

## Authenticity of gastronomic events as a function of branding a destination

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**Abstract:** The promotion of authentic food and beverages in Vojvodina is most commonly carried out in gastronomic events. Vojvodina is rich in gastronomic products coming from the households of different nations that inhabit its territory. Gastronomic events with their authenticity can contribute to the creation of the destination brand. The aim of the present study is to explore the authenticity of gastronomic events, which could contribute to a better promotion of Vojvodina and the creation of a recognizable brand of this tourist destination. The research was conducted through the method of survey, using a questionnaire on a sample of 150 respondents. Using statistical methods of binary logistic regression, Chi – square and Fisher’s test, the analysis was performed and the results were presented. The findings of the research indicate that the authenticity of gastronomic events is recognized by the tourists; however, this should be better utilized in destination branding, as this feature could be the key in attracting tourists.

**Keywords:** gastronomic events, destination branding, Vojvodina

**JEL classification:** M31, Z32, L66

## Autentičnost gastronomskih manifestacija u funkciji brendiranja destinacije

**Sažetak:** Promocija autentične hrane i pića na teritoriji Vojvodine najčešće se vrši putem gastronomskih manifestacija. Vojvodina je bogata gastronomskim proizvodima koji dolaze iz domaćinstava različitih naroda koji naseljavaju njenu teritoriju. Gastronomske manifestacije sa svojom autentičnošću mogu doprineti kreiranju brenda destinacije. Cilj rada je da se istraži autentičnost gastronomskih manifestacija, koja može doprineti boljoj promovisanosti Vojvodine i stvaranju prepoznatljivog brenda ove turističke destinacije. Istraživanje je sprovedeno primenom metode ispitivanja, korišćenjem ankete, na uzorku od 150 ispitanika. Primenom statističkih metoda binomne logističke regresije, Hi-kvadrat i Fišerovog testa, izvršena je analiza i prezentovani su rezultati. Istraživanje pokazuje da je autentičnost gastronomskih manifestacija prepoznatljiva kod turista, ali da je treba bolje

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iskoristiti za brendiranje destinacije, jer upravo ovaj atribut može da bude ključan za privlačenje turista.

**Ključne reči:** gastronomske manifestacije, brendiranje destinacije, Vojvodina

**JEL klasifikacija:** M31, Z32, L66

## 1. Introduction

Events can contribute to the recognizability of a city, region, as well as a country, and their authenticity is an important aspect of branding. Branding of a certain gastronomic event can affect the overall perception and creation of the image of the tourist destination itself. The recognizability and authenticity of a certain event, in fact, brings potential tourists to a certain destination. The aim of branding is to differentiate a certain product on the market from other products (Mandarić, 2016). Intense competition between tourist destinations is increasingly present, and therefore the need for destination branding is becoming more pronounced. The issue of recognizability as well as authenticity is precisely the task of the brand. Tourist destination branding is a concept that started developing in the late XX century and integrates all the features of the destination into a single whole, which expresses a unique identity and differentiates the destination from the competition (Tsauro et al., 2016). Gastronomic events have become increasingly important in recent years, as they attract an increasing number of tourists. Gastronomic events held in rural areas have a great promotional and entrepreneurial potential, as the gastronomic products from these events could be offered to local restaurants, as well as to retail chains, which would positively affect the revitalization of the rural area of a particular tourist destination (Stojanović et al., 2020). The events can be used to promote the destination as a gastronomic tourism destination. There are numerous gastronomic events in Vojvodina held every year at a certain time. Authentic food and drinks, which are characteristic of the venue of the gastronomic event, are presented through the events. It can be said that “food also provides ‘authentic’ representation of the culture for the tourist” (Vuković & Mosurović Ružičić, 2020, p. 79). Gastronomic products are a very important tool for introducing tourists to the culture, tradition and history of a particular place or region. The paper focuses on the gastronomic events that, with their authenticity, could influence the creation of recognizability, as well as a better promotion of Vojvodina as a tourist destination. Creating a brand and developing perceptions among tourists and locals can significantly contribute to the economic strengthening of villages, towns and the region.

