

**Ernes Oliva, B. Sc.**

University of Juraj Dobrila, Pula

**Marko Paliaga, Ph. D.**

Assistant professor

University of Juraj Dobrila, Pula

E-mail: marko.paliaga@rovinj.hr

## **RESEARCH OF INFLUENCE OF AUTOCHTHONOUS REGIONAL PRODUCTS ON REGIONAL BRAND- EXAMPLE OF THE ISTRIAN REGION**

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### ***Abstract***

*Development of regional brands has become increasingly important over the last years. The main distinctive elements of regional marketing are its autochthonous products. They enable regional differentiation and create premises for the development of regional brands of autochthonous products. Development of regional brands of autochthonous products makes it possible for the region to preserve its identity, at the same time generating a positive image of the region and creating a positive customers' perception of the region. Autochthonous products guarantee quality for customers and marketing promotion for the region. For this reason, we can say that development of regional brands of autochthonous products may create a positive image of the region used as a basis for establishing a regional brand. Preliminary research has been carried out for the needs of the present paper. It indicates particular autochthonous products that are specific for Istria and that make it recognisable, in addition to their significance for the image and identity of the region. Research sample included 181 respondents, through a standardised questionnaire distributed through Facebook and a specialised database created especially for these purposes.*

***Keywords: branding, regional branding, autochthonous products, agricultural products***

## **1. AUTOCHTHONOUS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN REGIONAL BRANDING**

Branding and marketing have always tended to differentiate. Therefore, building regional brands based on local and unique autochthonous products will be one of the possible future ways of regional branding. In today's global world, customers are looking for a unique brand which would offer more than its competitors, a brand that is clearly different and that cannot be bought just anywhere, in any country or city. Times when all customers wanted Coca-Cola and McDonald's are behind us. Over the last period, people who travel around the world keep running into brands-products they can buy at home. Considering the fact that branding and marketing always aim at being different from competitors and substitutes, it is crucial to build brands based on what is local, unique and recognisable. Quality product brands are always on the mind of potential customers and a part of their quality system.

By all means, before launching the process of branding a product or service, it is necessary to decide how innovative and unique the product or service actually is and how much it differs from other similar or same products or services. The same has to be done with the region and its regional identity.

The European Union countries and some other countries worldwide currently feel intense globalisation pressure. This means that, among other things, agricultural products lose their distinctive features and they are taken over by powerful global brands. Consequently, if agriculture of various countries is to resist these trends and the fierce competition of agricultural products in fast-moving consumer goods markets, it has to develop its own regional-autochthonous agricultural products whose quality can be competitive. Today's consumers increasingly require high-quality agricultural products with a clear geographical origin. Geographical indication and association to a particular location are at the heart of the need to merge the process of development of autochthonous products with branding a particular region. If these two separate processes are combined, it is actually possible to preserve a part of quality autochthonous agricultural production on one side, and, on the other side, it is possible to associate the image of a particular region and its recognisability to its own products as the basis of its branding.

Protection is the backbone of the above merging. Among other things, products are protected because of possible achievement of higher price category, creation of identity and recognisability. Also, a direct connection between a product and a particular geographical area endows it with extra value and recognisability and contributes to the rural development and establishment of interest associations, if they still do not exist, for purposes of joint market presence and joint promotion of foodstuffs.

There are two pillars of EU policies dealing with protection of products. One concerns organic products known under the abbreviation GI that denotes geographical indication, and the other pillar is designation of origin of rural products. Therefore, there is a distinction between geographical indications, registered designation of origin and traditional terms. With its particular geography, nature and climate, rich culture and tradition, the Republic of Croatia has a large number of autochthonous foodstuffs whose technological, nutritional and organoleptic characteristics, in addition to their quality and distinctiveness, make them successful competitors both in the Croatian and international market. Many of these products have become recognisable as geographic areas where they are produced.

