

# Tourists Perceptions of Istrian Wines

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## Summary

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Istrian County, the Croatian most developed tourist region, has a long tradition in viticulture and wine production. In the last decade wines from Istrian County became more and more recognized in Croatia, and abroad. The purpose of this paper is to determine the level of tourist familiarity with Istrian wines and then to examine their perceptions and opinions about the quality, price, promotion and availability on Istrian wine market. Results are based on research which was conducted from June to August 2005 in major resorts on Istrian coast. A total of 802 questionnaires were collected. For analysing the survey data, appropriate statistical procedures were used (descriptive statistic, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation analysis). The survey revealed tourist satisfaction with Istrian wines. Based on research findings, it can be concluded that Istrian wine is well known typical Istrian product. Relatively high consumers' satisfaction is associated with the quality, promotional activities and availability of the product.

## Key words

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wines, wine market, tourist perception, Istrian County

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## Introduction

Presently, most Western consumers become the driving element of the food chain because they can buy exactly what they want to eat, instead of only what is readily available or affordable (Costa and Jongen, 2006). It is known that lack of market knowledge and technical problems tended to be associated with product failure. Therefore, knowledge about how consumers choose their food is very important factor for success in food product development process.

The type of food, but also the way it is produced, prepared and used is deeply rooted in one's culture. This fact implies that there are likely to be cross-cultural differences in terms of factors for success in food product development (Stewart-Knox and Mitchell, 2003). This research seeks to find out the level of tourist knowledge about Istrian wine as a typical Istrian food product.

Regional food products may have three important functions: to enhance the competitiveness of the agri-food system through the differentiation; to preserve agriculture in the regions with cost disadvantages, but where rural communities perform considerable environmental and social function; and to keep alive local traditions and to avoid the loss of social and cultural diversity which disappears because of globalization (Sodano, 2001).

Wine, as a product, is a fast moving consumer good, or packaged good, because more supermarket categories have 10 or so brands and wine typically has over 700. As a result consumer choice for wine is more complex than the choice for many other products (Lochshin, 2003). Among others, consumer behaviour research is important for stakeholders in wine tourism because it can help provide important insights into who the wine tourist is, what motivates them to visit a winery or attend a wine festival or purchase wine and why. All this help marketers and managers to effectively target and develop markets (Richard, Hall and McIntosh, 2002, pp.118).

Currently, consumers show great interest in typical food products because of their distinctive historical, cultural and physical attributes deep ingrained in the area of production. Wine as typical food product also contains the mentioned attributes that enable to present people and territories of the visited tourist destination, i.e. enable to approach culture in a more experiential and participative way. Due to the fact that modern tourist consumers are searching for quality and diversity during their visit of their tourist destination, offering distinctive qualities and related experiences is of prime interest.

Previous research conducted in Istria County showed that local tourist market in considerable measure is recognised and there is the interest to purchase Istrian Malvasia (Brščić et al., 2005).

According to the Statistical Yearbook, from total agricultural area of Croatia (3.137 million ha) 57,000 ha are vineyards. Wine consumption in Croatia is currently 22 litres per head and experts expect this will rise by about 25% until 2010 when it will be around 27 litres per head. In the year 2004 in registered trade was 56% of quality wine, 41% table wine and 3% high-quality wine (CEECA AGRI POLICY, 2006).

## Survey methodology

Methods used in the survey were interview and questionnaire method. For the field research the questionnaire with 14 opened and close-ended questions has been prepared. The questionnaires were distributed in Croatian, English, German, Italian and Slovenian language.

The questionnaire was divided into several parts. One part included questions related to the consumer's perceptions of quality and attempted to identify their familiarity with the surveyed products. In particular, the data related to the consumer's economic, social and demographic characteristics and the data related to their preferences were recorded. In the questionnaire 7 point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 to 7, for example 1= not at all familiar with the product to 7= knowing the product very well. In the paper only data that are referring on Istrian wines were used. Field research was conducted in many hotels, camping sites, private accommodations and restaurants in Istrian County (Croatia) from June to August 2005. A total of 802 questionnaires were collected. The questionnaire results were analyzed using corresponding statistic procedures (descriptive statistic, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation analysis). A questionnaire was created in order to determine the level of tourist knowledge about Istrian wines and then to examine their perceptions and opinions about the quality, price, promotion and availability on Istrian wine market.

## Results

Using a 7 point Likert scale, to find out the level of tourist knowledge of the following ten typical food products: Istrian Prosciutto, Truffles (Mushroom), Istrian Virgin Olive Oil, Istrian Wine, Istrian Grappa, Istrian Soup, Istrian Minestra, "Fuži" Folded Pasta, Istrian Fritule (Doughnuts) and "Kroštule" the following question was asked: "Do you recognize the following typical Istrian food products". In Figure 1 tourists responded in regard to their knowledge of Istrian wine.