## 2. Gastronomic events and destination branding

The number of gastronomic events in the world is constantly increasing, along with the growing interest in gastronomic tourism, which is a very interesting form of recreation and tourist attraction (Wargenau & Che, 2006). “Events or organized events, as a reflection of modern tourism, with regard to culture (music festivals, concerts, exhibitions, contests etc.), sports (regattas, water-skiing, etc.), tradition (carnivals, gastronomy, folklore, etc.), are gaining more importance in modern tourism” (Jovanović, 2015, p. 137). The combination of food, culture and tourism has become an emerging tourism product called gastronomy, regarded as a vehicle for regional, local and sustainable development of a particular destination (Mohanty et al., 2020). Gastronomic events represent a unique connection between food, drinks, tourist events and travel. Gastronomic events involve gathering a large number of people in one place, with the aim of tasting food and drinks, observing or participating in the preparation of food and beverage, as well as entertainment and leisure through the accompanying cultural and artistic program or competition. Since these events

are mostly held in smaller towns and villages, there are conditions for the development of rural and gastronomic tourism (Bjeljac, 2010). In recent years, there have been an increasing number of events aiming to present the gastronomy of a particular part of the country. This is precisely where one can seek the opportunity for a larger number of visitors, both domestic and foreign. Through the affirmation of authentic food and beverages, any region can become a significant tourist destination, and one of the means to present and promote them can be through gastronomic events (Stojanović et al., 2018). According to Vićentijević (2015), events play a significant role in improving the quality of the tourist offer of Serbia, especially as one of the reasons for visiting certain destinations beyond the primary motive (spa, mountain and other tourist products). The importance of gastronomic events can be observed through the improvement of cultural, economic and overall social potential of a tourist destination. Some events are traditionally held every year and have become an integral part of the tourist offer. Some towns and cities are known for their gastronomic events (Milićević & Đorđević, 2016). It is very important that the organization of events in a certain destination affect the growth of tourism in the same area. The promotion and affirmation of an event is at the same time the promotion of the destination where it is held. Holding recognizable events leads to a larger number of visitors, and the most important are those who would not visit the destination if it were not for that event (Mandarić & Stamenković, 2017). In case the event is a positive experience for the visitors, their re-visit is expected, and probably recommendations to relatives and friends. Poorly organized events can worsen the image and perception of the destination. It is impossible to observe events and their effects separately from tourism, or from the economy, as they are inextricably linked (Unković & Zečević, 2011). A clearly defined gastronomic identity and heritage can be exploited in key differentiation processes, helping to convey a unique sense of a tourist destination (Fox, 2007).

A large number of tourist destinations on the market are reminiscent of each other - they have good conditions for stay and emphasize the uniqueness of their own culture and heritage. However, the perception of a particular destination has to be distinct (Mandarić, 2016). In the era of global economy and the growing need to achieve competitive advantage, “strong brands and the branding process itself are gaining importance, which is why the principles of brand management are applied even to geographical areas and destinations” (Jojčić Novaković & Mandarić, 2019, p. 47).

The goal of branding a tourist destination is to create such a perception in the minds of consumers that there is no other place as that one in the tourist market, that it is special and should be remembered as unique. However, it is important to take into account the fact that branding does not happen on the market, but exclusively in the minds and awareness of the consumers (Mandarić, 2016). A brand is the result of all the mental connections that the consumer creates with a given entity (Brzaković et al., 2019). The importance of the brand comes from the fact that it is a strategic asset for competitive advantage (Terzić & Đalić, 2019). The need for destination branding nowadays is becoming more pronounced since numerous destinations may have high quality content and services but at the same time may not be recognizable on the market. In this respect, destinations may be similar and then the brand becomes an important factor as it gives added value and a promise to potential tourists that they will experience something special there, something worth a visit. Therefore it is important to create a perception in the minds of tourists about the uniqueness of the destination (Perić & Mandarić, 2020). Branding of a destination, along with the strengthening of event tourism, can lead to significant economic results, the influx of new and retention of the existing tourists, as well as the diversification of the overall tourist offer of a country. Vojvodina with its gastronomic events can certainly be a unique and authentic destination, which should be used in developing strategies and promotion.