Within the process of the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union, in the part referring to compliance of laws in the area of agriculture, more precisely, quality policy, Croatia has passed the Act on Geographical Indications, Designations of Origin and Traditional Terms for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs (the official gazette of the Republic of Croatia Narodne novine no. 84/08). The Act enables Croatian agricultural producers of autochthonous agricultural products to have the same protection enjoyed by their competitors from countries of the European Union. It officially opened the path towards registration of Croatian brands at the level of the European Union, which increases recognisability of products and the region where they are produced and whose name they bear, and finally, the recognisability of Croatia as such. This also increases their competitiveness in the market, which is one of the most important objectives of Croatian agricultural policy.

There are 15 manufacturers of autochthonous products and 16 associations (manufacturers) producing raw materials for autochthonous products currently registered in Croatia. So far, protection of geographic indications has been carried out by the State Institute of Intellectual Property. In conformity with its regulations, a total of 9 foodstuffs has been protected, namely Istrian prosciutto, olive oil Torkul, the Cetina cheese, the Pag cheese, Slavonian homemade kulen/kulin, aromatised crisp bread Paški baškotin, prosciutto from Driš, the Dingač wine and the Slavonian plum brandy "Slavonka". A diversity of landscape, climate and historic influences has produced a great number of similar characteristic products, both food and other products. At the moment, a relatively small number of Croatian products succeeded in overcoming local sentiments and the significance of local souvenirs and becoming economically interesting products.

We must not forget the fact that important economic effects may be achieved primarily through connecting the process of protection and production of autochthonous agricultural products on one side, and branding on the other side. A recognisable region - a branded region - will achieve significant economic progress through its image and perceived identity, particularly in terms of agriculture and catering and tourism industry.

Recognisable foodstuffs and other autochthonous traditional and local products may carry the message about regional and national identity. Among other things, they are not only economic, but also a significant tourist attraction of a particular tourist destination, and an important part of its tourist product. Autochthonous agricultural products should be an integral part of offer in restaurants, hotels, other high category catering facilities, specialised catering facilities and in rural tourism, especially at tourist rural households.

According to Denis Ivošević, the President of the Tourist Board of the Istrian Region, intense promotion and creation of Istria as a gastronomic brand contributed to making Istria increasingly more recognisable, whereas autochthonous Istrian products are the main reason for visits to central Istria in the post-season. In fact, wine cellars in Istria are annually visited by approximately 140.000 persons, olive itineraries have attracted 40.000 visitors, which makes a positive statement about the importance of development of autochthonous products and their role in regional branding. Another important segment in creating the Istrian brand and promoting autochthonous products is a tradition dating back to 1995 when Istria is annually visited by approximately 150 journalists covering tourism, in addition to gourmet journalists, opinion makers, opinion leaders, and experts in enogastronomy. They help Istria tell its story, point out its advantages, emphasise its autochthonous products, which is published in specialised magazines worldwide, on web portals and in the most renowned world gourmet guides representing the "ultimate criteria for product or destination evaluation"<sup>1</sup>.

Along with the above mentioned facts concerning valorisation of autochthonous agricultural products, if they are to be commercialised, they have to be protected. Protected geographical indication label is crucial for protection of products and for the process of regional branding towards its own autochthonous products. Such labels help customers identify a product. If it is protected with such a label, the market is protected too. As soon as one of such products which is autochthonous receives a protected geographical indication label, possibilities of its misuse and imitation are much lower. Protected geographical indication labels designate the quality of products. Protected autochthonous agricultural products may and do affect economic development of regions. In time, they become the most distinctive features of a region, backbones of its identity, and consequently, of its branding. Expansion of recognisability of regional autochthonous products increases their demand and causes a series of economic and business effects through their local production and commercialisation. Protected autochthonous agricultural products are created and recognised. It is crucial to determine their authenticity and their market power.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.istra.hr](http://www.istra.hr), 12.12.2011

