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## NATURE AND NATURAL FOOD PRODUCTS IN FUTURE TOURIST'S PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*Two years after Covid-19 outbreak, the trend of local movements in ecologically clean areas is continuing. Parallel with searching for nature, tourists renew old, almost forgotten, traditional nature-inspired recipes. This study investigates tourists' attitudes towards natural areas, interest in natural products experiences and their preference to renovate traditional healthy food products and to be included in future food tourism offers. The study includes standard and ethnobotanical interviews aimed to show the stronger connection between tourists and nature compared to the previous period and its intention to mitigate and adapt to Covid-19 challenges. The results show continuous changes in tourist perspective related to nature and natural food products in general. The results were compared with previous research and show that tourists are still interested in natural boosters through natural food, staying in nature, and active involvement in natural product collecting, however, the focus has shifted from traditional medicinal plants to edible ones.*

**Key Words:** *natural products, nature, future of tourism*

**JEL classification:** *I12, Q57*

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## **Introduction**

### **Covid-19 dictates future trends in tourism- getting back to nature and tradition**

The corona virus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) has seriously endangered human health, life and livelihood (Sharma & Mahendru, 2020). The industry that could rely on digital technologies has had some success on the one hand (Mehroliya et al., 2020), while on the other hand tourism mobility is necessary for tourism. When comparing the first quarters of 2019 and 2020, the number of tourists decreased by 22% (World Tourism Organization, 2020). Therefore, the pandemic threatens, if this trend continues, to have a very negative impact on the development and prospects of tourism. Examining the effects of the pandemic on the hospitality and tourism industry, Rivera (2020) in his study pointed out the directions of future research aimed at solving the problems plaguing the tourism industry.

Locks and social distance as well as other forms of restraint indicate that important decisions are urgently needed to help avoid or significantly mitigate the effects on tourism (World Economic Forum, 2020), and that in addition to technological advances, these measures have proved more effective (Baldwin & Mauro, 2020). Pollock (2019b), points out that in Regenerative Tourism there is an unbreakable link between the visitor and the destination as part of a living system built into the natural environment and that everything works according to natural principles. There is an important destination marketing and management as well as the development of tourism products that are important for the recovery of tourism.

In recent years, the role of landscape in tourism has been the subject of many interdisciplinary researches (Skowronek et al., 2015; Skowronek et al., 2018), through the dependence of culture, time and space (Council of Europe, 2020; Clegg et al., 2002). Special emphasis is placed on experiences after visiting certain destinations (Nguyen, 2020). Starting from the very definition of landscape (Kareiva, 2008; Kulczyk, 2013; Le et al., 2020), it is important to emphasize the connection between tourism, landscape and visitors because they can not be separated. It is important to note that special landscapes attract special tourists with appropriate perceptions and expectations (Pyle, 1993; Pyle, 2003), as well as different experiences (awe, excitement, education or a sense of well-being). Visitors

achieve regeneration through change, tradition, pleasure, sports and recreation, socialization at the appropriate destination. This is crucially influenced by the mobility of visitors (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2005).

The fact that there is a certain disconnection between the natural environment and people and that in general the increasingly pronounced urbanization has the consequence that a sedentary lifestyle conditions a sedentary way of entertainment (internet, video games, TV, etc.), and that therefore Pile and his „The extinction of the experience” (Kareiva, 2008; Kulczyk, 2013; Le et al., 2020) indicates a reduction in outdoor recreation. This has negative consequences on mental and physical development, especially during childhood, as well as on the attitude towards the environment (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2005).

Taking into account the cultural economy of space (Terkenli & d’Hautesserre, 2006; Terkenli et al., 2019), the characteristics of leisure and tourism increasingly affect the characteristics of the landscape so that the difference between tourism and leisure becomes less pronounced. Therefore, the natural landscape is one of the primary and most important media for establishing contact between the destination and tourists.

Unfavorable socio-economic conditions have affected the smaller impact of tradition due to the loss of primacy of local leadership in decision-making in relation to newcomers for tourism-related jobs (Park et al., 2012). In South Korea, research has shown that in rural areas, rice, fruit and vegetable growers have had the most contact with tourists through their activities (Park et al., 2012). These are the trends in Serbia which include phenomena of rural tourism such as religious tourism, wine, gastro, health tourism etc. (Baćac, 2011). The importance is greater because rural areas make up a large part of Serbia. It is important to point out that population migration can reduce the development gap between urban and rural areas. Important elements such as the preservation and protection of the environment (historical sites and natural landscapes) are crucial for the development of the tourist offer in rural areas. The important fact is that rural tourism is at the beginning of development in Serbia and that there are great differences in development between the regions. The holistic principle has been applied in Serbia, ie all elements of marketing are important (Dašić et al., 2020).