### **3. Authenticity in the function of developing strong brands and gastronomic events**

Gastronomic events can contribute to destination branding, which is significantly helped by the attribute of authenticity. “Authenticity shows whether a brand has a heritage and an established set of values, which is why it is able to meet the expectations of visitors” (Mandarić, 2016, p. 200). The authenticity of a brand is also related to the origin, as well as the uniqueness of a certain product. In the case of gastronomic products, this can be very significant for the tourists. When a certain product is typical of an area, it is promoted through gastronomic events that are recognizable. The authenticity of the gastronomic event is crucial in creating perception and loyalty among tourists. Gastronomic events “promote the culture of a destination and its culinary resources to enhance the tourist destination” (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020, p. 1328). The gastronomic events of Vojvodina offer a wide selection of food and drinks to tourists to satisfy their different tastes. Authentic food at events is a means of communication with visitors who, in addition to participating in cultural activities, try gastronomic specialties characteristic of a particular area and get to know the culture and traditions of the people who live there. The gastronomy of Vojvodina has been formed under the influence of complex living conditions, a large number of nations living on its territory, cultural and social events. Gastronomy can be considered as one of the most attractive tourist offers of Vojvodina, based on a large number of events offering culinary specialties (Stojanović, 2013). In the area of Vojvodina there is a mixture of cuisines with a large number of dishes. The Germans had a significant influence on gastronomy, as they brought their own dishes and customs for preparing winter food stores, growing fruit and vines, and making wine. Furthermore, the people of neighbouring countries, Romania and Hungary, as well as Slovakia and Russia, have left a large number of dishes that are still prepared in some parts of Vojvodina where these people live (Vojvodinian cuisine, 2021). A national gastronomy represents a historically originated cuisine that has developed in a certain territory, which is related to the culture, society, tradition, as well as the habits of the people who live there (Vukić, 2019). Attractive gastronomic offers of scattered isolated farms (granges), with different architectural and cultural traditions, are one of the main products that can be offered to guests. The gastronomic offer of Vojvodina is reflected in authentic food, desserts and wines, which are promoted and marketed through various events. The number of gastronomic events is at a high level, and includes numerous specifics of a certain place and people of that area. Moreover, through numerous museums of food and beverages, as well as granges, ethno houses, chardas and rural households, authentic Vojvodina specialties are offered and promoted. Gastronomy is significant because of its ethical and sustainable values that are based on local food, culture, traditions, lifestyles, practices that not only allure the visitors but also at the same time promote the destination marketing (Mohanty et al., 2020). Gastronomic events increase the need for tourists to visit a certain destination; therefore, it is expected that these events, which are very important for the development of gastronomic tourism, will be more represented in the promotion of certain tourist places. Every region abounding in authentic gastronomic products should be represented and placed in the overall tourist offer of a particular country (Čavić & Stojanović, 2018). In addition to the Dolovo Strudel Festival, in the area of the South Banat district there are well-known events dedicated to: preparation of goulash (Debeljača, Baranda, Omoljica), competitions in preparing soups and cauldron foods (Pančevo, Ivanovo, Kovin), bacon (Kačarevo), ham (Omoljica), desserts and cakes (Crepaja), ritual bread (Starčevo). Events dedicated to wine are present in the vine-growing area – Vršac, and events dedicated to brandy are held in Bela Crkva (Čavić & Stojanović, 2018). All these events can be used as a unique and authentic gastronomic offer for tourists who visit or pass through Banat. Traditional gastronomic products, due to their character, quality and heritage,

could “become a regional brand and also promote the region as a unique destination of rural tourism” (Mandarić et al., 2017, p. 787).

Table 1: Number of gastronomic events in Vojvodina per months

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Month when the events are held</b>		
January	4	2.06
February	20	10.31
March	6	3.09
April	5	2.59
May	26	13.40
June	21	10.82
July	12	6.19
August	32	16.49
September	26	13.40
October	23	11.86
November	13	6.70
December	6	3.09

Source: Author’s research

Table 1 shows the number of gastronomic events held every month during a year. These events are officially registered and can be found on the website of the Tourist Organization of Vojvodina (Tourist Organization of Vojvodina, 2021). There are 194 of them in total, and they are placed under the category of gastronomic events and promote certain food or drinks. Each of them is specific and unique, reflecting the people, tradition and culture of the place where they are held. We can conclude that the largest number of these events are held in August - 32 (16.49%), whereas the smallest number in January – only 4 (2.06%), as well as in April - 5 (2.59%), March - 6 (3.09%) and December - 6 (3.09%). In other months, that number is increasing and it is much higher. In 2020 most of these events were not held due to the declared Covid 19 pandemic, or were just symbolically marked by the organizers so as not to break the tradition. However, the events did not have a large number of visitors as previous years, because of the respect for epidemiological measures and the restrictions related to the gathering of a large number of people.

