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TOURISM AND ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTION IN CROATIA:
CASE STUDY OF THE CETINA REGION

by
Marina Pavletić

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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TOURISM AND ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTION IN CROATIA: CASE STUDY OF THE CETINA REGION

Marina Pavletić, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2015

Croatia is an emerging tourist destination where attractive beaches, rich culture and culinary delights form a perfect combination for a great vacation. As the number of tourists visiting Croatia continues to grow, their demand for food is following suit. However, more than half of the food purchased in Croatia is imported, while agricultural land in many Croatian regions is neglected. As the largest number of Croatia's tourists comes from the European Union, which spent €22 billion on organic food in 2014, this study looks at opportunities and challenges for organic farming in Croatia as an alternative to conventional agriculture in the context of how this will improve opportunities for tourists and the tourism industry. Through literature review, semi-structured interviews and personal observations, this study attempts to answer questions about the importance of organic food in tourism within the European Union, as well as in Croatia.

The Cetina Region is chosen as the case study due to its geographical location, high unemployment rate and level of neglect of agricultural land. Lack of vision, interest and higher education, as well as different policy issues, some of which are the legacy of the previous political system, emerge as the possible reasons for today's state of the Cetina Region.

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Marina Pavletić

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In recent years, the small European country of Croatia has been featured prominently in the media as a “must see” tourist destination. Multiple media sources promote Croatia as a newly discovered top sight for tourists. Croatia is an emerging tourist destination due in part to the beautiful coastline, rich culture, history, and, in particular, the world class cuisine. Many articles published in scientific journals have commented on how the particular smells and tastes of food have an ability to affect positive change in people’s memory. “Our most elusive sense, smell, reaches more directly into memory and emotions than other senses.” (Gibbons, 1986, p. 337)

Undoubtedly, it would seem that Croatian food and cooking is in a unique position alongside the more established culinary delights of the Mediterranean region such as Italy, Greece and Southern France. White truffle and wild asparagus in Istria, Dalmatian prosciutto, sheep cheeses from the Island of Pag, seafood dishes or lamb on the spit are just some of the traditional Croatian meals that are somewhat unique to this region. However, in the Mediterranean region tourism is highly competitive. Therefore, to emerge into this market and then remain a popular destination Croatia must develop a niche market.

An important part of a tourist’s experience revolves around food and the culinary nuances of the Mediterranean region in which they are vacationing. Food is often a reason to travel. For many it is the highlight and a valuable experience at a destination. In fact, modern culinary experiences are sold by tour operators promoting culinary tours,

cooking lessons, and the tastes of places. Even upscale hotels promote packages such as “shop with the chef” where tourists can cook with the chef; these often include a visit to local farmers markets. These experiences provide tourists with hands-on opportunities to interact with local producers and sample produce specific to the region. The trend analyst Ian Yeoman (2008) in his column on hospitalitynet.org says,

Today’s traveler is better educated, wealthy, has traveled more extensively, lives longer, and is concerned about his health and the environment. As a result, food and drink have become more important and have a higher priority amongst certain social groupings...Food is a significant aspect of the tourist’s experience of a destination, driven by the growing trends of authenticity and the need to have a high-quality experience.

As in any other country, food is an integral part of Croatian culture. Thus, visitors to Croatia have many opportunities to experience its rich and diverse culinary history (Yeoman, 2008). However there exists in Croatia opportunities to develop food tourism as a distinct tourist activity. One area that is ripe for development is vacation experiences geared toward the organic food traveler. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze how Croatia currently produces organic food in the context of how this will improve opportunities for tourists and the tourism industry.

Research questions

Having in mind today’s global trends in organic food production, the size of the EU’s organic food market and the economic situation in Croatia, specifically in the Cetina Region, these became my research questions:

Research Questions:

1. What is the role of organically grown food in the development of tourism within the European Union?
2. How can Croatia define its role in the organic food market within the tourist sector?
3. What are the potential opportunities and challenges for organic food production in the Cetina Region?

Some studies have been done on the topic of organic food production in Croatia (Znaor, 2002, p. 43; (Heinrich Boll Foundation [Boll], 2014)) as well as on the prospects of rural tourism development in the Cetina Region (Ruzic & Demonja, 2013). However, it seems that the results of those studies did not reach the community leaders and decision makers. As in some other places in the world, the contrast of economic deprivation on one side and the richness of culture, history, knowledge and value on the other side is visible (Derickson & Routledge, 2015, p. 3), and to be able to benefit from the scholars' studies, a certain level of scholars' activism is needed.

The study begins with an overview of the expansion of organic food markets in the European Union and follows with a brief analysis of the connections between the development in tourism, agritourism in particular, and organic farming. Following from this, it is important to compare these findings with the present situation in Croatia, and the changes within the tourism and food industry since its accession to the European Union. In conclusion, this study will analyze the potential opportunities and challenges of organic food production, particularly in the Cetina Region of Croatia. The Cetina Region was chosen for this study to find out about the potential opportunities and

challenges for organic food production and whether there is a market for it during the tourist season. The Cetina region is important for a number of reasons. It is in the heart of Dalmatia, which is a coastal region of Croatia; the use of arable land for food production is minimal, and the unemployment rate remains among the highest in the country. Data collection for this study was conducted in the summer of 2014.

In spite of the growing trend in demand for higher quality, and organically produced food in tourism, Croatia's organic food production has been rather lackluster despite the overall importance of tourism to Croatia's national economy. Only 1% of all food produced within Croatia is certified organic (Kresic & Sucic, 2010, p. 63-74). At the same time as its agricultural sector struggles, Croatia imports more than 50% of its food (Rak Sajin, 2013).

According to the new *Plan for Strategic Development of Tourism in Croatia until 2020* (Vlada Republike Hrvatske, 2013, p. 35), only two out of ten Croatian regions (Istria and Slavonia) offer food and wine as their primary tourist products, while the Dalmatian counties – the region stretched along the coastline of the Adriatic Sea – consider food and wine as their secondary or even tertiary tourist products. According to some studies, “tourists’ spending on food can constitute up to one-third of the total tourist expenditure” (Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012, p. 172); this transfers into significant revenue for the local economy. Over 12 million tourists, with an average stay of 5.2 nights, visited Croatia in 2013 and 42% of those tourist nights were spent in Dalmatian counties (Croatian Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2014, p. 62). I grew up in the Cetina Region and remember the quality and the quantity of food that was produced there at the time. My expectation was that the need for large amounts of food due to a large number

of tourists who visit Dalmatia every year would result in Cetina Region being the most productive region in Dalmatia.

The Cetina Region is located approximately 20 miles inland from the city of Split, the largest city on the Adriatic Coast. Split is connected by ferries to several Central Dalmatian Islands and Italy, and by air, by railway and by the newly constructed highway to the rest of Europe. As the largest agricultural region in Dalmatia, and with such proximity to modern traffic infrastructure, the Cetina Region should not be experiencing as much economic deprivation as some other parts of the country. However, the numbers paint a different picture as the unemployment rate is over 25% (Milos, 2014), no more than 30% of the valley is used for agricultural production (Ljubenkovic, 2012, p. 218), and the region's tourist potential is not being utilized at a satisfactory level.