## 2. AUTOCHTHONOUS PRODUCTS AND REGIONAL IDENTITY

As stated earlier herein, autochthonous regional products can certainly be one of possible differentiating foundations of regional marketing as they enable regional differentiation. Development of regional brands of autochthonous products makes it possible for the region to preserve its identity in the increasingly more emphasised globalisation process and in the EU accession process. Autochthonous products are regional products manufactured in a particular area for a long time (Oliva, Paliaga, Marjanović 2011) and they are an important factor in preserving special features, tradition and culture, or the identity of the region of their origin. In other words, we may say that identity in a wider sense implies all values that make something unique and recognisable. From the standpoint of a city, its identity comprises all its assets that make it recognisable and unique, different from its competitors (Paliaga, 2007). Regional identity concerns differentiation of physical, cultural and historic characteristics distinguishing a particular region from other regions (Paasi 2002, 2003). Therefore, regional branding is marketing management of all qualities a given region has in a widest sense, such as landscape, nature, cultural heritage, regional products, regional gastronomy and traditional quality products (de Bruin, 2008), which comprises the overall regional identity. Considering the fact that regional identity concerns distinctive features that distinguish regions, we may conclude that autochthonous products as part of regional identity are one of cultural, historic and traditional distinctive features of the region.

In their work, Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) state that food may be used in the process of branding a destination, and that it may be considered an essential element of brand building, as it is frequently intertwined with social, cultural and natural characteristics of a particular region and it carries a large number of symbolic meanings (Lockie, 2001). As a result, food is strongly related to the area of its origin. Authors Oliva et al. (2011) show that the relation is reflected in geographical indication, manufacturing tradition, and culture. Therefore, autochthonous products are not only part of regional identity - they also share identity with the region of origin.

The distinctiveness of foodstuffs in relation to a particular place plays an important role in a destination identity (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). A vast number of empirical researches has shown that regional food attracts a large number of tourists due to their desire to have a unique experience (Reynolds 1993; Hall et al 2003; Cohen and Avieli 2004). In his research, Simon (2005) used the example the Waterland region in the Netherlands to prove that rural identity may be used for purposes of promoting local foodstuffs. These products are related to a series of regional characteristics bearing a positive connotation about the region and places where these foodstuffs are produced. In this manner, production of meat in the Waterland region has been presented as typical for the

region, despite the fact that there are no true historical relations. In other words, a completely new regional identity that had not existed before has been built.

Messely, Dessein and Lauwers (2009) discuss possibilities of regional identity as a force of mobilisation in rural development where they represent critical elements of success in developing regional identity. They state that regional identity may be used as a starting point for regional branding distinguishing it from other regions. In the process of regional branding, region as a whole becomes a product or brand that offers various regional products and services. Regional differences and particular regional features are increasingly emphasised, with more attention dedicated to regional products and cultural and historical heritage, which is used in the process of preserving and strengthening regional identity.

Autochthonous regional products play a very significant role in regional identity. Effects and benefits of autochthonous regional products are multifold. Research paper of authors Oliva, Paliaga and Marjanović (2011) proves that autochthonous regional products share a part of identity of the region of their origin and that they may serve as a basic and extended regional identity and the backbone of regional differentiation. In addition to their being some of cultural, historic and traditional distinctive regional features, autochthonous regional products are very significant for the process of preserving and strengthening regional identity. Identity of autochthonous regional products also has an enormous potential in creating new strategies of regional diversification. In light of this fact, their identity may be used as a strategy of added value in regional diversification. The role of autochthonous regional products is aimed at preserving culture, history and tradition, as well as regional identity, and they play a significant role in promoting the region and creating regional recognisability based on a very distinct identity (Sonneveld, 2007) used as a basis for regional brand with the objective of promoting the region.

### **3. CHANGES IN REGIONAL IDENTITY AND IMAGE AS A RESULT OF PROTECTION AND RECOGNITION OF REGIONAL AUTOCHTHONOUS PRODUCTS**

Particular regions have made a significant step forward with their marketing activities having recognised the importance of autochthonous regional products. Protection of autochthonous regional products has brought progress to the development of regional economy and tourism, the creation of added value for regional products and services and to rural development. Using autochthonous regional products in the region marketing implied certain positive changes in regional identity and image. French regions of Champagne and Bordeaux succeeded in creating their basic identity built on autochthonous regional

products, which generated changes in regional image considering the fact that image is created as a consequence of identity (Skoko, 2009).

