

IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL RESTAURANTS GASTRONOMIC OFFER FOR THE FUTURE OF RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Importance of local restaurants gastronomic offer for the future of rural tourism in Knić municipality was estimated based on the questionnaire filled by 200 tourists who were accommodated in rural households in four villages (Dragušica, Žunje, Grivac and Knić) in this municipality during 2021. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: respondent profile and importance of local restaurants gastronomic offer for the future of rural tourism. Based on respondents answers, it could be concluded that local restaurants gastronomic offer is very important for the future of rural tourism, but that the offer in villages of Knić municipality is modest. Gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation is much better than local restaurant gastronomic offer. Quality, authenticity, serving and food decoration in local restaurants gastronomic offer were not estimated as good. Respondents concluded that improvement of gastronomic offer of local restaurant is very important for success of rural tourism.

Key Words: *gastronomic offer, Knić, restaurant, rural tourism*

JEL classification: L83

Introduction

After the Second World War, tourism became one of the fastest growing economic branches, thanks to the development of traffic, tourist infrastructure and various service activities. Meanwhile, tourism has become a very complex, multi-sectoral industry in which a large number of participants participate in various aspects of providing services to tourists,

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enabling tourism organizers to provide unforgettable experiences for their clients (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Given that tourism is a key economic opportunity for many countries and regions, investments in tourism development are more and more. This allows potential tourists to choose what suits them best from the wide range of travel and accompanying facilities on offer. Great help to tourists in choosing locations and accommodation capacities is provided by online consumer reviews using social media, which has been determined in the case of numerous hotels in Serbia (Mašić & Kosar, 2016, Mašić et al., 2019). Modern trends in tourism are such that the specificity and diversity of the tourist destination attract the attention of tourists who want to bring unforgettable impressions from tourist trips. Therefore, the demands of modern tourists are increasing, and aspects of the offer that differ from the usual offer of most tourist destinations offer tourists just that specificity and diversity. Namely, modern tourists increasingly value holidays in rural, unpolluted areas, which are in harmony with nature and which are characterized by a specific culture, tradition, gastronomic offer, etc. Until a few decades ago, the traditional type of tourism, which includes "sun and sea", and whose goal is fun, rest, health and enjoyment was dominant. Nowadays, increasingly popular is thematic tourism or tourist trips are motivated by special interests in certain attractions and activities (sports, untouched nature, traditional crafts, wellness, culture, rural tourism, events, festivals, nautical, etc.), which record high rates of growth, especially in the USA and Europe (Unković & Zečević, 2011). Famous world tourist destinations that offer luxury and the most modern achievements in the tourist offer look like each other and as such are not very interesting for tourists who want to escape from the monotonous everyday life which is an integral part of excessive urbanization and pollution. In such conditions, natural beauties and rural areas of Serbia represent a significant potential for the development of tourism in our country. Apart from the natural beauties, tourists are also attracted by the exceptional gastronomic offer. The strongest impression that foreign tourists bring from our country is related to the hospitality of the hosts (Armenski et al., 2009). Gastronomic offer in rural areas include gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation in rural areas and local restaurant gastronomic offer. The aim of this research was to estimate importance of local restaurant gastronomic offer for success of rural tourism in municipality Knjic.

Importance of gastronomic offer for rural tourism

The gastronomic offer can be the main reason for traveling to a destination, either to consume gastronomic specialties or to get acquainted with the

technology of preparation of traditional or specific dishes and drinks. Hall & Mitchell (2000) consider the gastronomic offer to be an important tool of the tourism industry, precisely due to the fact that travel is very often motivated by food and drink. Quan & Wang (2004) proposed a concept that explains the complex relationships of tourists with food, who the role of food in the holiday experience divide into central and peripheral. The importance of gastronomic offer for tourism is reflected in the fact that: a) gastronomic offer can be a key element of tourist destination identity (Lin et al., 2011; Ghanem, 2019), b) gastronomic offer can be used for branding and creating the image of a tourist destination (Lai et al., 2018; Lai et al., 2019) and c) gastronomic offer can play a significant role in attracting tourists to a particular destination (Robinson & Getz, 2014).