Figure 1- Ferry lines from Split

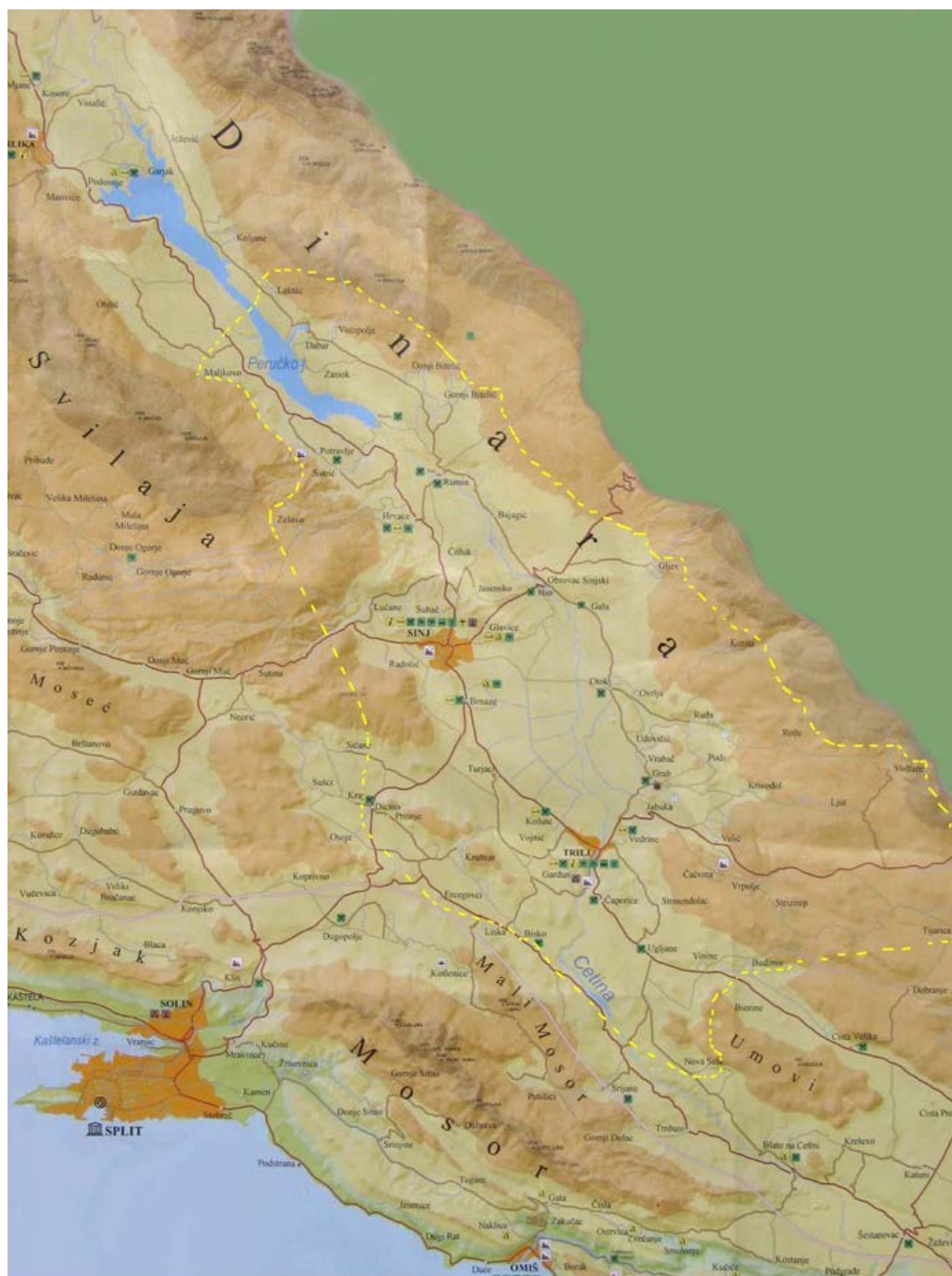


Source: Hvarinfo.com

Tobler's first law of geography states "Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (Tobler, 1970). I had to understand the contradiction between large numbers of tourists and the vicinity of the Cetina Region but low food production and one of the highest unemployment rates in Croatia in the same area. This seems to be exactly the opposite of what Tobler's first law of geography states. The higher demand for food due to large numbers of tourists in Dalmatia did not trigger higher level of food production within the nearby agricultural region.

The Cetina Region is the region in the Dalmatian hinterland that stretches along the Cetina River. A home to around 45,000 people, it covers an area of around 1,000km² and consists of three cities -Sinj, Trilj and Vrlika - and two municipalities -Hrvace and Otok (LAG Cetinska krajina," 2013). The river runs through the valley of Sinj, the largest karst valley and the largest agricultural area in Central Dalmatia. Just 20 miles inland from the city of Split, a major tourist destination and the second largest city in Croatia, the Cetina Region has an almost ideal location for food production in relation to its market. A major highway, an international airport, ferry port and a railway station are all within 30 miles from the city of Sinj, the largest city in the Cetina Region. More than 2.2 million tourists visited the Split-Dalmatian County in 2014 and spent more than 12million nights in the area (Mint, 2015, p. 34-35). One may think that an agricultural region such as Cetina Region most likely produces large amounts of food and supplies farmers' markets, hotels and restaurants with fresh fruits and vegetables. With its Sub-Mediterranean climate, fertile soil and river running through the valley, the region should be producing high-quality food that tastes and smells exactly the way I remember it.

Figure 2 - Cetina region map



Source: usck.hr

There are several traditional meals that are prepared in the Cetina region during the Alka festivities. The menu shows a mixture of Italian, German and Turkish influences and sometimes reading a menu feels like reading a history book. Popular dishes of the region are stuffed cabbage rolls known as “arambašići” which is a variation of a Turkish dish called “sarma,” and “pašticada”, a type of a marinated pot roast that usually takes at least two days to prepare. Prepared with lots of garlic, rosemary, cloves and served with pasta or gnocchi, this dish is found in many Dalmatian homes. However, the reality of the situation is quite different than one would expect; where crops used to grow, now only grass grows. One could ask how authentic a dish is if its main ingredients are not grown in the region but imported from different places? While the unemployment rate is still among the highest in Croatia (over 20%), the unemployed in the region do not look for employment in agriculture and food production industry. Large foreign and domestic store chains such as Kaufland, Lidl, Metro and Konzum are major providers of affordable, often processed and low-quality food imported from the European Union and other non-EU countries. I wanted to find out why the local unemployed population does not find any interest in agriculture or agritourism although the region is so close to many highly visited Croatian tourist attractions. So I went to Sinj, the center of the Cetina Region, and talked to local officials and local farmers to hear their point of view.

The Cetina Region is not just an unattractive plot of agricultural land covered with grass that could not offer any enjoyable vacation time to tourists looking for a non-beach vacation. On the contrary, the region offers different outdoor activities such as fly fishing, biking, hiking, horseback riding, skydiving, hunting, kayaking, paintball and airsoft (Sinj Tourist Board website, n.d.). According to the statistics, in 2013 almost

11,000 tourists (foreign and domestic) visited the Cetina Region (cities of Sinj and Trilj) and spent on average 2.5 nights in the area. This may not look like a large number of tourists, but it is important to point out that in 2013 tourists spent over 40% more nights in the Cetina Region than in a previous year (Turistička Zajednica Splitsko-Dalmatinske Županije [TZSDŽ], 2014, table 2).

Figure 3 - The valley of Sinj



Source: Marina Pavletić

Nature and outdoor activities are not the only attraction in the region. Several intangible cultural heritages from this area find themselves on the UNESCO Intangible World Heritage List: the ojkanje singing, silent circle dance, klapa (a capella) singing, and the unique Alka Tournament in the city of Sinj. Alka is described as a knight's tournament that is performed annually in the city of Sinj, commemorating the victory of a small number of local population over the large Ottoman army in 1715 ("Alka," 2010). With colorful 18th century costumes of alkars (the knights) and their servants riding through the city, this event is an attraction that brings several thousand visitors to Sinj every year.