#### 4. Research methods and results

The subject of the research are gastronomic events, which with their authenticity can influence the creation of recognizability, as well as better promotion of Vojvodina as a tourist destination. The research was conducted on the sample of 150 respondents, with a deliberate convenient sample, through personal examination during the event Dolovo Strudel Festival in September 2019. All respondents were informed that the survey was anonymous and would be used for scientific purposes. After the review and processing, all 150 survey questionnaires were found valid. In the conducted field research, the examination method was used, and survey was used as a technique. The questionnaire consisted of 22 open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questions were divided into three segments. The first part referred to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, whereas the second part was about the event itself (whether it is authentic, how they learned about it, what they find especially interesting etc.), and the questions in the third part were about the Dolovo strudel (whether they tried it, what type of strudel they prefer, whether it is authentic and promoted enough etc.). The respondents were the event visitors and members of several associations. To present the description of the research, descriptive statistical measures were used –

frequencies and percentages. The questions from the questionnaire were categorical questions, so the choice of statistical tests is within the framework of non-parametric statistics. Binary logistic regression was used as the statistical method. Logistic regression was applied to examine the influence of several variables on one, and binary regression as the dependent variable is dichotomous. The Chi-square and Fisher's test were used to examine the differences. Statistical analyses were conducted within the statistical package SPSS 22.0 (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows 22.0*) (Leech et al., 2005; Pallant, 2011; Sheskin, 2004).

In order to gain a better understanding of the visitors to Dolovo Strudel Festival, Table 2 indicates the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	29	19.3
Female	121	80.07
<b>Age</b>		
up to 35	27	18.0
from 36 to 50	38	25.3
over 50	85	56.7
<b>Level of education</b>		
Elementary, high school	94	62.7
College, university	47	31.3
Master's degree, PhD	9	6.0

Source: Author's research

Table 2 shows that the number of female visitors to the event (80.07%) is higher than the number of male visitors (19.3%), which indicates that the population more interested in strudels and the event are women. Regarding the age of the respondents, most of them are over 50 (56.7%), followed by those between 36 and 50 (25.3%) and those younger than 35 (18.0%). As far as the level of education is concerned, most respondents completed elementary and high school (62.7%), college or university (31.3%), whereas only 6.0% hold a Master's degree or PhD.

In order to examine the influence of the event program on the perception of the authenticity of the Dolovo Strudel Festival, the statistical method of binary logistic regression was used. Criterion (dependent) variable is the authenticity of Dolovo Strudel Festival, operationalized through the question from the questionnaire: "Do you think that the event is authentic?" coded as dummy variable (categorical): 1- yes and 0 – no. Predictor (independent) variables are the attractiveness of the overall program and the attractiveness of the competitive part of the event. The variable regarding the attractiveness of the competitive part of the event was operationalized through the question from the questionnaire: "Do you find the competitive part of this event interesting?", and the attractiveness of the overall program of the event through the question: "Do you find the program of the event interesting?". Both predictor variables are dichotomous coded as dummy variable: 1- yes and 0 – no. The model is statistically significant;  $\chi^2(2)=21.68$ ,  $p=0.00$ ; which indicates that the predictor variables significantly contribute to the interpretation of the criterion variable – the authenticity of the Dolovo Strudel Festival. Predictor variables interpret between 13.5 (Cox and Snell  $R^2$ ) and 53.1 (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) the variances of the criterion variable.