In modern society, the search of tourists for an authentic meal experience has led to the popularity of various forms of tourism based on gastronomic offer. Special attention is drawn to the innovative gastronomic offer of the restaurant based on modern trends such as phycogastronomy, the use of sprouts, microgreens and edible flowers in the preparation of meals, the use of edible insects, gluten-free or lactose -free foods, then low-calorie foods, low-sugar or sugar-free foods, the use of organically produced ingredients in the preparation of meals, etc. (Božić & Milošević, 2021). Some of that contemporary trends are used as part of gastronomic offer in our country, but mainly in luxury restaurants. For example, microgreens are a useful tool for food decoration in many Belgrade restaurants (Božić & Milošević, 2020).

Different terms are used to define the forms of tourism related to the gastronomic offer, namely gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, food and beverage tourism, gourmet tourism, etc. Rangus & Brumen (2016) analyzed the publications obtained on the basis of key words related to tourism and found that the term “culinary” was used in 420 cases out of the total number of 27,520 of these publications. Ottenbacher & Harrington (2011) define gastronomic tourism as a form of tourism where a unique and unforgettable food and drink experience contributes to the motivation to travel and the pleasure that results from traveling. The gastronomic offer of the restaurant enables tourists to get to know the food culture of the local population (Jimenez-Beltran et al., 2016), thanks to which the food offer can be considered a promoter of local community culture. Local gastronomy as a component of the intangible cultural heritage of the site reflects the local character (Gordin & Trabskaya, 2013) and provides tourists with the opportunity to get to know the local population (Vuksanović et al., 2016).

Trying local food can be a way to experience an authentic experience of destination culture (Huang, 2017). However, it should be borne in mind that the concept of local food is not clearly defined and that restaurateurs, tourists and researchers often use different terms and definitions. Thus, Mykletun & Gyimóthy (2010) by local food means traditional dishes, which represent local heritage and which are produced using traditional technology and crafts, while exhibiting high standards, are associated with a particular location and are considered original for that location. Chang et al. (2011) consider local food as food with a gastronomic identity that may represent the character of the destination, while Omar et al. (2015) believe that local food should be a heritage that is typical of local cuisine and that it is part of the cultural values that represent the lifestyle of the community.

The gastronomic offer can be a very important part of the tourist offer, which is confirmed by the fact that the gastronomic offer is used as part of the marketing of a tourist destination (Vuksanović et al., 2016). The importance of the gastronomic offer of restaurants for the tourist offer of a certain tourist destination is reflected in the fact that certain types of tourism are recognized as trips motivated by various attractions related to food. Many authors in recent years have focused on research into the use of food as a tourist resource, and the main topic of their research is food marketing as a tourist attraction (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012; Horng & Tsai, 2012; Činjurević & Pestek, 2014). The importance and role of food in tourism stems from the fact that food is specific to a particular area, both because of the preparation of typical local foods, whose uniqueness comes from a particular geographical area, and because of the specific way of preparing, serving and / or consuming local culture (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018).

Today, tour operators are aware that the region's gastronomy can be transformed into a national brand that can be used as a powerful tool in promoting a region or country (Williams & Shaw, 2011). Harrington & Ottenbacher (2010) believe that one of the main success factors in gastronomic tourism is that the destination differs from the competition in unique cultural, geographical, natural and gastronomic resources. Gastronomy often stands out as a unique tourist offer when branding the state as a tourist destination, so often the first associations about the state (among other things) are related to its specific gastronomic products (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018). In that sense, Italy is known for pasta and pizza, Greece for gyros, France for cheese and wine, Hungary for goulash and peppers, etc. (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018). Some gastronomic

curiosities can be a major attraction for tourists and can be a motive for visiting a country. Such an example is the fugu dish typical of Japan, which is prepared from fugu fish that contains poison, which can be deadly for consumers (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018). Gastronomic events (culinary competitions, gastronomic festivals, etc.) are a special type of tourist travel for which the motive is local or traditional food (Stojanović, 2018). These events are interesting tourist attractions that attract locals and tourists, exert economic influence and present local products (Lee & Arcodia, 2011).

Research methodology

Research was conducted in four villages (Dragušica, Žunje, Grivac and Knić) in Knić municipality during 2021. The aim was to estimate importance of local restaurants gastronomic offer for success of rural tourism in this municipality. The questionnaire consisted of two sections (I - respondent profile and II - importance of local restaurants gastronomic offer for success of rural tourism) were used. This questionnaire filled by 200 tourists who were accommodated in rural households. All participants were asked the same questions in the same order. The respondents were asked to estimate: (1) importance of local restaurant gastronomic offer for success of rural tourism; (2) quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurant in municipality Knić; (3) quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurants in comparison to gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation; (4) authenticity of local restaurants gastronomic offer; (5) way of serving food in local restaurants; (6) decoration of food in local restaurants; (7) importance of improving the gastronomic offer of local restaurants to increase the success of rural tourism. For each question respondents were asked to choose one of three offered options. The results are presented descriptively.