Italy also has two good and successful examples of regions that successfully protected and valorised their autochthonous sorts and breeds, and eventually protected and valorised their autochthonous regional products. Owing to the valorisation of its autochthonous sorts and breeds, the Italian region of Tuscany has positioned itself worldwide as a region of quality wine and gourmet offer with a large number of typical autochthonous products. Protecting its autochthonous regional products, the region of Tuscany has made significant efforts to distinguish itself from other regions, strengthened its identity of “healthy”, ecological and tradition-oriented region. Successfully preserved tradition and culture make it a very strong Italian cultural centre and a globally renowned wine and gourmet destination. Autochthonous, traditional or typical Tuscan products have become the backbone of a distinct identity and a very recognisable image.

The region of Sicily is another Italian region that strengthened its position and successfully created a recognisable image through protection and valorisation of its autochthonous sorts and breeds and through protection of its autochthonous regional products. Apart from being world-renowned for its unique Sicilian red oranges, Sicily has distinguished itself for its production of oil, wine, cheese and other types of citrus fruits.

French regions of Champagne and Bordeaux have also undergone large changes in identity and image. The Champagne region has achieved world fame due to protection and valorisation of its autochthonous regional product – the sparkling wine Champagne. This achievement is successful because of uniqueness of the product and uniqueness of its production. Champagne has become the main product of the region that has strengthened regional identity and simultaneously generated recognisable image at the global level, which has elevated the Champagne region way beyond every other region and created its undoubted recognisability. The Champagne region holds the exclusive number one position in the world of sparkling wines. Champagne is the most successful example of a brand of autochthonous regional products that glorified the region and guaranteed uniqueness and prestige to it. The whole story about champagne production has been successfully completed with the establishment of hundreds of champagne houses, which very efficiently contributes to the identity and image of the Champagne region.

Bordeaux is a region in France that distinguished itself for wine manufacturing, so that the autochthonous wine of the same name has been used as a basis for the creation of its image. Due to protection and valorisation of regional wines, the brand bears the name of the capital of the region – Bordeaux. After the near collapse of French viticulture in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, several measures have been undertaken to restore production, quality and the dominant wine manufacturing position. From the almost complete collapse,

the Bordeaux region protected and valorised its production and introduced a system of stimulation of wines with denomination of controlled origin. The region adopted regulations that protect wine manufacturing and wine quality, and passed special laws regulating the wine manufacturing area. The Bordeaux region produces 25 percent of all wines with denomination of controlled origin, so that the region has the title of the largest manufacturer of wine with denomination of controlled origin.

In his research, Van Ham (2001) concludes that place branding is a promotional strategy that comprises all activities that increase attractiveness of the area as a place for work, life and holidays, and regional branding is aimed at creating a differentiated image and reputation, which contributes to the strengthening of regional competitiveness (Maessen et al., 2008). The region of Istria is known for its autochthonous/traditional products, which is its distinctive feature. It is perceived as a region of rich cultural heritage related to tradition, with specific wine and gourmet offer, primarily renowned for its olive oils, truffles and prosciutto, and for its wine.

The following section of the paper presents results of the undertaken preliminary research which attempted to indicate autochthonous products that make the region of Istria specific and recognisable, in addition to an assessment of their significance for regional image and identity.

#### **4. RESULTS OF PERFORMED RESEARCH OF INFLUENCE OF AUTOCHTHONOUS ISTRIAN PRODUCTS ON REGIONAL IDENTITY AND RECOGNISABILITY**

We have carried out a research of recognisability of autochthonous regional products. The products have been selected and used in this preliminary research according to the authors' experience and in conformity with the Tourist Board of the Istrian Region. The research has been carried out using an on-line questionnaire distributed to target respondents only in the territory of Croatia and Italy through the social networking website Facebook. The questionnaire was made using free software SurveyMonkey. Respondents could answer the questionnaire only once. We have analysed only those questionnaires/answers that were properly filled out by respondents. A total of 181 properly filled-out questionnaires has been taken into consideration. 48 % of women and 54 % of men took part in the questionnaire, of which 69 % are employed, 29 % are unemployed, and 2 % are retired. The last category probably indicates specific use of social networks in which retired persons are probably not as present as other categories.



