higher consumption (Shani et al., 2009; Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014). Examining the motivation of visitors to a wine and food festival in Miami Beach, Park et al. (2008) found that visitors who came for the first time were motivated, among other things, by new tastes, enjoying the atmosphere, meeting new people and food and wine experts. The results of this study indicated that repeat visitors were more motivated than those who visited the event for the first time in the case of all analysed motives (food knowledge, wine knowledge, meeting gastronomic and wine experts, atmosphere and spending time with close people). People who have visited gastronomic events multiple times have a much richer gastronomic experience than those who are attending a particular event for the first time. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formed:
H4: The frequency of attendance at gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia significantly influences the importance that tourists assign to the factors motivating them to visit gastronomic events.

3. Research methodology

In this study, the authors examine tourists' attitudes about the factors that motivate them to visit gastronomic events in Serbia. The authors adapted the survey questionnaire based on the research studies of Tsiara (2014), Stojanović et al. (2020) and Çekiç (2023). The survey questionnaire consisted of two sets of questions. In the first part, respondents rated the importance of the offered motives (10 motives) when deciding whether to visit gastronomic events using a five-point Likert scale (1-completely unimportant to 5-completely important). The questionnaire also included a question asking the respondents how many times they had visited gastronomic events to find out whether they had any experience with this type of event. The second group contained questions focused on determining sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. Convenience sampling was used considering that the survey questionnaire was distributed electronically through e-mail and social networks. A total of 160 valid responses were collected. The data obtained

on tourists' motives, how many times they had previously visited gastronomic events, and sociodemographic characteristics were analysed using descriptive statistical methods (arithmetic mean and standard deviation). To test the hypotheses, the following statistical tests were used: independent samples t-test to analyse statistically significant differences in the attitudes of respondents of different gender. and Kruskal-Wallis test to analyse and determine statistically significant differences in the attitudes of respondents in terms of age, education and number of visits to gastronomic events. The independent variables are gender, age, education and number of visits, while the dependent variables are statements about the motives that influence visits to gastronomic events. The reliability of the measurement scale and the consistency between the variables were tested by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

4. Research results

In this chapter, the authors will present the results of the empirical research.

Table 1. Demographic structure of respondents

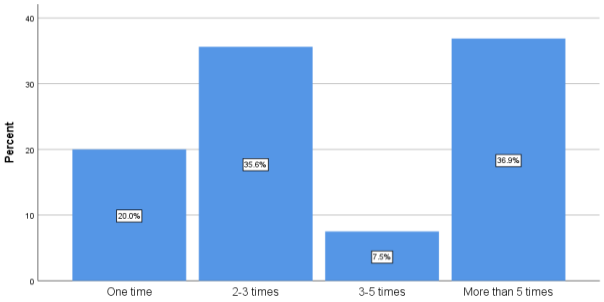
Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	81	50.6
Female	79	49.4
Age		
18-29	98	61.3
30-39	33	20.6
40-49	20	12.5
50-59	9	5.6
Level of education		
High School	31	19.4
Faculty	74	46.3
Master	45	28.1
PhD	10	6.3
Total	160	100.0

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

As shown from Table 1, most of the respondents were male (50.6%), while 49.4% were female, belonging to the age group 18–29 (61.3%). According to the level of education, 46.3% of respondents have completed university studies, followed by the respondents who had completed master's studies (28.1%).

When asked how many times they visited gastronomic events in Serbia (Figure 1), the largest number of respondents (36.9%) visited gastronomic events more than 5 times, followed by the respondents who visited them 2–3 times (35.6%), once (20%), while 7.5% of respondents visited them three to five times. The following section presents the results concerning tourists' motives for visiting gastronomic events.

Figure 1. Number of visits to gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia



Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

The reliability of the measurement scale was checked by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, whose value in this case is α=.727. According to Pallant (2009), if the value of α is greater than 0.7, it can be concluded that the internal consistency of the variables is very good, as well as the appropriate reliability of the measurement scale for the analysed sample. Given that the respondents assessed the influence of certain factors on their motivation to visit gastronomic events, average values were calculated for 10 statements.