Results of research and discussion

Profile of respondents

Table 1 presents profile of respondents concerning their gender, age, and education. Most of respondents were female (58%). The highest percentage (44%) of respondents were between 51 and 70, as well as between 31 and 50 (37%), while less respondents were older than 70 (16%) or younger than 30 (3%). Most of them completed high school (54%). Many of them have bachelor (34%) or master degree, while some of them finished only elementary school (2%). Only 1 respondent (0.5%) has a title PhD.

Table 1: *Profile of respondents*

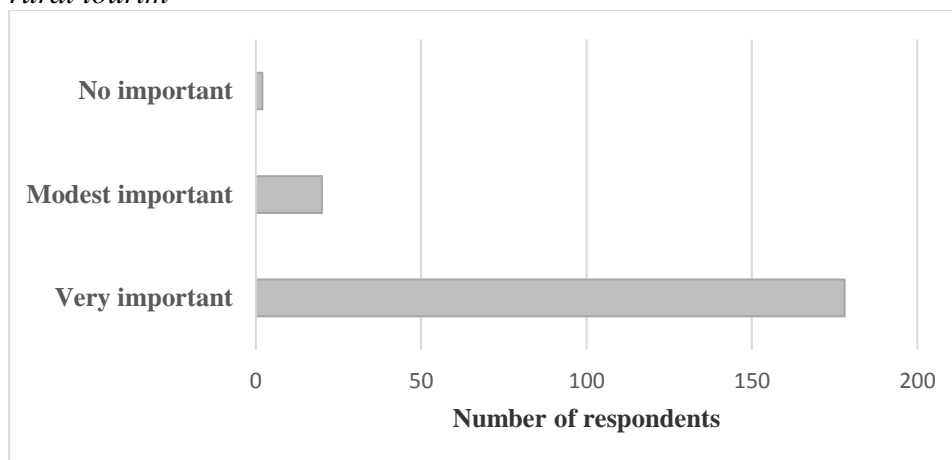
		Number of respondents	Percent of respondents %
Gender	Male	84	42
	Female	116	58
Age (year)	< 30	6	3
	31-50	74	37
	51-70	88	44
	>70	32	16
Education	Elementary school	4	2
	High school	108	54
	Bachelor degree	68	34
	Master degree	19	9.5
	PhD	1	0.5

Source: *Author's research*

Importance of local restaurants gastronomic offer

Many authors highlighted importance gastronomic offer for tourism (Hall & Mitchell, 2000, Lin et al., 2011; Robinson & Getz, 2014; Lai et al., 2018; Lai et al., 2019; Ghanem, 2019). They indicate that gastronomic offer can be key element of tourist destination identity and base for branding tourist destination. However, the importance of gastronomic offer of local restaurants for rural tourism was not studied.

Figure 1: *Importance of local restaurant gastronomic offer for future of rural tourism*