For the needs of the present work and research, we have formulated the following hypotheses that are later analysed based on gathered preliminary research results, as follows

**H 1: Regional autochthonous products of Istria contribute to the preservation of identity of the region of Istria**

**H 2: Regional autochthonous products of Istria have a positive effect on recognisability of the region of Istria**

**1. Have you heard of traditional/autochthonous Istrian products?**

All respondents answered YES, that is, 100 % of respondents claim they have heard of traditional Istrian products.

**2. Asked to choose the most associative product of Istria, respondents answered as follows:**

Table 1.

Products associative of the region of Istria

<b>Product</b>	<b>Respondents – in %</b>
Wine	44,75
Olive oil	17,68
Truffles	17,13
Prosciutto	10,5
Beef (Ox)	8,84
Homemade brandy	1,1
Lavender	0
Cheese	0
Honey	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: authors, 2011*

The above results indicate wine to be the most associative product of Istria, followed by olive oil and truffles, while the Istrian prosciutto, so far the only Istrian product protected in conformity with the EU regulation, holds only fourth place. It reveals the fact that respondents mostly associate Istria with wine, while the following results show that the region of Istria is more renowned for olive oils and truffles than wine, that is, we may conclude that respondents do not consider Istria to be an exclusively "wine region". Consequently, it may be concluded that there is an imbalance between the "vision" of Istria and the actual state. The existing imbalance means that there is enough space for the development of appropriate marketing strategies.

3. **Respondents were asked, using grades 1 to 5 (1 meaning I totally disagree, and 5 meaning I totally agree), and based on given characteristics (See Figure 2), to evaluate associations of the word "Istrian..." in the name of the product. Mean values of grades are shown below:**

Table 2.

Associations to the word "Istrian" in the name of the product

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Uniqueness	4,828729282	0,503822101
Tradition	4,613259669	0,488354248
Quality	4,585635359	0,674630154
Reliability	4,392265193	0,671437807
Prestige	4,38121547	0,791258255
Safety	4,364640884	0,58658002
Happiness	3,762430939	0,991027891
Expensiveness	3,414364641	1,178328977

*Source: authors, 2011*

The results show that associations to the word "Istrian" in the name of the product, such as "Istrian prosciutto", "Istrian olive oil", or "Istrian malvasia" are very positive. First and foremost, the word "Istrian" associates respondents to uniqueness. This information is exceptionally important for purposes of building a strong and distinctive brand, because one of the most important premises for brand construction, especially concerning regional brands, is its uniqueness and differentiation from competitors. The second association is tradition, which is very significant, because brands of autochthonous regional products should be tradition-oriented. By the same token, it is also significant that the word "Istrian" carries associations to reliability, prestige and safety, and not to expensiveness, which is important for the creation of future marketing strategies and marketing mix of regional autochthonous agricultural products.

In the view of that fact and based on research results, we may conclude that the name of autochthonous regional products from Istria should contain the word "Istrian..." because it carries positive associations for respondents, and this is important for creating a recognisable and distinct regional brand.

4. Respondents were asked, using grades 1 to 5 (1 meaning I totally disagree, and 5 meaning I totally agree), and based on given characteristics (See Figure 3), to evaluate autochthonous Istrian products. Mean values of grades are shown below:

Table 3.