Figure 4 - The Alka Squires



Source: <http://www.visitsinj.com/en/Vodic/36/alka-tournament>

Much has been expected from the recent accession of Croatia to the European Union. New opportunities for economic development as well as the access to the EU market, all of which could be beneficial to the economic development of Cetina Region. As the European Union represents the second largest organic food market in the world after the United States, I was particularly interested in potential benefits of organic food growing and production in the Cetina Region.

Figure 5 - The Alkars



Source: <http://www.visitsinj.com/en/Vodic/36/alka-tournament>

It has been twenty years since the Croatia's War of Independence ended and, while still weak and in recovery, Croatia's economy was hit by the world's financial

crises in 2008. Since then, it has been struggling to get back on the right track. According to the World Bank, Croatia's GDP is falling, the unemployment rate in 2013 was 17% nationally but especially high among the youth – standing at over 40%, which is one of the highest rates in the European Union ("WorldBank," 2014). Although some of the EU Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development (IPARD) as well as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) projects have been implemented in Croatia, the impacts of these projects on local communities are still not quite visible. UNDP's Conservation and Sustainable use of Biodiversity in the Dalmatian Coast (COAST) program is an example of different development projects that include organic agriculture support and promotion in the region of Dalmatia, especially in regards to vineyards and olive groves.

To answer the first question, I explored the existing literature, laws and regulations of the European Union, and researched existing examples of the successful cohesion of tourism and organic food production, such as the case of Bio-Hotels (biohotels.info).

To answer the second question, I explored the existing literature on organic food production in Croatia, as well as Croatian laws and regulations. I interviewed government officials and certification agencies as well as certified organic farmers and hotel and restaurant managers to find out about their experiences, benefits and barriers in dealing with organic food production in tourism. I also talked to some of the incoming Croatian tour operators to find out what their experience is with guests' food requests.

To answer the third question, I spent four weeks in the Cetina Region in the summer of 2014, and conducted free-form interviews with city officials, farmers, representatives of Croatia's tourist board and local journalists to find out if there are certified organic

growers in the region and if there is a market for the product. The structure of the interview process did not follow through a prescribed series of questions; rather it was used to develop a conversation that highlighted the trials and tribulations of Cetina Region.

Significance of the study

This study and its results could help the population of the Cetina Region to understand the value of the land they have, and its potential for organic agriculture. Through this research, I came to the conclusion that people from the Cetina Region are not aware of the demand for organic food products on the European market or among the European tourists in Croatia. Local populations often look at market demand for organic food through the prism of their own demand (If I cannot afford it then others probably cannot afford it either; if I do not desire it neither do others), and are not familiar with the possibility of product placement through tourism. Information is not appropriately shared and statistics on real demand level for organic products, particularly in tourism, are almost non-existent. Going organic could result in the higher employment rate and a diversification of services offered in the region, and could significantly positively influence rural development policies of Croatia.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken for the purposes of answering the following research questions. What is the role of organically grown food in the development of tourism within the European Union? How can Croatia define its role in the organic food market within the tourist sector? What are the potentials and challenges for organic food production in the Cetina Region? The following topics emerged as themes within the literature:

1. Factors affecting rural development
2. Organic farming and production within the EU
3. The European Union – organic food and tourism and organic agricultural land
4. Croatia: Joining the European Union
5. Organic food production in Croatia
6. Tourism in Croatia
7. Croatia: Organic food and tourism

Introduction

There are many different definitions of organic farming in use today, but as written on an EU website, it could simply be said that “organic farming is an agricultural system that seeks to provide the consumer with fresh, tasty and authentic food while respecting natural life-cycle systems”(“Organic Farming,” 2014). It is interesting that the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, who is considered the father of modern organic

agriculture, was born in the northern part of Croatia, which was a part of the Austrian Empire at that time. His course on bio-dynamic agriculture given to farmers in Germany in 1924 is marked as the beginning of organic agriculture in Europe (Foundation Ecology & Agriculture, Germany & Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, Switzerland [SOEL & FiBL], 2002, table 2). Since then, organic food production in Europe has come a long way. The results of this study will show the level of organic agriculture as well as the state of the organic food market in Europe and Croatia. It will also show the two-way connection with tourism: through eco-farms (agritourism) and through use of organically grown food in hotels, restaurants and specialty stores. Economic benefits of organic food production in tourism on a local and national level will be shown.

Factors affecting rural development in Croatia

When Croatia joined the European Union in July, 2013, its GDP was considerably lower than the average EU GDP and the unemployment rate was one of the highest in Europe, especially among youth (European Commission [EC], 2013, p.34). As a predominantly rural country with over half of its population living in rural areas, rural development policies are of high importance to Croatia (European Commission [EC], 2013, p.34). Although, agreement on comprehensive definition of rural development does not exist (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000, p.391) we may say that the goal of rural development is “improvement of quality of life or rural communities by satisfying their socio-economic and cultural aspirations and strengthening their social organization, while protecting natural resources” (“IFOAM,” 2006). Rural development could be recognized as a multi-level process defined by historical traditions of a region, from global to local interrelations between agriculture and society (Van Der Ploeg et al., 2000, p. 392-393).

As an economic union of the European countries, European Union introduced and supported different programs and projects, such as LEADER and Cross-Border Regions (CBR), with aim to initiate transnational and regional co-operation that would support development of rural areas (Ray, 2001; Perkmann, 2003). While LEADER initiative was meant for the EU countries only, the CBR included bordering countries regardless of their membership in the European Union (Ray, 2001; Perkmann, 2003).

Three strategic long-term objective for EU rural development policy include fostering the competitiveness of agriculture, ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment ("EU Rural Development," 2014). Pugliese argues that organic farming is an important factor of sustainable rural development as she identifies four cornerstones of that relationship as innovation, conservation, participation and integration (Pugliese, 2001, p. 112). She continues stating that innovation is the base for rural development, and organic farming is innovative, conservative as it helps to preserve natural and cultural diversity of the European rural areas, and resources, in a way that is compatible with the rural development policies. As the newest member of the European Union, Croatia's rural development policies need to be in compliance with those of the European Union, and Croatia needs to find the best way to work on achieving these three strategic goals.

Organic agricultural land in EU

Through several EU farm policy reforms and different action plans, and with the latest Action plan for the future of Organic Production in the European Union from

March 24, 2014 (Action Plan, 2014), European Union countries promote and encourage farmers to engage in organic farming with subsidies playing an important role.

In 2011, the total agricultural land in the European Union under use for organic farming was 5.5 percent while in 2012 organic farming grew to 5.7 percent of all agricultural land. However, organic agriculture is not spread equally among EU countries; some countries such as Austria and Sweden had more than 15 percent of their agricultural land under use for organic crops, while others, such as Ireland, Bulgaria and Malta had only 1 percent or less. Regardless of these differences, the EU organic food market has been growing steadily and reached a value of €21 billion in 2013.

Germany is the largest organic food market in Europe and Germans spend over €7 billion annually on organic food. According to the statistics of the European Commission (EC), although the percentage of agricultural land under use for organic crops grows every year, in total that land makes up less than 6% of EU farmland, with only 1.6% of EU farms being involved in organic agriculture in 2013 (European Commission [EC], 2013, p. 20-22). At the same time, almost half of the conventional farms in the European Union are less than 2 hectares in size while only 6% of organic farms fit into that category. Organic farms in the European Union tend to be larger than conventional, with an average size of 34 hectares (EC, 2013, Graph 16).