Table 2. Reliability and descriptive statistics of the study constructs

Variables (α=.727)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organic food is available at gastronomic events.	2.78	1.252
Local gastronomic offerings are presented and consumed at gastronomic events.	4.50	.925
Visitors can taste specialties from different cuisines at gastronomic events.	4.20	1.057
Products with protected geographical origin are available at gastronomic events.	3.93	1.231
Gastronomic events are held at authentic and appropriate locations.	4.27	.911
Non-traditional food is also offered at gastronomic events.	3.01	1.168
Gastronomic events present cultural values of different regions.	4.13	.810
The presence of renowned culinary experts may influence attendance at gastronomic events.	3.01	1.405
Gastronomic events have a pleasant atmosphere.	4.17	.749
Gastronomic events enable socializing with friends.	4.05	.950

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

The results show that visitors to gastronomic events in Serbia are mainly motivated by local gastronomy and authenticity. The highest-rated factor is the local food offerings (M = 4.50), followed by the authenticity of the location (M = 4.27) and tasting different cuisines (M = 4.20). Presentation of cultural values (M = 4.13) and socializing opportunities (M = 4.05) are also highly valued. In contrast, organic food (M= 2.78), non-traditional food, and the presence of renowned culinary experts (both M = 3.01) are less important. Overall, the findings indicate that traditional and authentic elements are the main drivers of attendance, while innovative and expert-related factors play a secondary role.

Table 3. Results of t-test by gender

Motivational factors for visiting gastronomic events	Gender			
	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	t-value	p
Local gastronomic offerings are presented and consumed at gastronomic events.	4.81	4.18	4.632	.001
Visitors can taste specialties from different cuisines at gastronomic events.	4.43	3.96	2.876	.005

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

In order to examine the presence of statistically significant differences in the attitudes of respondents regarding the factors that motivate them to visit gastronomic events in Serbia according to gender, an independent samples t-test was conducted. This test is used when comparing the mean values of a certain characteristic (factors that influence the decision to visit gastronomic events) for two groups of subjects (men/women) (Pallant, 2009). The results indicate statistically significant gender differences for both motivational factors. Male respondents reported significantly higher ratings than female respondents regarding the presentation and consumption of local gastronomic offerings at gastronomic events (M = 4.81 vs. 4.18; t = 4.632; p=.001) and the opportunity to taste specialties from different cuisines (M = 4.43 vs. 3.96; t = 2.876; p = .005). Given that differences in the attitudes of men were identified only in the case of 2 out of 10 factors that motivate them to visit gastronomic events in Serbia (Table 3). Accordingly, hypothesis H1 was not confirmed.

Table 4. Results of Kruskal-Wallis test by age

Motivational factors for visiting gastronomic events	Mean Rank				
	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	p-value
Organic food is available at gastronomic events.	85.99	85.53	58.08	52.06	.015
Gastronomic events are held at authentic and appropriate locations.	74.53	80.55	111.93	75.50	.004
Non-traditional food is also offered at gastronomic events.	76.79	98.26	62.60	95.56	.017
Gastronomic events present cultural values of different regions.	84.28	72.17	91.28	46.00	.030
The presence of renowned culinary experts may influence attendance at gastronomic events.	87.39	75.55	56.20	77.67	.033
Gastronomic events have a pleasant atmosphere.	79.08	99.64	43.15	108.83	.001

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

When analysing the differences in the motivation of respondents belonging to different age groups and for visiting gastronomic events, the Kruskal Wallis test was applied, allowing the examination of the differences between two or more groups of variables. Differences were determined in a large number of factors that motivate respondents to visit gastronomic events (Table 4). This was concluded because the significance level for 6 out of 10 analysed factors is less than the value 0.05. The hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed. To identify key age groups whose motivation differs, it is necessary to analyse the mean values of the rank or Mean Rank (Pallant, 2009). Statistically significant differences in motivation for visiting gastronomic events in Serbia are present in almost all age groups, with the largest differences being between the motivation of the younger population (18-29; 30-39 years) and the motivation of respondents aged 50-59. The Kruskal–Wallis test identified statistically significant differences among age groups for all six motivational factors examined. These included the availability of organic food (p=.015), the authenticity and suitability of event locations (p=.004), the availability of non-traditional food (p=.017), the presentation of cultural values from different regions (p=.030), the potential influence of renowned culinary experts (p=.033), and the pleasant atmosphere of gastronomic events (p=.001) Table 4). The mean rank results further demonstrate that respondents' ratings varied across age groups, with the age group showing the highest mean rank differing depending on the specific motivational factor. The theoretical part of the paper explains that the differences in motivation of different age groups are primarily a consequence of the younger population's desire to have fun, while in the older population, motivation is related to culture, socialization, etc.