Characteristics of autochthonous/traditional products:

Given characteristics of autochthonous traditional products	Mean	Std. Dev.
Element of recognising the region	4,839779006	0,473483492
Part of cultural heritage	4,834254144	0,453551567
Closely related to the region	4,773480663	0,631192466
Best promotion method	4,701657459	0,657814153
They are quality	4,640883978	0,65683356
They are recognisable	4,624309392	0,660189529
I get "value for money"	4,464088398	0,859640023
They are excellent	4,419889503	0,894701681
Their quality is higher	4,270718232	1,048106246
They are one of motives to visit Istria	4,060773481	1,101341333
They are healthy	3,939226519	1,188676883
They are expensive	3,635359116	1,154541038
They are accessible	3,602209945	1,031070415

Source: authors, 2011

Respondents maintain that autochthonous Istrian products are primarily an element of recognising the region and part of its cultural heritage. The results indicate the fact that respondents maintain that autochthonous Istrian products are closely related to the region and that they are the best way to promote it.

Moreover, research results state that these are high quality products and recognisable for most respondents. By the same token, a vast majority of respondents thinks that when they buy autochthonous Istrian products, they get "value for money". According to a group of respondents, autochthonous Istrian products are also one of the reasons why people visit Istria. For the sake of development of future marketing strategy, it has to be noticed that respondents maintain that autochthonous Istrian products are not expensive, but that they are also not sufficiently accessible, which indicates the need to increase production and undertake corrections in their distribution network.

5. Respondents were asked, using grades 1 to 5 (1 meaning I totally disagree, and 5 meaning I totally agree), and based on offered characteristics (See Figure 4), to evaluate relation of the region of Istria to given statements concerning tradition, autochthonousness and agricultural products. Mean values of grades are shown below

Table 4.

## Characteristics of the region of Istria

Istria is :	Mean	Std. Dev.
Known for its olive oils	4,79558011	0,647372742
Known for autochthonous or traditional products	4,624309392	0,708884251
A region with rich cultural heritage	4,61878453	0,661211567
Specific wine and gourmet offer	4,61878453	0,68595486
Related to tradition	4,574585635	0,684117818
Known for truffles	4,552486188	0,694227713
A wine region	4,535911602	0,71108905
Known for prosciutto	4,508287293	0,793156735
A region with preserved nature	4,276243094	0,633280021

Source: authors, 2011

As shown in the above figure, respondents see and recognise Istria for its autochthonous regional products, most of all its olive oils, truffles, and finally, its prosciutto. There is a discrepancy between these results and the actual state, because we expected that Istria would be primarily recognised for wine and the Istrian prosciutto - a protected Istrian autochthonous product. We may conclude that past marketing strategies for Istria as a region have not been oriented towards construction of recognisability of autochthonous Istrian agricultural products, and that we ultimately have to define the policy of both stimulating and manufacturing these products at the regional level, in addition to defining the strategy of branding Istria as a region based on recognisable regional autochthonous products.

Respondents perceive Istria as a region with a rich cultural heritage and specific wine and gourmet offer rooted in tradition. These findings should be taken in consideration when creating a regional brand, so that marketers could

base a regional brand on real, deeply rooted values, and use them to successfully complete "the story about Istria".

Based on results shown in previous figures, we have confirmed the following hypotheses formulated for the needs of the present paper and research

**H 1: Regional autochthonous products of Istria contribute to the preservation of identity of the region of Istria**

Autochthonous regional products play a very important role in regional identity. Effects and benefits of autochthonous regional products are multifold. Autochthonous Istrian regional products share a part of their identity with the region of their origin, and they may be used as a basic and expanded regional identity in establishing regional differentiation. In addition to being one of cultural, historical and traditional distinctive features of the region, autochthonous regional products hold great significance for the process of preserving and strengthening regional identity. The present research shows that respondents perceive autochthonous Istrian regional products as part of Istrian cultural heritage (M: 4,834254144, SD: 0,453551567) that have a strong relation to the region of their origin (M: 4,773480663, SD: 0,631192466) in terms of cultural, historical and traditional distinctive characteristics of the region, which constitutes regional identity. To get a clearer view of the influence of autochthonous products on the region, autochthonous Istrian products are related to the following characteristics of the region of Istria recognisable for its autochthonous or traditional products (M: 4,624309392, SD: 0,708884251), a region with rich cultural heritage (M: 4,61878453, SD: 0,661211567), specific wine and gourmet offer (M: 4,61878453, SD: 0,68595486), and a lasting and firm relation to tradition (M: 4,574585635, SD: 0,684117818), which eventually constitutes the identity of a given region.