From data collected it can be seen that Istrian wine was well known typical Istrian product (mean 5.01, standard deviation 2.11). The majority of tourists (65% - the sum of the grade 5, 6 and 7 on 7-point Likert scale) demonstrated

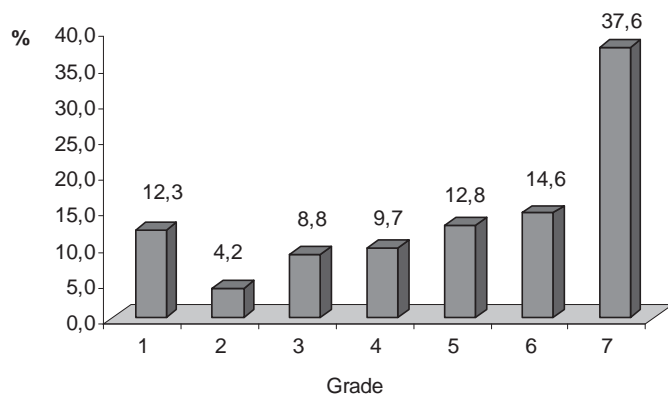


Figure 1. Tourist knowledge about Istrian wine (Source: Survey 2005)

great knowledge about Istrian wine. According to the respondent's country of origin, there were not statistically significant differences in answers. However, it was possible to see Slovenian tourists were the most familiar with Istrian wine, while the least familiar were Austrian tourists.

Tourists who visited Istria several times (three or more times) showed more knowledge about Istrian wine than others who were visiting for the first time. Also, from the collected data it can be concluded that female respondents had more knowledge about Istrian wine than male respondents.

By analyzing tourist knowledge about Istrian wine in relation to age group, statistically significant difference in respondent's answers can be seen. Elderly tourists (50 years and more) showed more knowledge about Istrian wines than younger tourists. According to respondents educational level, there was a statistically significant difference in responses ( $F = 2.477$   $p = 0.043$ ). Tourists with higher level of education had more knowledge than others. Tourists with college-level education had the highest familiarity with Istrian wine (5.31).

Regarding the purpose to define satisfaction of tourists as consumers of typical food products, the following question was asked: "How do you grade the price and quality of the following typical Istrian food products?" Using the 7 point Likert scale, the aim of the research was to find out how tourists perceive each of the ten typical food products mentioned earlier. Tourists were moderately satisfied with the price of all typical Istrian food products. The highest satisfaction can be seen with the price of Istrian Grappa (mean 5.27) and Istrian Wine (mean 5.24).

According to the visitors' country of origin, there was not a statistically significant difference in respondent's answers (Milohanović, 2006). However, Austrian tourists were least satisfied with the price of typical Istrian food products in relation to British tourist and those from Eastern

Table 1. Consumer satisfaction with the price of typical Istrian food products

Product	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Istrian Grappa	537	5.27	1.5358
Istrian wine	582	5.24	1.5503
Typical Istrian doughnuts "Fritule"	447	5.17	1.7345
Folded Pasta "Fuži"	471	5.14	1.7032
Istrian Virgin Olive Oil	554	4.98	1.7188
Typical Istrian cake "Kroštule"	418	4.96	1.8331
Istrian Soup	422	4.79	1.8276
Istrian Minestra	425	4.78	1.8459
Istrian Prosciutto	604	4.65	1.6825
Truffles (mushrooms)	465	4.22	1.8943

Source: Research results

Table 2. Consumer satisfaction with the quality of typical Istrian food products

Product	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Istrian Prosciutto	609	5.97	1.3755
Istrian Virgin Olive Oil	561	5.86	1.4216
Istrian wine	580	5.61	1.4046
Folded Pasta "Fuži"	469	5.6	1.5583
Istrian Grappa	526	5.56	1.5216
Typical Istrian doughnuts "Fritule"	460	5.54	1.5566
Truffles (mushrooms)	449	5.48	1.6943
Typical Istrian cake "Kroštule"	416	5.37	1.691
Istrian Minestra	412	5.31	1.6379
Istrian Soup	406	5.3	1.6957

Source: Research results

European countries who showed a higher level of satisfaction. In relation with the frequency of visits to Istria, statistically significant difference in respondents' answers were found in regard to the price of Istrian wine ( $F=2.754$ ;  $p=0.065$ ), although Pearson coefficient results found a low positive correlation. Tourists who repeated their visit to Istrian County showed, to some extent, a greater level of satisfaction with the price of Istrian wine and other typical food products in relation to those who visited Istria for the first time.

Tourists were asked to show their level of satisfaction with the quality of typical Istrian food products. On the list of ten food products Istrian wine was ranked third (mean 5.61). This fact showed great tourists' satisfaction with its quality.

The survey scope wasn't only to investigate tourist satisfaction regarding the quality and price of typical Istrian food products, but also to determine how tourists perceive the availability of these products. It can be concluded that tourists were most satisfied with the availability of Istrian wine (Table 3.).