Table 3: Contribution of independent variables to the model of authenticity of the Dolovo Strudel Festival

	$\beta$	p	Exp(B)	95 confidence interval	
				Lower endpoint	Upper endpoint
<b>Do you find the program of this event interesting? (Yes)</b>	3.522	0.071	33.867	0.740	1550.785
<b>Do you find the competitive part of this event interesting? (Yes)</b>	3.961	0.002	52.513	4.389	628.266
<b>Constant</b>	-2.376	0.219	0.093		

Source: Author's research

Table 3 shows that the attractiveness of the competitive part of the event significantly contributes to the interpretation of the authenticity of the Dolovo Strudel Festival,  $p < 0.05$ . Those who find the competitive part of the event interesting are more likely to perceive the event as authentic (OR=52.51; 95 CI=4.39-628.27;  $p=0.00$ ) compared to those who do not find it interesting. The competitive part of the event is very unique every year, as the quality of the strudels taking part in the competition is evaluated. Based on quality parameters such as: appearance of strudel, ratio of dough and filling, whether it is coated with eggs and has a nice crust, quality of dough and filling, harmony of taste etc., the expert jury selects and declares the best strudels in several categories. This is very interesting for all the visitors, as well as for the members of numerous associations.

In order to test the differences between those who find the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic and those who do not find it authentic, the Fisher exact test was used (Table 4). The results of Fisher's test indicate that those who consider the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic are significantly different from those who do not find it authentic in their answer to the question: "Do you find the program of this event interesting?";  $p=0.00$ . Almost all the respondents (99.3%) who consider the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic find the program of the event interesting, whereas 40% of the respondents who do not consider this event authentic do not find the program interesting. When asked: "In your opinion, is this event sufficiently promoted?", 120 (80%) of the respondents replied YES, and only 30 (20%) replied NO. This is an indicator of a good promotion of the event; however, it does not mean that it should not be raised to an even higher level, in order to attract a larger number of visitors. In reply to "How did you learn about this event?", 102 (68%) respondents said that they heard about it from their friends, followed by 28 (18.7%) respondents who learned about it on TV, and only 20 (13.3%) learned about it on the Internet. This is very significant for planning future advertising and promoting the Dolovo Strudel Festival.

The results of Fisher's test indicate that those who consider the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic are significantly different from those who do not find it authentic in their answer to the question: "Do you find the competitive part of this event interesting?";  $p=0.00$ . Those who find the event authentic at the same time like the competitive part of the event (95.2%), and those who do not think the event is authentic do not like the competitive part either (80%). When asked "What do you consider authentic in this event?", the respondents mostly replied "strudels" 104 (69.3%), then "program of the event" 38 (25.3%) and "competition" 8 (5.3%). Authenticity is a very important part of the brand. According to the respondents,

strudels are something authentic and therefore they can be the main advantage in branding of this event.

Table 4: Differences in terms of the authenticity of the event Dolovo Strudel Festival

		Do you find the event authentic?				N		p
		no		yes		f	%	
		f	%	f	%			
Gender	male	2	40.0	27	18.6	29	19.3	0.248
	female	3	60.0	118	81.4	121	80.7	
Age	up to 35	2	40.0	25	17.2	27	18.0	0.653
	from 36 to 50	1	20.0	37	25.5	38	25.3	
	over 50	2	40.0	83	57.2	85	56.7	
Level of education	Elementary, high school	4	80.0	90	62.1	94	62.7	0.651
	College, university	0	0.0	47	32.4	47	31.3	
	Master's degree, PhD	1	20.0	8	5.5	9	6.0	
Is this event sufficiently promoted, in your opinion?	no	2	40.0	28	19.3	30	20.0	0.261
	yes	3	60.0	117	80.7	120	80.0	
How did you learn about this event?	TV	1	20.0	27	18.6	28	18.7	0.655
	Internet	1	20.0	19	13.1	20	13.3	
	Friends' recommendation	3	60.0	99	68.3	102	68.0	
What do you consider authentic in this event?	strudels	4	80.0	100	69.0	104	69.3	0.513
	program of the event	1	20.0	37	25.5	38	25.3	
	competition	0	0.0	8	5.5	8	5.3	
Have you tried Dolovo strudel before?	no	1	20.0	28	19.3	29	19.3	0.664
	yes	4	80.0	117	80.7	121	80.7	
Which strudel do you like tasting most?	Poppyseed strudel	3	60.0	87	60.0	90	60.0	0.677
	Walnut strudel	1	20.0	37	25.5	38	25.3	
	Carob strudel	0	0.0	10	6.9	10	6.7	
	Fruit filling strudel	1	20.0	8	5.5	9	6.0	
	Savory filling strudel	0	0.0	3	2.1	3	2.0	
Do you think that the Dolovo strudel is the best cake of Banat?	no	2	40.0	23	15.9	25	16.7	0.194
	yes	3	60.0	122	84.1	125	83.3	
Do you find the program of this event interesting?	no	2	40.0	1	0.7	3	2.0	0.003
	yes	3	60.0	144	99.3	147	98.0	
Are you a member of the Association or a visitor?	association	2	40.0	84	57.9	86	57.3	0.651
	visitor	3	60.0	61	42.1	64	42.7	
Do you find the	no	4	80.0	7	4.8	11	7.3	0.000