### **Future tourism trends based on natural products**

Natural ecosystems provide a range of goods and services for the population. Each country has its tradition in natural products utilization. After the Covid-19 outbreak, people worldwide express their interest in natural products, especially those that boost the immune system and the special ones with antiviral effects. There is no absolute effective therapy in Covid-19 treatment, which implicates that herbal medicine could be an alternative (Adhikari et al., 2021). An interesting fact is that about 85% of the global population depends on or bases the healthcare on natural products (Pešić, 2015). According to The World Health Organization (WHO) report, traditional herbal medicine has an important role concerning health goals, which complements increased demands in this field (Das et al., 2020). Traditionally used plants in China, India, Russia, Balkan countries, etc., find their place in current trends and reveal old immune boosters, plant therapy, natural-based food. Following these trends, people return to sources of health and change their demands. At first, medicinal herbs and their bioactive constituents come to the centre of interest together with healthy food enriched with functional ingredients. Recent research shows a range of plants with antiviral effects for which the demand is increasing including *Artemisia annua*, *Dioscorea batatas*, *Glycyrrhiza radix*, *Polygonum multiflorum*, etc. (Adhikari et al., 2021; Alagu Lakshmi et al., 2021; Boukhatem & Setzer, 2020). Also, food plays an important role in boosting immunity. Traditional natural-based food has several main compounds such as antioxidants, vitamins and minerals especially those based on herbs. Lipophilicity, which is shown through hydrophobic binding (Stojanović et al., 2020), is one of the activities of immuno-boosters in our body.

Some studies reported that food plays crucial motivational factor behind tourists' travel and destination choices. Despite the pandemic period, the neophilic food tourism and demand for exotic species and wildlife still exists (Ying et al., 2021), while on the other hand getting back to tradition becomes a new choice for the future of tourism. The new wave of tourism goes a step forward than sustainability and suggests a regenerative direction in terms of “renew”, “rebuild”, “regrow”, “restored” everything related to nature, nature services, tradition, culture, indigenous skills, etc. *Regenerative tourism aims to restore disrupted natural and traditional systems in the world of indigenous nature, and based on nature's principles establish new return to old conditions (Fountain, 2021). This new tourism direction flourished especially during Covid-19 around the world. If*

regenerative tourism is a return to natural systems and principles, then the Republic of Serbia is the place for its implementation through natural products and long historical tradition and culture.

The aim of this study is to examine the potential interests of tourists in specific natural areas and natural products in the future period and, using comparison with previous research, identify whether the trend has continued.

## **Research methodology**

### **Researched area**

The research was conducted on the territory of the Republic of Serbia respecting geographical distribution. Considering the fact that there is a movement from cities to rural areas, the research included the urban populations from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Niš, Kraljevo, Užice, Vranje and Valjevo as centres of coronavirus infection flow.

Figure 1: *The map of the researched area*



Source: *Authors*

### **Data collection and analysis**

The questionnaire included four parts and was based on interviews where the sets of questions in complex and multidisciplinary surveys are tailored to investigate tourists' attitudes or interests concerning the future food habits based on natural products and staying in nature during and after the Covid-19 period and implications for changes in the tourism sector. In this research 123 respondents (N-123) participated. The first part of the research included basic socio-demographic data (gender, age, level of education and the level of economic status) about respondents, while the second part included a set of questions related to the most popular natural areas in the last two years (such as protected areas - national parks, nature parks, special nature reserves, etc., affirmed touristic rural areas, unaffirmed ecologically preserved areas, wilderness areas). The third part of the questionnaire referred to statements related to natural-based products demands (e.g. traditional plant-based food, traditional immunity-boosting beverages, food based on old varieties of fruits and vegetables, etc.), and the fourth part of the research asked respondents to express how much they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement using a five-point Likert scale (1- I strongly disagree, 2- I disagree, 3- I have no opinion, 4- I agree, 5- I strongly agree).