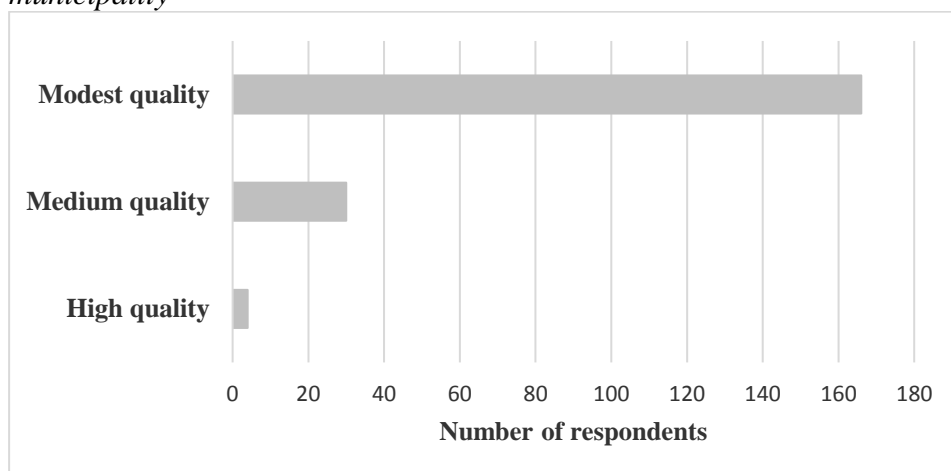


Source: *Author's research*

The results of study presented in this paper indicate that gastronomic offer of local restaurants is very important for future of rural tourism (Figure 1). Namely, respondents view about that were quite consistently. Most of them (89%) consider that gastronomic offer of local restaurants is very important for future of rural tourism. Only 10% choosed “modest important” as answer, while only 1% opted for “no important”.

Feloni (2014) indicates that below-average food quality is one of the main reasons for restaurant fail. Also, Camillo et al. (2008) believe that the quality and consistency of the gastronomic offer can be crucial for the success of the restaurant, among other factors on which the success of the business depends. Although Hernández-Rojas & Huete Alcocer (2021) confirmed that a satisfactory experience with the food of a traditional restaurant has a positive effect on the image of the destination and the gastronomy of the place, respondents in our study quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurants in Knić municipality mainly estimated as modest (Figure 2). Namely, 83% of respondents choose answer “modest quality”. Some of them (15%) believe that the quality of gastronomic offer in these restaurants is medium, while only 2% choose "high quality" as answer. Taking into account that quality is one of the main, and often the leading factor influencing the choice of restaurant by the guest (Akbar & Alaudeen, 2012; Kafel & Sikora, 2013) gastronomic offer of local restaurants in the municipality of Knić can not give a significant contribution to development of rural tourism in this municipality.

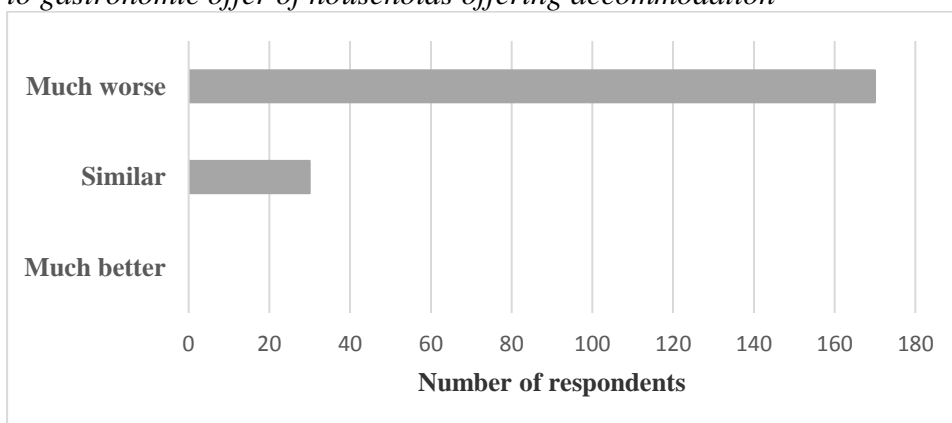
Figure 2: *Quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurants in Knić municipality*



Source: Author's research

Respondents' impression of the quality of the gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation was completely opposite to the impression of the quality of the gastronomic offer of local restaurants (Figure 3). Most of them (85%) believe that the gastronomic offer of local restaurants is much worse than the gastronomic offer of households that offer accommodation. Some of them (15%) indicate that the two compared gastronomic offers are similar. However, none of the respondents assessed that the quality of the gastronomic offer of local restaurants is better than the gastronomic offer of households that offer accommodation. This assessment of the quality of the gastronomic offer of local restaurants in the municipality of Knić indicates that local restaurants cannot contribute to the loyalty of visitors, given that loyalty is influenced by their enjoyment of local gastronomy (Hernández-Rojas & Huete Alcocer, 2021). However, unlike the contribution of the gastronomic offer of traditional restaurants to visitor's loyalty, which these authors estimated for Cordoba, in the case of the municipality of Knić, such a contribution to rural tourism is provided by the gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation. Namely, households offer a wide range of high-quality domestic dishes prepared in the traditional way, which leaves a positive impression on tourists.