Employment in organic agriculture in EU

It has been a long time belief that organic agriculture is more labor-intensive than conventional agriculture. European Union statistics corroborates this fact due to the limitations of organic farming in its use of inputs and agricultural practices. Using a measure of hectares per annual working unit (ha/AWU), statistics show that more AWUs

are needed in organic agriculture per hectare of agricultural land (EC, 2013, table 2). It is also shown that organic agriculture employees are, on average, younger than those employed in conventional agriculture.

EU data do not provide specific information on the number of people employed only by organic agriculture, but data on all agricultural employees shows that in 2010 there were around 10 million people employed full-time in agricultural activities in the European Union. These 10 million people represent 5% of all EU employment. However, there are almost 25 million people working on farms annually, but the majority of them are family members and not salaried employees (European Commission [EC], 2013, p. 9). Family farms make up over 90% of all the farms in the European Union, and we know that there are around 260,000 farms that manage land organically (www.fibl.org).

EU organic food market and consumers

In the European Union, “organic farming is sometimes seen as a panacea for addressing the environmental, animal welfare and food safety concerns driving Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) adjustments” (Darnhofer, 2005, p. 308). With higher demand for organic food lately, there is a fear that organic agriculture is changing its face and beginning to look more like the conventional agriculture, losing the important role of a factor in rural development (DeLind, 2000, p. 198-208; Banks & Marsden, 2001, p. 103-121). When thinking of organic farming it is the picture of an individual farm household that comes to mind. Individual household organic farms not only provide organically grown food but are also places where agriculture and tourism intertwine. Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005, p. 500) argue that farms involved in rural tourism often have a higher productivity level, and that “support for agricultural production is indirectly channeled

into support for tourist activities”. The importance of these findings is stressed when thinking of different policy measures where some relationships are usually ignored (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005, p. 500).

Often, due to inadequate policy measures, local agriculture does not always benefit from the expansion of tourism in the same region. Torres (2003, pg.563), on the example of Cancun, argues that “the primary reason why links failed to materialize in the state is that concrete agricultural development interventions, appropriate to the local social and environmental context, and backed by real investment, were not incorporated into the tourism development process”.

Literature on food consumption in tourism is broadly separated into four groups: food as a tourist product/attraction, tourists’ food consumption behavior/pattern, tourists’ dining experiences, and tourists’ special interests in various food and beverages and related events/activities at a destination (Mak et al .2012, p. 171-196). Organic food consumption in tourism could fit into any of these categories as different forms of gastro/culinary tourism take place today in the world. Green & Dougherty (2008, p.149) advocate that food tourism has a significant impact on regional economies by bringing opportunities for sustainable economic development that link the agrarian and tourism sectors. On the other hand, Gilg & Battershill (1998, p.37) do not find much evidence that the level of a direct sale of quality food products could eliminate farmers’ need to use conventional distribution channels.

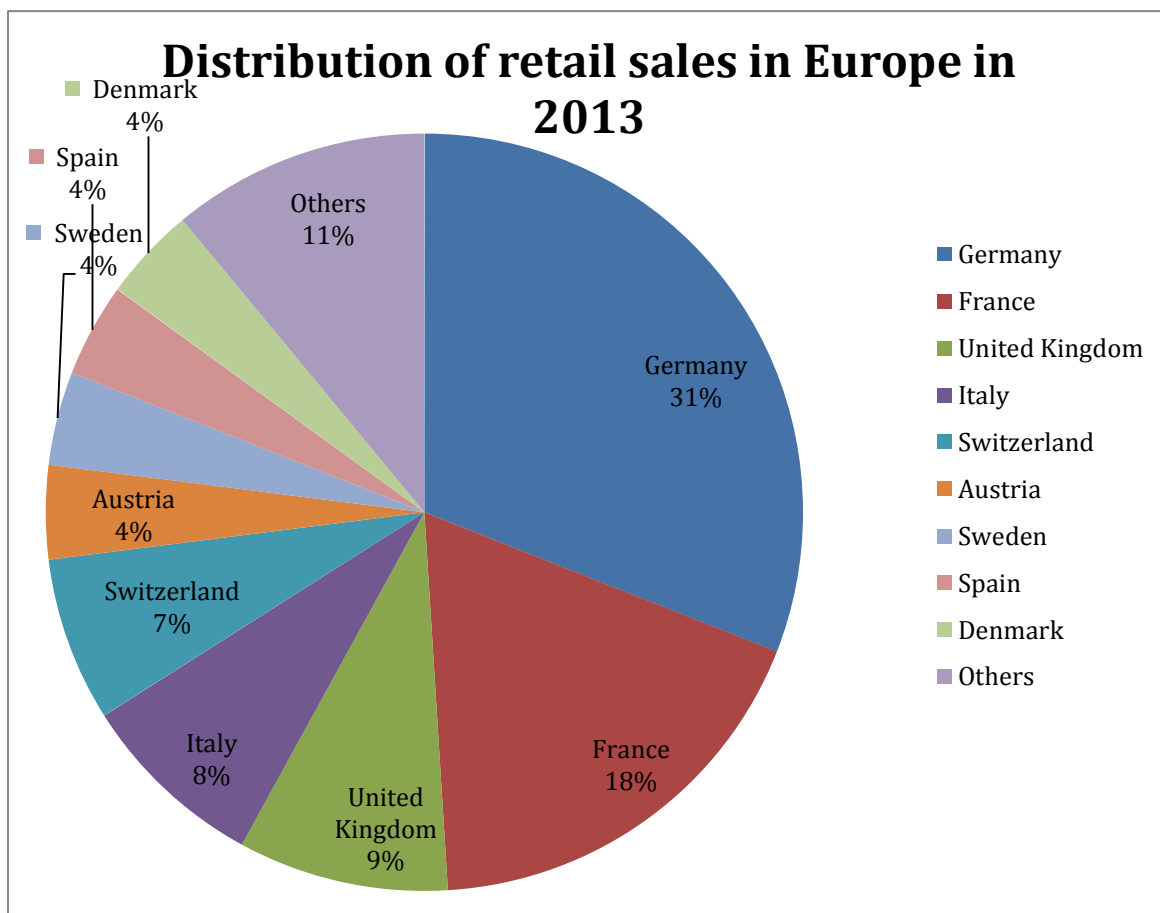
Organic food has found the way to reach choosy and environmentally conscious tourists not only through agritourism but also through urban and rural hotels dedicated to “green” tourism. This kind of hotel behavior and business policy are often found among

family owned European hotels that pride themselves as owners of eco-certificates that guarantee a certain level of environmentally friendly business behavior. Proebstl & Mueller (2012, p.3-15) discuss different eco-labels/eco-certificates in the German speaking Alpine region, and among many of the private and government-issued eco-certificates, they pinpoint the Bio-Hotels private eco-certificate as the most trusted and desirable by hotel owners due to its credibility and high level of customers' satisfaction. Their study shows that most of the hotel owners that apply for eco-certificates, apply for Bio-Hotels certification as it best represents their personal beliefs and their business philosophy. The use of eco-certificates encourages hotel owners/managers to reduce their usage of energy and water as well as their level of waste production which results in higher cost efficiency and is also a good marketing strategy (Jurincic & Bojnec, 2009, p. 226-237).

Although organic farming does not directly employ a large number of people, and the majority of those employed on organic farms are family members, organic food production is a large business in the EU. Organic farming indirectly employs people in the food processing industry, retail and tourism activities. It is safe to say that organic farming and food production are responsible for the employment of millions of people in the European Union. The value of retail sales in the European Union in 2013 was €22.2 billion which is 6% higher than the previous year; almost half of this value coming out of Germany and France (Willer & Schaack, 2015, p. 17-18).