Table 5. Results of Kruskal Wallis test by education

Motivational factors for visiting gastronomic events	Mean Rank				
	High-School	Faculty	Master	Ph.D.	p-value
Local gastronomic offerings are presented and consumed at gastronomic events	94.98	70.13	89.97	69.75	.004
Products with protected geographical origin are available at gastronomic events.	92.35	65.62	94.47	91.00	.001
Gastronomic events are held at authentic and appropriate locations	81.39	66.32	97.00	108.40	.001
The presence of renowned culinary experts may influence attendance at gastronomic events.	96.53	89.47	62.62	44.90	.001

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

Differences in the attitudes of respondents depending on the level of education were also examined using the Kruskal Wallis test. In the findings no significant differences in attitudes were determined regarding the major factor that motivates them to visit gastronomic events in Serbia (Table 5). Differences in the attitudes of respondents were determined in the case of local food offerings (p=.004), consumption of food with protected geographical origin (p=.001); authenticity of the location where the event is held (p=.001) and the presence of renowned culinary experts (p=.001). Although the statistical significance values are less than 0.05, it cannot be concluded that the attitudes of people with different levels of education differ when it comes to factors that influence the desire to visit gastronomic events. Although statistically significant differences were identified for four out of the ten analysed statements, differences were not observed for the majority of the examined motivational factors. Therefore, the results do not provide sufficient evidence to confirm H3 as a whole, and the hypothesis was rejected. Accordingly, it was concluded that the motivational factors are generally similar among respondents with different levels of education, despite the significant differences identified for four individual factors.

Table 6. Results of Kruskal Wallis test by number of visits

Motivational factors for visiting gastronomic events	Mean Rank				p-value
	One time	2-3 time	3-5 time	More than 5 times	
Local gastronomic offerings are presented and consumed at gastronomic events.	56.66	93.93	49.13	86.84	.001
Visitors can taste specialties from different cuisines at gastronomic events.	61.06	97.52	49.42	80.92	.001
Products with protected geographical origin are available at gastronomic events.	65.27	94.77	80.33	75.01	.012
Gastronomic events are held at authentic and appropriate locations.	54.97	86.15	89.38	87.08	.002
Non-traditional food is also offered at gastronomic events.	100.33	76.67	97.63	69.97	.008
Gastronomic events present cultural values of different regions.	56.42	86.35	71.38	89.76	.003
Gastronomic events have a pleasant atmosphere	75.08	78.36	51.17	91.47	.018
Gastronomic events enable socializing with friends.	64.11	82.31	65.21	90.75	.025

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 25.0

Using the Kruskal Wallis test, the authors examined the existence of differences in the attitudes of respondents about the motives for visiting gastronomic events depending on the number of visits to this type of event. Given that differences are present in a larger number of factors, i.e., eight out of ten analysed, it was concluded that the attitudes of respondents differ depending on the number of visits to gastronomic events, so that hypothesis H4 was confirmed. The Kruskal–Wallis analysis showed that respondents' frequency of attending gastronomic events was significantly associated with differences in ratings across all eight motivational factors. Significant variations were identified for local gastronomic offerings (p=.001), the opportunity to taste specialties from different cuisines (p=.001), products with protected geographical origin (p= .012), the authenticity and suitability of event locations (p =.002), the availability of non-traditional food (p=.008), the presentation of cultural values from different regions (p=.003), the pleasant atmosphere of gastronomic events (p=.018), and opportunities to socialise with friends (p=.025). The mean ranks indicate variations in responses across visit-frequency groups, although the specific pattern differs depending on the motivational factor. The highest mean rank value is present in the case of respondents who visited gastronomic events 2-3 times and more than 5 times, which would mean that their attitudes differ compared to respondents with a smaller number of visits. According to the results obtained, it can be assumed that the differences in motivation are the result of experience, which was formed due to frequent visits to gastronomic events.

5. Discussion

A significant number of studies have indicated the growing interest of tourists in learning about and consuming local dishes while traveling (Zrnić, 2016; Williams et al., 2019; Ullah et al., 2022), as well as in visiting gastronomic events in the form of festivals, fairs, food sales exhibitions, etc. (Čavić & Mandarić, 2021; Çekiç, 2023; Darvishmotevali et al., 2023). This study analyses the motivation of tourists to visit gastronomic events in Serbia with a special emphasis on examining the influence of sociodemographic characteristics on differences in visitors' motivation to visit such events. Research studies highlight the significant influence of basic characteristics such as gender, age, education, marital status, etc. on shaping the motivation for visiting gastronomic events and interest in the gastronomy of a particular destination (Vuksanović et al., 2017; Krajíčková & Šauer, 2018; Carvache-Franco et al., 2023). Research results presented in this study indicate tourists having different motives for visiting gastronomic events in Serbia. It has been determined that tourists who visit gastronomic events in Serbia are motivated by the presentation and consumption of local gastronomic offerings, the location of the event and its authenticity, as well as the diversity of gastronomic specialties and the atmosphere at the event. When compared to the results of previously published studies, it could be stated that the