competitive part of this event interesting?	yes	1	20.0	138	95.2	139	92.7	
Do you like the idea of organizing a collective wedding for the first time in this event?	no	0	0.0	8	5.5	8	5.3	0.757
	yes	5	100.0	137	94.5	142	94.7	
What are you taking as a souvenir from this event?	strudels	1	20.0	83	57.2	84	56.0	0.541
	handicrafts	2	40.0	14	9.7	16	10.7	
	memories	2	40.0	48	33.1	50	33.3	
The reason you came to Strudel Festival?	socializing	2	40.0	86	59.3	88	58.7	0.649
	strudels	0	0.0	41	28.3	41	27.3	
	curiosity	3	60.0	18	12.4	21	14.0	
Do you think that the Dolovo strudel is a recognizable brand?	no	2	40.0	8	5.5	10	6.7	0.036
	yes	3	60.0	137	94.5	140	93.3	

Source: Author's research

The results of Fisher's test indicate that those who consider the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic are significantly different from those who do not find it authentic in their answer to the question: "Do you find the competitive part of this event interesting?";  $p=0.00$ . Those who find the event authentic at the same time like the competitive part of the event (95.2%), and those who do not think the event is authentic do not like the competitive part either (80%). When asked "What do you consider authentic in this event?", the respondents mostly replied "strudels" 104 (69.3%), then "program of the event" 38 (25.3%) and "competition" 8 (5.3%). Authenticity is a very important part of the brand. According to the respondents, strudels are something authentic and therefore they can be the main advantage in branding of this event.

The results of Fisher's test indicate that those who consider the Dolovo Strudel Festival authentic are significantly different from those who do not find it authentic in their answer to the question: "Do you think that the Dolovo strudel is a recognizable brand?";  $p=0.04$ . Those who consider this event authentic also think that the Dolovo strudel is a recognizable brand (94.5%). The connection is very significant from the aspect of authenticity and uniqueness of this event. When asked "Have you tried Dolovo strudel before?" 121 (80.7%) respondents said YES and they have already attended this event before, whereas 29 (19.3%) respondents said NO. The aim of the question "Which strudel do you like tasting most?" is to show which type of strudel is most tasted and sought after among visitors. Most respondents – 90 (60%) - confirmed that is the poppyseed strudel, then walnut strudel - 38 (25.3%) respondents, and the remaining three types of strudel are much less popular according to the respondents. Strudel is a cake that has traditionally been prepared and eaten in Banat for a long time. The question "Do you think that the Dolovo strudel is the best cake of Banat?" 125 (83.3%) respondents answered YES, and only 25 (16.7%) respondents said NO. When asked "Do you find the program of this event interesting?" 147 (98%) respondents replied YES, and only 3 (2.0%) said NO. This shows that the overall program of the Dolovo Strudel Festival is certainly well designed and interesting for visitors. The question "Are you a member of the