The collected dataset was stored in the excel database and used for further detailed analysis. The research method was based on the principle of widely used ethnobotanical interviews (Luković et al., 2021) and mathematical analysis in support of the methods used in this paper (Rosic et al., 2011). For this purpose, one parameter that describes the frequency of the mentioned term - RFC (Relative frequency of citation) was selected.

$$RFC=FC/N \ (0<RFC<1) \ (1)$$

Where, N is the total number of respondents and FC represents the number of respondents using the mentioned specific term.

The results are presented in tables and graphs.

## Results and discussion

### Socio-demographic analysis

Table 1: *Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Economic status</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	51	18-35	24	Secondary	61.5	<of average	21.4
Female	72	35-50	45	High	38.5	average	51.9
		50-	31			>average	26.7

Source: *Authors*

In our study, based on the socio-demographic characteristics of the examinees (Table 1), we can conclude that more women are represented (58.5%), which is 17% more than men. About 45% subjects of both sexes (middle-aged) were covered by the survey, and 61.5% of the total number of respondents have secondary education. About 38.5% subjects have high education. Most respondents have an average economic status (about half - 51.9%). Entities with economic status below the average make up 21.4% and above the average 26.7%. All this indicates the profile of the examinees were impacted by their financial situation (Glanz et al., 1998), type of their work (Wadolowska et al., 2008) and food choice. The profile of the subjects is very important because on the basis of all the presented characteristics we can determine the sphere of interest of the respondents. This is important because based on the information obtained, we can determine the potential future focuses of tourists.

### Nature as a potential future focus of tourists

The results show that in the previous period rural areas, especially the affirmed ones, were targeted destinations, while future tourists' aspirations include, in addition to rural areas, nature protected sites, as well as unaffirmed rural areas. The basis for comparative analysis was a research questionnaire.

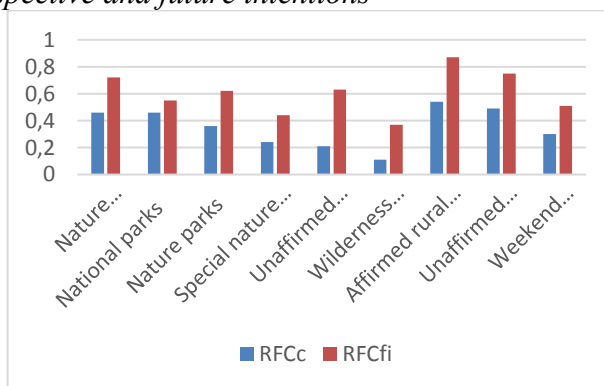
Table 2: *The most visited natural areas in the period 2020-2021 and future preferences of tourists*

<b>Natural ambient</b>	<b>FC</b>	<b>RFCc</b>	<b>FC</b>	<b>RFCfi</b>	<b>r</b>
Nature protected areas in general	57	0.46	89	0.72	0.8268
National parks	56	0.46	68	0.55	
Nature parks	44	0.36	76	0.62	
Special nature reserve	29	0.24	54	0.44	

Unaffirmed ecologically preserved areas	26	0.21	77	0.63
Wilderness areas	14	0.11	45	0.37
Affirmed rural areas	66	0.54	107	0.87
Unaffirmed rural areas	60	0.49	92	0.75
Weekend resorts in the vicinity of cities	37	0.30	63	0.51

Source: Authors (\*RFCc- Relative frequency of citation current situation, RFCfi- Relative frequency of citation future intention, r-Pearson correlation coefficient)

Figure 2: Comparative analysis of relative frequency citation in current tourist's perspective and future intentions



Source: Authors (\*RFCc- Relative frequency of citation current situation, RFCfi- Relative frequency of citation future intention)

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected destination selection and travel habits in the medium term for fear of infection as well as avoiding large groups, with the decision being influenced by the health and hygiene conditions of the host (Orîndaru et al., 2021). It is assumed that this trend will continue due to the long duration of the pandemic, which significantly affected the change of all habits in general. When we comparing RFCc with RFCfi, we can conclude that all the listed natural elements (Table 2, Figure 2) are significantly more visited by tourists, which shows the significant value of the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.8268$ ). The highest growth was observed in Affirmed rural areas, unaffirmed rural areas and Nature protected areas in general. On the other hand, the least changes are in Wilderness areas and Special nature reserve. This indicates to us the trends of visits by tourists and their interests that are expected in the future.