In a public consultation that the European Commission conducted in 2013, over 45,000 responses were given online to different questions in regards to habits and reasons for buying organic food.

Figure 6 - Distribution of retail sales in Europe in 2013



Source: Organic Data Network – FiBL- AMI survey 2015

This public survey that took place in all the European Union countries from January until April of 2013, showed that 71% of consumers trust the organic food label, 83% buy organic products out of concern for the environment, 81% buy them because they are free from genetically modified organisms (GMO) and pesticides, and 78% showed willingness to pay more for organic products (Willer, 2014, p. 193).

A large number of EU citizens care about their health and the health of the environment even when they go on vacation. The need for organic food and “green” accommodation was recognized by a group of hotel owners in Austria. In 2001 they founded an association of hotels and restaurants which provides organic food and follow sustainable business practices. The association is called BioHotels and from 12 hotel members in 2001, it grew to over a hundred hotels and restaurants in seven European countries (www.biohotels.info). According to its website, by 2010 it had almost 4000 beds, employed over 1200 employees and had accumulated 3 million overnight stays since inception.

Beginning in 2010 the association added more members and, as listed on its website, the association guarantees that its hotel and restaurant members serve organically produced food and drinks and are environmentally friendly. The BioHotels Association is just one indicator that the Europeans place a large value on environmental safety and that demand for organic food is not just a fashionable trend but rather a consequence of a serious concern for their health and the environment. Moreover, they obviously take that concern with them even when they are on vacation. As 50 percent of international tourism takes place in Europe which has increased environmental threats, at the same time the solution to these environmental issues helped create market opportunities for sustainable products (Hamele, 2004, p. 1).

Croatia: Joining the European Union

Croatia joined the European Union on July 1, 2013, and became the 28th member. Membership to the European Union has changed many laws, rules and regulations in the country but has also given hope to the citizens of Croatia for better economic prospects

and faster economic development of the country. Since the War of Independence (1991-1995) that destroyed much of Croatia's industry, Croatia has been struggling to get back on its feet, politically and economically. The country has been shaken by political scandals that lead to the arrest of Premier Ivo Sanader, who resigned in 2009 and has been in jail on corruption charges since. Some other members of the government and close friends of Mr.Sanader were jailed on similar charges as well.

Many wrongdoings were discovered in the process of privatization of government-owned companies that brought financial benefit to some but brought financial loss to Croatia's people and its economy. On top of all this, Croatia's unemployment rate in 2012 was 15.8 % that was among the highest unemployment rates in Europe (The World Bank, 2012, table 1). Croatian citizens were disappointed, and they stopped trusting anyone. They felt like they had been lied to so many times by people they trusted and elected, so they did not know whom to trust or what to believe anymore. Many were skeptical about the European Union and did not believe that joining the Union would help the situation. However, they voted YES on the referendum to join the European Union, giving it a chance and hoping for the best. Croatia entered the European Union with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe of 43.1% and one of the lowest GDP's per capita of €10,300 - only 40% of the average EU GDP per capita at that time (European Commission [EC], 2013, p. 34).

According to the same report, Croatia was predominantly rural (79.1%) with 56.5% of the total population living in rural areas. Predominantly urban regions made up only 1.1% of the Croatian territory with 18.1% of the population living in urban areas (pg. 34). With more than half of its population living in rural areas, it is expected that a

large number of them are employed in agriculture. The same report by the European Commission shows that agriculture covers around 40% of Croatia's land area that does not include forests and transitional woodland-shrub areas which cover another 46% of the land (pg.36). Most farms in Croatia are much smaller than the average size farm in the European Union, and more than half of all the farms work on less than 2 hectares of arable land; the smallest farms being located mostly by the Adriatic Sea, and less than 5% of all farms being larger than 20 hectares (pg.36).

However, the benefit of joining the economic union of the European countries is that goods can flow freely among the member countries without stopping at borders or paying any customs fees. Joining the European Union may bring an opportunity for Croatia to export its agricultural products to this large market and support its agricultural economy and farmers. However, the situation in Croatia seems to be very much the opposite of what one may expect. Croatia does not grow or produce enough food to feed its own citizens, let alone enough to benefit from the export of excess food. On the contrary, Croatia imports over 50% of the food its citizens consume on a daily basis (Rak Šajn, 2013).

Croatia was hit hard by the war in the 1990s, and its farmland was deserted as people tried to escape war activities. It had not had a chance to recover, so compared to other EU countries, Croatia's agriculture was seen as uncompetitive in price and quality. Instead of taking advantage of the large EU market to place its products in, Croatia became saturated by imported food products from other European and non-European countries, while domestic food production struggled with low productivity and mandatory fees and taxes.

Organic food production in Croatia

As one of the important factors of rural development, Croatia's government decided to include organic farming and food production in its strategic plan. The first farmers and producers of organic food in Croatia were registered in 2003. According to the Ministry of Agriculture's website, in 2003 there were only 130 organic farmers/food producers, and this number grew to 2,194 by 2014 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2015). The Ministry of Agriculture adopted an action plan which aimed to have 8% of Croatia's agricultural land under organic management by 2016. Their goal might be a little out of reach because, as of the end of 2014 only slightly more than 4% of Croatia's agricultural land was under organic management (Ministry of Agriculture, 2015). Although there are almost 2,200 producers of organic products in Croatia, as of 2013 only 16 entities were registered as exporters while 90 were registered as importers of organic products (Ministry of Agriculture, 2015).

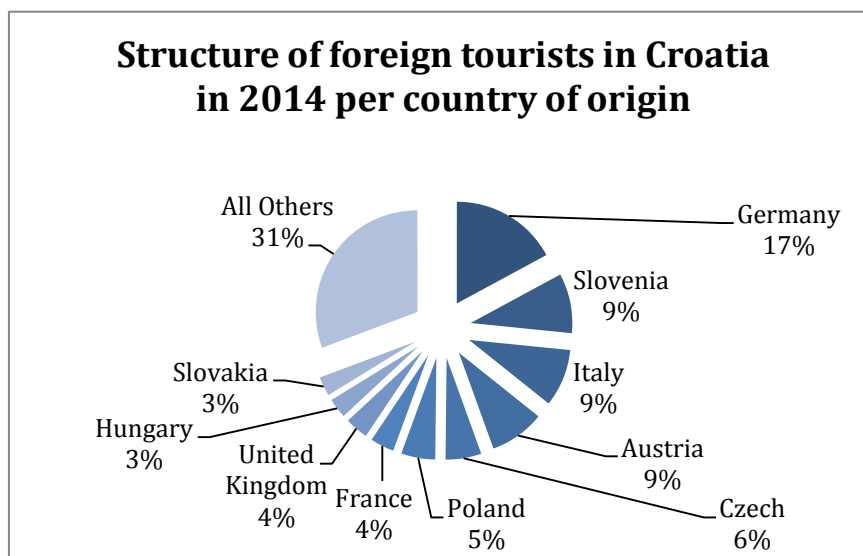
It was difficult to grasp these numbers because it seems that more people are involved in organic food production. The government has an action plan that promotes organic farming, yet, the numbers of registered firms that import organic products far outweigh those that export organic products. When Croatia's unemployment rate and GDP per capita are taken into consideration, it seems a bit strange for Croatia to be among the top ten European countries in per capita consumption of organic food as well as one of the ten countries with the highest market share on total market in 2013 (Willer & Schaack, 2015, figure 77 & 78). So if the citizens of Croatia do not possess the purchasing power necessary for the widespread consumption of organically grown food, who buys organic products in Croatia?