Association or a visitor?”, produced the following answers – 86 members of the Association (57.3%), and 64 visitors (42.7%), which is important in order to receive feedback from two different angles. When asked: “Do you find the competitive part of this event interesting?” 139 (92.7%) respondents said YES, and only 11 (7.3%) said NO, which indicates that the competitive part received a positive evaluation from the respondents. A collective wedding was organized in this event, so the respondents were asked “Do you like the idea of organizing a collective wedding for the first time in this event?”- 142 (94.7%) respondents replied YES, and only 8 (5.3%) said NO. The visitors were pleasantly surprised by the wedding, as this was an opportunity for a number of couples to get married as part of such a beautiful event. When asked “What are you taking as a souvenir from this event?”, most respondents said “strudels” -84 (56.0%), then “memories from this event” -50 (33.3%) and various types of handicraft 16(10.7%). An edible souvenir such as strudel can be something authentic and after the event the visitors have impressions to talk about. In reply to “The reason you came to Strudel Festival?”, most respondents said it was for socializing - 88 (58.7%), taking into account the fact that such events are a great opportunity for the members of the association and visitors to socialize and exchange experience, then “for strudels” - 41 (27.3%) and “curiosity” as they heard about his event - 21 (14.0%). When asked “Do you think that the Dolovo strudel is a recognizable brand?”, 140 (93.3%) respondents said YES, and only 10(6.7%) respondents said NO. The results of this research indicate that this is an authentic gastronomic event which, with its program and strudels, has a significant role in the gastronomic offer of Vojvodina and Serbia. Gastronomic events with an authentic gastronomic offer are increasingly attracting many domestic and foreign tourists. However, they are still not sufficiently promoted, and they can contribute to the strengthening of the economy, both in the region and the entire country (Čavić & Stojanović, 2018).

## 5. Conclusions

High attendance at a tourist destination and creating a brand at destination, through the development of event tourism, contribute to strengthening the competitive position of the destination, enable easier overcoming of geographical distance, attracting new and retaining existing tourists and visitors to the destination, while achieving favourable economic effects (Mandarić & Stamenković, 2017). The need for destination branding nowadays is becoming more pronounced as many destinations may have high quality content and services but are not necessarily recognizable on the market (Perić & Mandarić, 2020). Vojvodina has a large number of gastronomic events held regularly, every year at the same time. Each of these events is characteristic of the place where it is held, as it reflects and presents the people who live there, with their customs, culture and tradition. A number of associations and various societies have been formed, in order to present in an organized and adequate way an event that can become a kind of brand of a place, and thus an important segment of the tourist and gastronomic offer of Vojvodina and Serbia. The results of the research indicate that the gastronomic events held in Vojvodina are authentic in terms of the uniqueness of the dishes, desserts and wines they promote and that in certain cases they represent the brand of a particular village, town or city.

The Dolovo Strudel Festival is an authentic event traditionally held in Dolovo near Pančevo. The distinctive feature of this event are Dolovo strudels, which are unique and attract an increasing number of tourists every year. The research indicates that the Dolovo Strudel Festival is recognized by the tourists who visit it, but it is still not promoted throughout Serbia although it would enable it to have a better placement in gastronomic movements of tourists. Many events are recognizable, unique and represent the brand of the place where they are held and of Vojvodina as a tourist destination. According to the Strategy for the development of tourism in Serbia for the period 2016-2025, events are positioned in the

second place as a tourist product of special importance for the development of tourism. In the same document, gastronomic tourism is ranked among the modern trends in the motives of tourists to visit a destination (Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, 2016).

One of the research limitations of the present study is the application of dichotomous (Yes/No) questions, preventing the respondents from expressing their attitudes more freely. Another limitation is the fact that the research does not apply to larger-scale events. Furthermore, new gastronomic events appear every year, with a more complex content, which might affect the authenticity of this particular event.

It is recommended that the promotion of the Dolovačka strudel event, which was the subject of research in the paper, but also other gastronomic events that have great tourist potential, should be improved. Creating the perception and a positive image of a destination among potential tourists is important and it is something that all the capacities of the destination should be used to achieve. Marketing communication is very important in tourism and provision of information and the exchange of ideas and experiences (Marić et al., 2020) can help gastronomic events to achieve better higher attendance. Some of the recommendations are to improve the information on the websites of tourist organizations, make gastronomic films about the events, improve the contents and appearance of the brochures and leaflets, more frequent visits of the members of the Association in TV shows, form gastronomic routes through the places where food and beverages are promoted, as well as all other activities that could improve the promotion and create a recognizable image and brand of Vojvodina as a tourist destination. The authenticity and uniqueness of gastronomic events can certainly be and should be a good basis for the promotion of gastronomy, for destination branding and for attracting both domestic and foreign tourists.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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