### Natural food products in future tourist's perspective

Products from nature and old varieties of fruits and vegetables have a centuries-long tradition in Balkan cuisine. They are the cultural and historical treasures of a nation, because they have been created for decades, even centuries, and are deeply rooted in the national gastronomy. As such they must be preserved through the promotion of tradition and cultural heritage. The results of this study confirm the strong interest of tourists in traditional recipes based on natural ingredients and local domestic products (Table 3). According to the RFC index the most frequently mentioned natural products were wild berries (0.87), mushrooms (0.71) and old varieties of wheat, fruits and vegetables (avg. 0.50), while medicinal plants were reserved for connoisseurs with 0.46.

Table 3: *The most frequently cited natural food products*

Natural products	FC	RFC	Plant-based food/Food products/traditional recipes mentioned by respondents
Wild edible plants in general	107	0.87	e.g., Nettle/ wild cabbage - greens/wild garlic/dandelion/Black elder: "sarma" (cabbage rolls), pies, salads, cooked food, dough, drinks, etc.
Wild berries	93	0.76	e.g., Bueberry/ raspberry/ wild strawberry/blackthorn/blackberry/pomegranate/ cornel/juniper: pie, juice, liquer, dry, tea, jam, compote, etc.
Wild mushrooms	87	0.71	e.g., Field mushroom/chanterelles/boletus-porcini mushrooms/common morel/pepper milkcap/chicken-of-the-woods/parasol mushroom: Side dish, grilled, baked, fried, stuffing, jam, tea, winter pickles, pie, goulas, aroma, etc.
Medicinal plants	56	0.46	e.g. Mint/lemon grass/oregano/thyme/ mountain germander/ chamomile/ yarrow: Tea, spice, aroma, etc.
Autochtonus fruits	63	0.51	e.g. Apple varieties- "budimka", "kožara", "petrovača"- St.Peters apple, Pear varieties- Medlar tree, "takuša", lubeničarka- fruits like watermelon, oskoruša- Service tree, zimnjača- winter pear, oldplum varieties, quince, peach, apricot: beverages (juice, compote, rakia, "vodnjika"), pies, jam, baked, dried, cakes, etc.

Old varieties of wheat	60	0.49	e.g. Old wheat varieties- spelt, millet, rye oats barley;pseudograins-buckwheat, amaranth:Bread, pastries and rolls, pie crusts, cakes, pancakes, “cicvara”, “kačamak”, beer and yeast, etc.
Old varieties of vegetable	62	0.50	E.g. domestic onion, cabbage –“futoški”, “srpskimelez”; pepper- turšijara, “belopalanačavrta”; tomato cultivars – “jabučar”, “volovskooko”; beans –“tetovac”, “gradištanac”: traditional cooked food “varivo”, pickles, salads, etc.

Source: *Authors*

Old varieties are incomparably more resistant to disease, drought or some other weather conditions or related weather issues, however, they contain plenty of functional ingredients. Sometimes they look a little unsightly and thus they lose the battle with modern varieties of fruits and vegetables which, it must be admitted, look beautiful, big, but it is not known how many times and how they were all treated. Corona-19 pandemic brings new insights concerning health and self-preservation. Many people return to natural food, traditional recipes and over the last two years they expect to get domestic products like bread of old or pseudo grains, antioxidants in a glass of squeezed berries, or some forgotten recipes such as “kajmak” made of maize “osmak” ground in watermill or “vodnjika” elixir in rural areas as centres of tourism (Luković et al., 2021). It is a real challenge for tourist households to revive old techniques, recipes and include ingredients from nature.

### Comparative analysis

Using Jaccard index of similarity, the comparison concerning natural product demands between pervious researches and current results was done. Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to overview range of natural products for which the demand by tourists still exists based on the parameters RFC last year and RFC this year. The results show that demand for wild berries and mushrooms continues and shows a very similar trend to previous research (table 4). The differences in natural products demand are related to old varieties of fruits, vegetables and wheat which was not the case last year. The previous research shows high demand for medicinal plants, which is probably related to fear of covid-19 complications

(Luković & Nićiforović, 2021). At present, tourists are more oriented to healthy food and functional food ingredients, than the natural remedies.