What may be expected in terms of marketing is the development of a brand of autochthonous Istrian regional products that would act as one of the "guardians" of regional identity, provided that it is given an appropriate name, sign and slogan.

**H 2: Regional autochthonous products of Istria have a positive effect on recognisability of the region of Istria**

According to research results, autochthonous Istrian regional products are the first element of recognising the region (M: 4,839779006, SD: 0,473483492), which is witnessed by the information that the region of Istria is recognisable for autochthonous or traditional products (M: 4,624309392, SD: 0,708884251). Autochthonous regional products are the best way to promote a region (M: 4,701657459, SD: 0,657814153) and respondents consider them recognisable in comparison with other regional products (M: 4,624309392, SD: 0,660189529). Recognisability of autochthonous Istrian regional products contributes to recognisability of the region, because, as stated earlier herein, the

region of origin and autochthonous products are strongly and closely related and they are used as one of the basic distinctive elements of the region.

The development of the brand of autochthonous Istrian regional products, using appropriate marketing strategies, may achieve greater recognisability of autochthonous products and the corresponding visibility of region of origin both domestically and internationally for purposes of achieving greater regional differentiation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Research results lead us to conclude that autochthonous Istrian regional products are part of regional identity and that they contribute to the preservation of regional identity in terms of marketing. Autochthonous regional products secure regional recognisability in the domestic and international markets, which helps generate regional image, in addition to appropriate identity. Despite that fact, the region of Istria could be distinguished from other regions to a large extent through autochthonous Istrian regional products and through development of appropriate marketing strategies with the objectives of generating greater recognisability of autochthonous regional products both domestically and internationally.

Based on the above results, we may conclude that the brand of the region of Istria is not sufficiently well-rounded, which means that it is insufficiently related to wine and gourmet products and other regional autochthonous products. For this reason, there is a need to define the strategy of branding the region of Istria based on autochthonous products and the development of additional tourist offer, particularly itineraries such as wine and olive oil roads aimed at stimulating production and, even more importantly, at distributing researched products.

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***Ernes Oliva, dipl.oec***

Sveučilište Juraj Dobrila, Pula

***Dr. sc. Marko Paliaga***

Docent

Sveučilište Juraj Dobrila, Pula

E-mail: marko.paliaga@rovinj.hr

## **ISTRAŽIVANJE UTJECAJA AUTOHTONIH REGIONALNIH PROIZVODA NA REGIONALNI BREND – PRIMJER ISTRE**

### ***Sažetak***

*Razvoj regionalnih brendova postaje sve važniji tijekom proteklih godina. Glavni prepoznatljivi elementi regionalnog marketinga su autohtoni proizvodi. Oni omogućuju regionalnu prepoznatljivost i stvaraju preduvjete za razvoj regionalnih autohtonih brendova. Zahvaljujući razvoju regionalnih brendova autohtonih proizvoda regija čuva svoj identitet, a istovremeno stvara pozitivnu sliku i dojam u očima potrošača. Autohtoni proizvodi garantiraju kvalitetu za potrošače i marketinšku promidžbu za regiju. Stoga, možemo reći da razvoj regionalnih brendova autohtonih proizvoda može i pozitivnu sliku regije napraviti brendom. Preliminarno istraživanje je napravljeno za potrebe ovog rada. Ono upućuje ne samo na određene autohtone proizvode koji su tipični za Istru i koji ju čine prepoznatljivom, već i na njihovu važnost za sliku i identitet regije. Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 181 ispitanika, putem standardiziranog upitnika distribuiranog Facebookom, a specijalizirana baza podataka je formirana posebno za tu svrhu.*

***Ključne riječi: brendiranje, regionalno brendiranje, autohtoni proizvodi, poljoprivredni proizvodi***

***JEL klasifikacija: O13, Q13, M31***