strongest motivation for visiting gastronomic events is related to the taste of food i.e., the opportunity to consume a variety of local food at events, as well as the atmosphere that prevails during the food and drink events (Wan & Chan, 2013; Su et al., 2020). Topole et al. (2021) found that the most important motives for visiting are precisely the consumption of local food, which is in accordance with the results of this study. These motives for visiting gastronomic events were also identified in the study by Çekiç (2023) in the case of the GastroAntep food festival in Turkey. Our study did not identify any significant differences in the attitudes of men and women regarding motives to visit gastronomic events in Serbia, which is in accordance with the findings presented study of Fountain and Ryan (2016) who explored motives of visitors to wine and food festivals in New Zealand. The study of Kwiatkowski et al. (2021), on the other hand, determined differences in the attitudes of visitors of different genders. They determined that women tend to visit gastronomic events more often to escape from everyday obligations in relation to men. In terms of age, presence of differences in motives of tourists who visited gastronomic events in Serbia was determined in our study. These results are in accordance with the results of study of Chanda et al. (2020), in which authors analysed the impact of experience, satisfaction and demographics of visitors to a food festival in India. Differences were observed between visitors under the age of 30 and those over the age of 36.

The findings of the present study indicate that educational level does not have a statistically significant effect on the motivational factors influencing tourists' visits to gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia. Similarities with the presented research results were also determined in the study of Kılıçhan and Köşker (2020), who proved that education does not have a significant influence on the motivation of visitors to gastronomic events, or that it is present in the case of a smaller number of visit motives. On the other hand, in a study on demand segmentation and motivation of visitors to a food festival in Bahrain, Carvache-Franco et al. (2023) proved a significant influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the motivation of visitors to this event. Among other things, the authors found that people with a high school diploma and a higher level of education visit food festivals for several different motives, stay longer and spend more money. The present study confirmed that the frequency of attendance at gastronomic events in the Republic of Serbia significantly influences the importance that tourists assign to the factors motivating them to visit these events. The differences in the motives of visitors who come to a gastronomic event for the first time and those who have already attended it can be significantly different. As a result, for the first-time visitors the basic motive will certainly be more important, i.e., the taste of food and drinks, while repeat visitors will be motivated more with gaining new knowledge, getting to know new cultures, etc. (Park et al., 2008). Analysis of socio-demographic characteristics of visitors to gastronomic events and motivations can contribute to a more successful adaptation of the concept of the event to the needs of different categories of visitors (men/women; less or more educated people; older and younger population, etc.), which can increase the attendance and popularity of the event, as well as improve the image of the destination on the market and the economic benefits of organizing the event for the wider local community.

6. Conclusion

Gastronomic events represent an important part of the cultural heritage of a particular place and a way to provide visitors with an authentic gastronomic experience. Serbia has a long tradition of developing gastronomic tourism, primarily through the organization of food and beverage festivals in tourist destinations with specific gastronomic heritage. Organization of these events enables successful promotion of gastronomic heritage, as well as placing local food on the tourist market. Previous studies focus primarily on the analysis of overall satisfaction, perceived image of destinations, and gastronomic experience, while studies that analyse the motives of attending gastronomic events are relatively scarce. This was one of the reasons for focusing our study on examining the motives of tourists who visit gastronomic events on the example of Serbia as a tourist destination. Our findings represent a contribution both to the theory and practice.

The theoretical contribution of the study lies in enhancing the understanding of visitor motivation at gastronomic events, as well as in the analysis of existing literature on the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on motivation to attend such events.

The practical contribution of this research is that its findings can serve destination management and event organizers as a starting point for redefining the current concept of organizing gastronomic events. Its improvement will certainly contribute to enhancing the satisfaction of tourists as visitors to gastronomic events.

Key limitations in this research relate to the lack of narrowly defined criteria when selecting the research location and sample, so that future research should examine the motivation of visitors to a specific gastronomic event. Also, the research was conducted without a time limit for holding a specific gastronomic event. In addition to gastronomic events, which have a long and established tradition of organization, the role and importance of street food and drink festivals in forming a gastronomic experience should also be examined. Such research would provide insight into the motivation and gastronomic experience of not only tourists but also local residents.

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Declaration of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not use generative AI or AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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