Figure 3: *Quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurants in comparison to gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation*

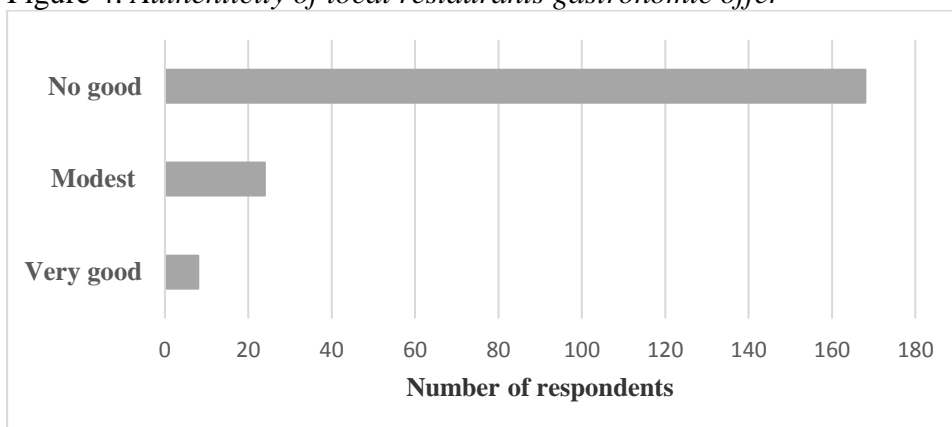


Source: Author's research

Restaurants often use the concept of authenticity to achieve success (Lu et al., 2015), due to the fact that authenticity is recognized as an offer of value-added restaurants (Kovács et al., 2014). Thus, for example, for ethnic restaurants, authentic concept is a key success factor, and this authenticity is manifested through two aspects: food authenticity (Sidali &

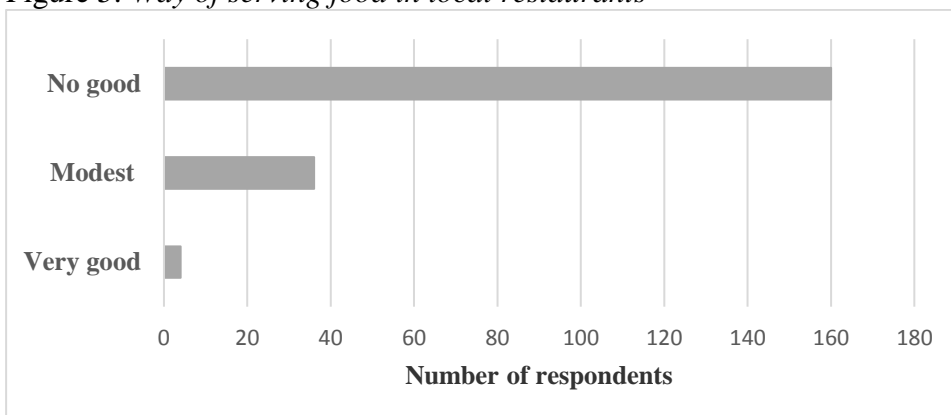
Hemmerling, 2014) and ambient authenticity (Wang & Mattila, 2015). Respondents' responses related to the authenticity of local restaurants gastronomic offer (Figure 4) were similar to the responses related to the quality of gastronomic offer of local restaurants. The majority of respondents (84%) believe that the authenticity of local gastronomic restaurants is no good. The rest of them believes that the authenticity of local restaurants gastronomic offer is modest (12%) or very good (4%). Given that the authenticity of the gastronomic offer is of great importance for the success of restaurants, especially ethno-restaurants (Agarwal & Dahm, 2015), this aspect of the gastronomic offer of restaurants in the municipality of Knić needs to be improved.