**Table 3.** Consumer satisfaction with the availability of typical Istrian food products

Product	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Istrian wine	529	5.8	1.4785
Istrian Grappa	492	5.62	1.5853
Istrian Virgin Olive Oil	498	5.57	1.563
Istrian Prosciutto	543	5.21	1.6941
Folded Pasta "Fuži"	437	5.04	1.8061
Typical Istrian doughnuts "Fritule"	433	4.88	1.798
Istrian Soup	400	4.7	1.9013
Typical Istrian cake "Kroštule"	401	4.68	1.9493
Istrian Minestra	401	4.59	1.8837
Truffles (mushrooms)	426	4.52	1.8902

Source: Research results

**Table 4.** Consumer satisfaction with promotion of typical Istrian food products

Product	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Istrian wine	510	5.01	1.7646
Istrian Grappa	483	4.94	1.8209
Istrian Virgin Olive Oil	491	4.9	1.7998
Istrian Prosciutto	535	4.5	1.9108
Typical Istrian doughnuts "Fritule"	427	4.34	1.9903
Truffles (mushrooms)	433	4.25	2.0003
Folded Pasta "Fuži"	432	4.25	1.9587
Typical Istrian cake "Kroštule"	399	4.09	2.064
Istrian Minestra	404	3.91	1.9748
Istrian Soup	410	3.9	1.9824

Source: Research results

Tourists were also asked to evaluate their level of satisfaction with promotional activities (available information's about these products). Respondents were the most satisfied with promotional activities of Istrian wines.

Although there wasn't statistically significant difference in respondents answers regarding the promotional activity on Istrian wines, according to the visitor's country of origin, survey results show that Slovenian tourists were the least satisfied. Female respondents were more satisfied with promotion of Istrian wine than male respondents, but there is little statistically deviation in respondents' answers. Statistically significant differences, although very small could be differentiated according to the respondent's age group. Elderly tourists (50 years and more) show more knowledge about Istrian wines than younger tourists.

## Conclusion

There is no question that food plays an important part in adding to a region's ambiance and unique character. Using local food products such as typical wines can help regions sustain local tradition and avoid the loss of social and cultural diversity disappearing as the consequence of globalization. An area that most regions have identified

as critical in meeting customer expectations is the need to integrate wine with quality food.

In order to achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace, there is a need of clearing understanding of the needs of potential tourists and their knowledge and perception about the products. Tourist's experts have to be focused not only on identification of tourists as consumers, but they must also to seek to understand their perceptions of different tourist products and services. If two consumers have different perceptions of the same tourist product, its price and other characteristics, it will imply different ways of behavior. Thus, for marketers in tourism it is very important to know the way tourists perceive their products. In this way the base for identification of different factors that influence their decisions is defined. It is well known that it is difficult to have an influence on consumer perceptions. However, the knowledge consumers have about some products has often facilitated their decision-making process.

Istrian County has a great culinary heritage and, of course, possibilities to use it as an advantage on competitive tourist market. Through offering typical Istrian wines there is a possibility for Istrian County to differentiate itself and compete with other tourist destinations in the global context. By using typical food products, it is possible to accomplish higher level of tourism development, but there is a need for organized and coordinated marketing activities.

Field research conducted on Istrian food market showed that Istrian wine is well known typical Istrian product. Tourists showed moderate satisfaction with the price of all typical Istrian food products, but respondents had the highest satisfaction with the price of Istrian Grappa and Istrian Wine. Based on research findings it can be concluded that relatively high consumers' satisfaction is associated with the quality, promotional activities and availability of the product.

Typical Istrian wines contain elements of cultural and local heritage of the area and, therefore, they can be used for tourist purposes. Tourist experts must become more conscious of the possibilities to use these products and emphasize their unique characteristics that add value to tourist destination marketplace.

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## Appendix 1. Sample structure

Selected features		Frequency	Percent
Country of visit	Italy	246	30.7
	Germany	242	30.2
	Austria	96	12.0
	Slovenia	66	8.2
	Netherlands	47	5.9
	Other European countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland)	26	3.2
	Great Britain	24	3.0
	Other	55	6.9
Total	802	100.0	
Number of visits to Istria	First time	204	25.7
	Second time	102	12.8
	Many times	489	61.5
	Total	795	100.0
Gender structure	Male	406	50.6
	Female	396	49.4
	Total	802	100.0
Age structure	Under 18	15	1.9
	19-29	112	14.1
	30-49	346	43.6
	50 and over	321	40.4
	Total	794	100.0
Education structure	Elementary school	94	12.9
	Secondary school	347	47.5
	College and higher	284	38.9
	Other	5	0.7
	Total	730	100.0
Occupation	Worker	90	11.5
	Clerk	198	25.2
	Manager	117	14.9
	Free professions	112	14.3
	Schoolboy or student	43	5.5
	Housewife	54	6.9
	Pensioner	121	15.4
	Unemployed	4	0.5
	Other	46	5.8
	Total	785	100.0
	Average monthly income (personal)	Without income	59
Up to 501 euro		42	6.3
501-1000 euro		102	15.4
1001-1500		157	23.7
1501-2000		143	21.6
2000 and more euro		160	24.1
Total		663	100.0

Source: Research results