Tourism in Croatia

Croatia has become a must-see and a very attractive destination for the last 15 years. Although it may be a new and still unknown destination to non-European travelers, the attraction of the region was recognized back in the 4th century A.D. by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. He decided to build his summer residence on the east shores of the Adriatic Sea, in what is today known as the city of Split. The abundance of fresh water and great food made him decide to rule the Empire from his summer palace rather than from Rome.

Croatia's mild Mediterranean climate, over 1,800km of mainland coastline, and over 1200 islands, islets and rocks attracted more than 13 million tourists in 2014, of which almost 90% were foreign tourists (Ministarstvo turizma Hrvatske [Mint], 2015, p. 19). Croatia has a population of around 4.4 million, and when the summer tourist season is at its peak, this number nearly triples which raises demand for food, whether organic or not. It is not unusual that the largest number of tourists to Croatia come from Germany. Germans have been coming to Croatia since the early 1960s, and Croatia and Germany also have strong economic ties. When the numbers in Figure 5 are compared to organic retail sales values in Europe in 2013, we can conclude that 43% of foreign tourists in Croatia (Germany, Italy, Austria, France, UK) came from the countries that purchased over €17 billion worth of organic food in 2013 (over 75% of the total retail value sold in EU in 2013). Among almost 5 million tourists who come from these five countries to vacation in Croatia, certainly there are a number of those who still prefer eating organic even when away from home.

Figure 7 - Structure of foreign tourists in Croatia in 2014 per country of origin



Source: http://www.mint.hr/UserDocsImages/150701_Turizam014.pdf

Croatia: Organic food and tourism

As an emerging tourist destination, Croatia has an enormous potential for combining organic food with tourism. Although the best known Croatian destination may be the city of Dubrovnik, located at the most south-east part of the Croatian Adriatic Coast, it is indeed the region of Istria, on the opposite side of the country, that is the most visited and advanced tourist destination. The Institute of Agriculture and Tourism conducted a survey among 1,300 tourists in Istria. The results conclude that over 63% of tourists buy organic food in their countries, and almost 70% of tourists are interested in buying and consuming organic food while on vacation in Istria (Ruzic & Medica, 2009, p. 47). The same study shows that over one-third of them would like to be able to consume organic food at the hotels where they were staying.

Certified organic agriculture in Croatia is just over a decade old, and since becoming a member of the European Union, Croatia's policies and Action Plans are in place to support and initiate faster conversion to organic farming. There are estimates that state that in the case of a total conversion to organic agriculture, the Croatian agricultural sector would require 12% more labor (Znaor & Landau, 2014, p. 126).

Summary

Literature reviewed in this chapter clearly shows that organic farming is important factor of rural development in the European Union, and is recognized as such through different projects initiated and supported by various EU agencies and commissions. The importance of organic food in tourism is shown through literature on demand and success of eco-labels in tourism sector with BioHotels eco-label as one of the most trusted and desirable among hotels and restaurants. The expansion of BioHotels eco-label through seven EU countries since 2001 presents clear sign that tourists' demand for hotels and restaurants that not only serve organic food, but also preserve water and energy and limit waste amounts, is on a rise.

As the newest member of the European Union, Croatia adjusted its laws and regulations on organic agriculture to those of the European Union. Importance of organic farming to Croatia and its rural development is written in its Action Plan to convert 8% of its agricultural land into the land under organic management by 2016. Studies show that there is a high level of demand for organic food among tourists who visit Croatia, however, supply of locally grown organic food is not sufficient. Literature gives only a partial answer to my second research question as it shows existing and potential demand and supply of organic food in tourism. However, it does not explain in details the reasons

why Croatia's organic food is represented on organic food market only in limited amounts. I will attempt to answer this question as well as my third research question through direct contacts and conversation with the government officials, tour operators, farmers, hotel/restaurant owners and managers in several regions in Croatia.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter presents in detail the methods employed to address part of the second research question and the third research question which are: (2) How can Croatia define its role in the organic food market within the tourist sector? and (3) What are the potentials and challenges for organic food production in the Cetina Region?

The chapter follows the following outline: (1) the research method chosen, (2) a brief description of the study site, (3) a description of the participant pool, (4) data collection methods.

Research Method

A case study approach was used for the study because as a methodology case study enables the researcher to study complex phenomena directly within the context that they occur (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). A case study approach for this study is applicable according to Yin (2014) for four reasons. First, it directly addresses the research questions in seeking answers to the how and why questions. Secondly, the study required no manipulation of the data and participant pool. Thirdly, I wanted to examine organic farming in the context of Croatia, as this is an important aspect of understanding the wider context of how Croatia develops food tourism as a distinct tourist activity. Lastly, a case study method was used because organic food tourism as a phenomenon cannot be

examined in isolation from the context (Yin, 2014). In fact, it would be impossible to examine organic food and tourism without the boundaries of a specific location.

Study Site

The Cetina Region (see Figure 2) is identified as the main site for this case study for a number of reasons. For a comparison and better understanding of the data collected in the Cetina Region, data is also collected in the northern and the coastal region of Croatia. As the researcher, I originate from Croatia and was, therefore able to spend an extended period in the Cetina Region in order to carry out this study.

The Cetina Region is a part of the Dalmatian hinterland stretching along the Cetina River. A home to around 45,000 people, it covers an area of around 1,000 km² and consists of three cities -Sinj, Trilj and Vrlika - and two municipalities -Hrvace and Otok (LAG Cetinska krajina," 2013). The river runs through the valley of Sinj, the largest karst valley and the largest agricultural area in Central Dalmatia. Just 35 km inland from the city of Split, a major tourist destination and the second largest city in Croatia, the Cetina Region has an almost ideal location for food production in relation to its market.

Tourism in Croatia is a booming industry, and Croatia is quickly becoming one of the most popular tourist hotspots of the decade with almost 12 million tourists arriving in 2012. Summertime is a busy tourist season in Croatia, which provided this study with access to a varied participant pool for the purposes of interviews. Cetina region of Croatia is a particularly important site for study for three reasons (1) it is in the heart of Dalmatia, which is a coastal region of Croatia, (2) the use of arable land for food production is minimal, and (3) the unemployment rate remains among the highest in the country. The on-site research took place during the summer of 2014.

Participants

The participants interviewed for this study came from different groups and individuals, identified by myself as important for the purposes of the study. Total of 26 participants were interviewed in total. All interviewed participants were located in Croatia. As this research did not require the collection of any personal information, this study was deemed exempt on the application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (See appendix A). The participant pool included the following:

- Local farmers
- Members of the tourism and hospitality industry
- Organic food retail store managers
- Tourists
- Government officials
- Faculty members at two Croatian Universities

Data collection methods

The data for this study was collected on-site in different parts of Croatia in May and June of 2014. This included face-to-face semi-structured interviews. When it was not possible to interview in person, emails with open-ended questions were sent to a participant and answers to questions were received in the form of an email (transcripts available). The majority of the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder to allow the researcher to focus on the participant and not detract from data collection (transcripts available). In some situations, voice recording was not possible due to a participant

feeling uncomfortable with recording. The researcher took appropriate written notes instead.

Farmers were asked questions on their interests and experience in organic farming; issues they faced and problems they had to solve to become certified organic; what they see as the biggest problem today in organic farming; what they see as the solution to the problem. Photographs of organic farms and land were taken to support data collection (see in chapters).