Figure 4: *Authenticity of local restaurants gastronomic offer*



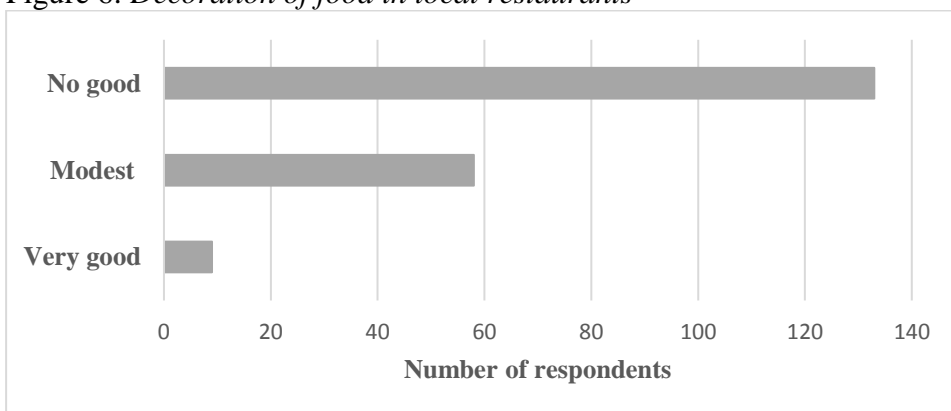
Source: Author's research

The importance and role of food in tourism stems from the fact that food is specific to a particular area, both because of the preparation of typical local foods, whose uniqueness comes from a particular geographical area, and because of the specific way of preparing, serving and / or consuming local culture (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018). However, based on the answers of the respondents, in the restaurants of the municipality of Knić, not much attention is paid to serving food (Figure 5). The majority of respondents (80%) answered that the way of serving food is not good, while 18% answered that the way of serving is modest, and 2% that it is very good.

Figure 5: *Way of serving food in local restaurants*

Source: *Author's research*

When it comes to the gastronomic offer of the restaurants, the greatest importance is given to the quality and taste of food (Mamalis, 2009). However, Gagić et al. (2015) indicate that, among other important quality factors, food decoration is an important factor in assessing the quality of food. Food decoration helps to achieve guest satisfaction (Kivela et al., 2000). In developed countries, chefs use microgreens, sprouts and edible flowers to give food exotic flavors, colors and appearance and thus attract consumers who care about health (Ebert, 2012).

Figure 6: *Decoration of food in local restaurants*

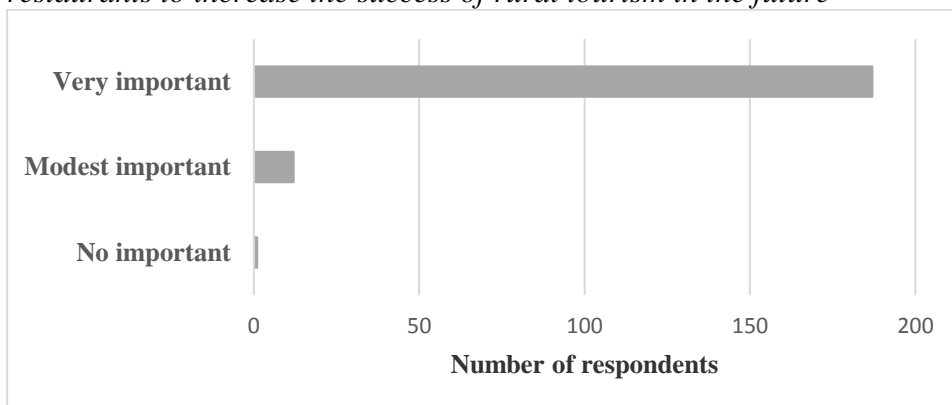
Source: *Author's research*

According to research by Božić & Milošević (2020), microgreens are used to decorate dishes in a large number of Belgrade restaurants. The impression of tourists who stayed in the villages of the municipality of Knjić

is that the decoration of food is not good (according to 66.50% of respondents) or is modest (according to 29% of respondents). Only 4.50% think that the decoration of food in the mentioned restaurants is very good.

Based on the respondents' answers to all the previously asked questions, it is clear that the gastronomic offer of local restaurants in the municipality of Knić has numerous shortcomings. Bearing in mind that the gastronomic offer for tourists in rural areas is very important, it is necessary to pay special attention to improving the gastronomic offer of restaurants, which was confirmed by respondents in answer to the last question (Figure 7). Namely, 93.5% of respondents believe that improving the gastronomic offer of local restaurants is very important for the success of rural tourism in the future. A significantly smaller number of respondents believe that this is of modest importance (6%) or that it is no important (0.5%).

Figure 7: *Importance of improving the gastronomic offer of local restaurants to increase the success of rural tourism in the future*



Source: Author's research

Conclusion

Based on research conducted in four villages in municipality Knić could be concluded that local restaurants gastronomic offer is very important for future of rural tourism. Unfortunately, that offer in villages of municipality Knić is modest and much worse than gastronomic offer of households offering accommodation. Quality, authenticity, serving and food decoration in local restaurants were not estimated as good. Taking all of that into account, respondents concluded that improvement of gastronomic offer of local restaurants is very important for success of rural tourism in the future.

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