Table 4: *Comparative analysis of the main natural products demands in the last two years and this year*

	WBly/WBty	OFly/Ofty	OVly/OVty	MPly/MPty	Mly/Mty
Jaccard index of similarity	0.73	0.33	0.41	0.53	0.87
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.84	0.71	0.63	0.34	0.81

Source: *Authors (WB-wild berries, OF- old fruits varieties, OV- old vegetable varieties, MP- medicinal plants, M- mushrooms)*

The shown results (Table 5) are in line with the trend of using healthy food and indicators of future aspirations of tourists.

Table 5: *Future trends in tourism*

Code	Statement	M	SD
<b>S1</b>	Future tourism should be based on local ecosystem goods and services	4.7967	0.3604
<b>S2</b>	The promotion of local natural resources should be more highlighted in tourism offer	4.0213	0.7668
<b>S3</b>	Nature-based tourism is the future choice of travellers	4.5076	0.7801
<b>S4</b>	Tourists will return to old habits after the pandemic period (mass tourism, conventional food, etc.)	3.0271	0.4519
<b>S5</b>	Tourists will be getting back to tradition, old recipes and local natural food ingredients	4.4866	0.4477

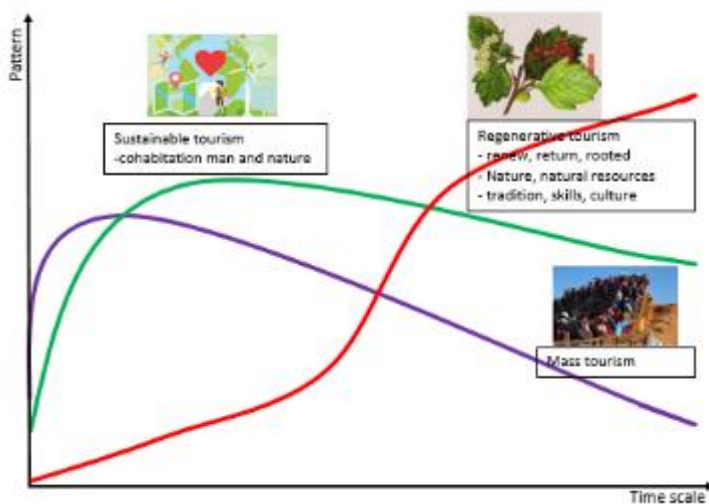
Source: *Authors*

At the top of the interest in the results (Table 5) is the growth of local ecosystem goods and services, local natural food ingredients with old habits. Somewhat less interesting will be the local natural resource and the choice of travelers. All this indicates the events after the easing of the measures that were applied due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Future tourist's perspective - nature and natural products

If sustainable tourism balances economic, social and environmental aspects related to travel, thus achieving its goals through ecotourism and responsible travel, then regenerative tourism in the post-pandemic period seeks to create new aspirations and ideas and therefore preserve or improve a specific destination for future generations or enhance well-being in general. The focus of regenerative tourism is on considering natural values, human health and well-being and indigenous community identities. The decline of mass tourism as a historical and heritage construct can be expected in future due to its adverse effects (economic, social, cultural and ecological), which opens the opportunities for rapid development of new tourism directions (Theng et al., 2015).

Figure 3: *Illustration of tourism trends - what is the way of nature and natural products*



Source: *Author's. Modified and inspired by the metamorphosis of tourism, by Wah, 2017. <https://medium.com/@designforsustainability/sustainability-is-not-enough-we-need-regenerative-cultures-4abb3c78e68b> (4 April 2022).*

Small-scale results in this research confirm global movements that consider nature, natural products and a general holistic approach to health, access to ecosystem services in the human surrounding, reviving indigenous tradition in future decades (Figure 3). The post-Covid tourism creates space

to pay attention to local communities, their life and ecosystem, enabling focus on the offer itself more than on the different demands.

### **Conclusion**

Man has always sought and still wants to know nature and the possibilities it offers him. In recent times, man has separated himself from nature and succumbed to modern heritage. Covid-19 stopped time and changed the routes of movement in many spheres of life. The fear of infection and its consequences changed the way of thinking from cities to villages, from global to local, and from modern food to traditional one. The aspiration of tourists in the last two years has been oriented to the well-known and long-confirmed principles of a healthy diet and staying in nature. The previous research, as well as this one, contributes to our understanding of the specific nature of ecosystem services that are the focus of tourists during and after the pandemic. The results show that there is still a trend to include wild species in addition to cultivated ones. Wild berries, mushrooms, old varieties of fruits, vegetables and wheat are at the centre of interest of a tourist. They expect a natural environment, healthy food and a return to tradition.

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