Tourists were asked about the level of importance of organic food availability in their decision making process when choosing their vacation destination.

Members of the tourism and hospitality industry, as well as specialty store managers were asked about the availability of locally grown and produced organic food and demand for such food from tourists. They were asked to share their opinion on the present situation of organic food availability in Croatia, the future of organic food in tourism industry, and their experience with local growers.

Government officials were asked about the organic agriculture laws and regulations that are in place today, and problems they experience when enforcing the law.

Higher education faculty members were interviewed to find out if students are interested to learn about organic farming and food production, and possibility of promoting organic food through tourism.

Given that summertime is a busy tourist season in Croatia, and although contacted in advance to set up the best time for interviews, some hotel managers/ executive chefs were not able to dedicate time in their busy schedules to answer questions. Contacted were 4-star and 5-star hotels in the region of Dubrovnik, Split, the Island of Brač and

Zagreb, as well as some boutique family-owned hotels in the area. While upscale hotels market to customers with higher than average income, smaller family run hotels also often attract customers who are more concerned about food growing and production techniques, and its impact on the environment. It should be noticed that tourists who rent private accommodations (apartments, houses, and villas) for their vacation were not included in this research as that data is not easily available.

I interviewed farmers in different parts of Croatia, from Medjimurje, Moslavina and Posavina in northern Croatia, to the Island of Brač and the Cetina Region in southern Croatia. These interviews helped to gain a better understanding of similarities and differences among organic farmers due to their geographic location in Croatia.

Included in the study were tour operators, local and national tourist agencies, government officials and faculty of higher education institutions in Croatia. Data was collected through in-person interviews, with the following pool of participants: the executive chef at one of the 5-star hotels in Dubrovnik, the owner of a 4-star hotel on the Island of Brač, two university faculty members; one from the tourism department at Vrnjačka University of Applied Science, and another one from the agriculture department of the University of Zagreb. The participant pool also included ten Croatian farmers, five government officials from the tourist board and the city's deputy mayor. I also interviewed the manager of the only restaurant in Croatia that promotes itself as an organic food restaurant, and the owner of one of eight organic certification agencies in Croatia.

Figure 7 -Regions of Croatia



Source: <http://www.map-of-croatia.co.uk/>

A phone interview was conducted with the owner of a small family run hotel in Trilj, a town located in the Cetina Region. Some tour operators, several farmers, and four small family run hotels were contacted by email: one farmer, two tour operators and one family hotel manager replied with answers. Email responses were also received from

managers of organic food stores in Zagreb and Dubrovnik. The study used narrative analysis to analyze the collected data.

Secondary data was used in this research mostly to understand trends in organic food and tourism in geographic locations other than the location of the case study. Such data helps to understand better trends in the twenty-seven European Union countries as well as Croatia before it joined the EU.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results are broken down by geographic region within Croatia: (1) the northern region, (2), the coastal region, and (3) the case study site, Cetina Region.

Northern region

To begin, it was important to find out what exactly it is those almost 2,200 organic farmers/producers grow and produce and where they sell their products. Tourists do not often visit this region as the area is mostly rural and primarily consists of agricultural land.

Participant 1

The first is a third generation farmer who together with other family members, manages around 500 hectares of arable land. In a country where less than 5% of farms are larger than 20 hectares, a farm of this size is certainly not easy to maintain. I was impressed by the organization and business attitude of one of the owners I talked to. He explained that his farm supports his whole family, but they also have their own mill, they produce sunflower oil, pumpkin seed oil, organic chamomile tea, and grow non-gluten grains that are in high demand on the EU market. He also said that his family exports over 80% of their production to Germany and has little to no connection to markets in Croatia. I asked him for his opinion on Croatian laws and regulations in agriculture, specifically organic agriculture, and he replied by saying that laws are not adjusted to the Croatian reality, and sometimes they make no sense. However, he also said that what helps him and his family have a successful business is that they are in the business of

growing grains and oilseeds that do not require as much human labor as fruits and vegetables. When asked, as a large land owner and producer, how much influence he has on government policies, and how often he is contacted by the Ministry of agriculture officials, he says:

As a farmer neither do I have influence on any government policies, nor does anyone from the government ask for my opinion. As an exporter, however, I may have larger input in policy making.

Figure 8 – Family owned specialty store



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 2

Next, I visited a fruit and vegetable grower, a family that grows organically on around 100 hectares of land. They told me that because of the inherent difficulty and seasonality of their work, one of the largest problems they face every year is a lack of available labor. Although many are jobless in the area, not many are willing to work in agriculture. It is a difficult and physically demanding job, and many would rather stay at home jobless and on government assistance. Farmers are forced to hire seasonal workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia or even Romania and Bulgaria. Croatia's labor laws sometimes present an obstacle in hiring local populace in seasonal agricultural jobs as often they receive more money from the unemployment agency than what they would receive from working on a farm. However, it is interesting to say that this farm was founded by two brothers who lost their city jobs in the late 1990s. As both had families, they looked for a solution to their unemployment and found it in organic agriculture. Today, they are one of the top producers of organic fruits and vegetables in Croatia with several of their own grocery stores. They proved that with planning and high-quality food production, it is possible to have a good business and employ their families. Participant 3

The third organic farmer I spoke with raises cattle, pigs, sheep, and chickens. He produces meat products only. He owns and manages around 100 hectares of land that is mostly used for animal that his meat is off the highest quality. He loves what he does even though the monetary food production. Although he is a certified organic producer, his products are purchased by the meat industry without any differentiation from any other non-organic meat. Although he does not receive top payment for his organic meat,

it gives him satisfaction to know award for his work and products is not what it should be.

Figure 9 - Peach orchard



Source: Marina Pavletić

Coastal Region

I joined a conference on organic food production on the Island of Brač, which was organized by a government agency for the coordination and development of the Split-Dalmatian County (RERA). The purpose of the conference was to help farmers, who came from different parts of Dalmatia, get the information on the application process

Figure 10 - Organic farm



Source: Marina Pavletic

Figure 11 - Goat Farm



Source: Marina Pavletic

Figure 12 - Pig farm



Source: Marina Pavletic

for the EU funds dedicated to projects in organic agriculture, and to discuss the process of organic certification with representatives from multiple certification agencies.

The Island of Brač is the largest island in Central Dalmatia with around 13,000 year-round inhabitants in several towns and villages. Just a short ferryboat ride from Split, the Island of Brač is a very attractive tourist destination with one of the best and most popular pebble beaches on the Croatian coast – Zlatni Rat (Golden Horn). In 2014, 186,000 tourists visited the island (Mint, 2015, p. 36). Among the residents of the island, many are organic farmers, mostly growing olives and vineyards, and making olive oil and

really good wine. Some also grow fruits and vegetables, but olives and vineyards make most of the organic farms on the island.

Figure 13 - Winery in Bol, the Island of Brač



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 1

I learned a lot about the connection between tourism and organic food on the island from the owner of one of several family run hotels. His family owns a large olive grove with around 3000 olive trees; they have a farm where they raise sheep, goats, several cows, chickens, and they also grow some vegetables. Their products are sold in their hotel and restaurant, although guests are not always aware that they are eating organic. Milk, cheese, eggs, lamb, green olives and olive oil as well as a variety of vegetables, all organic, are on their daily menu but without any special note of its organic origin. While thinking of BioHotels and pride that those organic hotels and restaurants take in providing high-quality food to their customers, I was surprised to learn that

“locally grown – organic” was not advertised at all. He explained that although they produce cheese and olive oil on-site, and serve meat and vegetables from their organic farm, they still do not feel ready to advertise as eco-hotel. However, he sees it as an investment for the future aware that at this moment his little fishermen’s village is ill-prepared for demanding tourists as there is not much to do around but to spend time on a beach or take a leisurely walk by the sea. His guests still have the opportunity to enjoy organically grown and produced food; although often they do not know it is organic, they certainly know that it tastes great.

Figure 14 - Olive Grove



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 2

While at the Island of Brač, I had an opportunity to discuss issues with eco-certificates that many farmers mentioned during the conference. I talked to the owner of

one of eight approved organic certification agencies and asked about the process and issues as she sees them. She says that the process takes anytime from 6 months to two years. During that time the farm is considered to be “in conversion” and is often controlled to confirm that farmers do follow all the regulations and instructions given in order to achieve organic certification. She pointed out that although certification agencies do their best to do their job responsibly, sometimes it is the law and the way it is written, that in fact, presents an obstacle in controlling the organic farms farming practice. According to law, agencies should cover the cost of laboratory tests, if test results show no in organic farming practice. This becomes costly for agencies and many agencies do not dare to send soil sample to a laboratory due to a possibility of incurring cost of the test. This allows for errors and lack of trust in organic certification and domestic eco-labels.

Participant 3

Many tourists visit Dubrovnik, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the unique medieval walled city with an impressive history of democracy and liberty. The people of Dubrovnik were skilled diplomats who over centuries negotiated peace with their neighbors and potential enemies to keep their city-state safe from wars and occupations. This centuries' long peace has given the residents of Dubrovnik an opportunity to strive in art, crafts and science, as well as to travel the known and unknown world and bring the knowledge accrued on those trips back home. Today, that entire cultural and historical heritage is what brings hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists to Dubrovnik every summer. Many known and less known celebrities and crowned heads from all around the

world find their way to Dubrovnik to learn about the city and enjoy the luxury of their hotel rooms, private villas or yachts.

So, my next stop was one of the five stars hotels in Dubrovnik as I concluded that, if there was anywhere in Croatia with high demand for organically grown food, it must be in Dubrovnik. I was disappointed to find out that the hotel restaurant does not have any organic food on their menu regularly, although the executive chef did say that they were capable of offering and giving their guests anything they wish. However, when it comes to organic food, that food then comes from a retail store, not from a farm. According to the executive chef, there aren't any organic farms in the area, and his only way to get organic milk, cheese, eggs, fruits or anything else his guests may ask for, is to buy it at a local specialty food grocery store. Tourists who ask for organic food are mostly families with little children and often Americans. When asked if he would prefer to be able to have organic food regularly on the menu, he said:

I need 400 eggs every morning just for breakfast in summer time. Nobody in Croatia can deliver 400 organic eggs to me every morning. Smaller hotels may be able to offer organic food, but our hotel is too large and supplies are non-existent.

As he mentioned that he was born in the vicinity of Dubrovnik, I asked for his opinion, as someone who knows the area well, what may be the reason for not having farms around the city as demand for food certainly exists. He believes that in fact, the expansion of tourism may be one of the reasons for lack of farming, at least in the area around Dubrovnik. He says:

People have realized that they can live better and make more money if they rent out their houses and apartments to tourists, rather than if they worked on land. Many sold their land to developers or don't care for the farm land anymore. That's why we need to buy food from large warehouses instead from local farmers.

The Cetina region

Participants 1&2

I interviewed local officials and farmers in the area to find out how they feel about organic food production as a means to tackle local unemployment and to serve this, still niche market that keeps growing every year, with high quality tasty food. In my conversation with one of the Ministry of Agriculture officials in Sinj, I found out that not only are there not any certified organic farmers in the region, but agricultural production in general is at a very low level. According to this official, there are some farms currently growing certain organic crops such as garlic, lavender, and even olives, but none of them is certified. As most of the farms run small scale operations and mainly sell to known buyers, certification seems like a costly and unnecessary hurdle. Large scale production is hard to achieve because, as previously noted, on average farmers own 1-2 hectares of land and usually not in one piece, but in several smaller parcels that are spread across different terrains.

I learned about attempts in the city to organize and register a co-op where farmers would grow fruits and vegetables for a known buyer, a local grocery store chain. The co-op was founded several years ago and is still operational, but there are different

opinions about the functionality, efficiency and level of economic benefit it brings to farmers. The information given to me by the local official of the Ministry of Agriculture about this co-op is that the farmers are not paid on time and the prices they get for their products are lower than the market prices. That is the main reason people are not involved more in this co-op. On the other hand, one of the founders of the co-op and the person in charge believes that the people are just lazy and do not want to do hard work.

The biggest reason, as I see it (for lack of agricultural activities in the region), is because people in this region simply do not like to work. They would all want to be in charge, be bosses and get rich in one year, and you cannot do it in agriculture. In 2013 I signed a contract, on behalf of our cooperative, with several vegetable wholesalers. Our co-op supplies farmers with everything they need: from seeds to tractors, placement of their products and payment within 30 days from delivery date, but it seems that nobody in Sinj likes this deal. No farmers come to work with us, and local officials do not offer much of a support at all - he says.

He continues by saying that, from his own experience, due to lack of interest in jobs in agriculture, it is impossible to expect that anyone would get into organic farming because it is more labor intensive than traditional agriculture, and according to his words, many would try to avoid physically demanding jobs.

Participant 3

However, not everyone is without a vision and ideas. I talked to several of those who believe that organic farming and organic agriculture is the best way to go. A couple

in their late thirties realized that the indigenes sort of garlic is almost extinct and decided that they should start growing garlic organically. They do it on a parcel of land, isolated from others that limit the possibility of pesticides or herbicides getting accidentally onto their land from surrounding farms. As a family with two small children and only one income, they turned this unfavorable situation into an opportunity to make a change and do something new and meaningful. Today they grow organic garlic, make homemade bread for local restaurants, and grow other vegetables. For the last ten years, they have been producing up to one metric ton of high-quality organic garlic annually. Their experience shows that buyers are the ones that dictate what gets grown and what not, and garlic, the indigenous Dalmatian sort, is in demand. Return on investment is also great and is, according to their ten years of experience, ten to one. They, however, do not have a certificate of organic production; it does not make sense to invest in certification at their level of production as the certification process may take up to two years. Although they have many plans on how to combine organic food production with tourism (some beach hotels have showed interest in their organic products), a lack of support from the local and regional government is a common barrier to potential organic farmers which may be very discouraging for some.

Far away from any other agriculture and a possibility to get contaminated by pesticides or chemical fertilizers, the garlic grows in accordance with the rules of the organic farming. Unfortunately, they cannot say the same for other vegetables they grow due to the closeness of their neighbors' conventional agriculture fields.

Figure 15 - Organic garlic field



Source: Marina Pavletić

Figure 16 - Vegetables in the Cetina Region



Source: Marina Pavletić

Figure 17 - Organic non-certified



Source: Marina Pavletić

Another interesting project that their household started is use of natural wool to create a very unique souvenir- sheep called Delma. Delma or Dalma is an old Illyrian

word that means sheep, and the region of Dalmatia was named after Illyrian word for sheep. At the beginning of the 19th century Dalmatia had over 1.1 million sheep wandering around, while today there are less than 50,000 (Grgas, 2014, p. 3). But sheep are still a symbol of Dalmatia and a souvenir made out of the real wool is certainly very original.

Figure 18 - Souvenir Delma



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 4

Being away from the coastal area, the Cetina Region is not what might be considered “classic olive grove region”, and I was surprised to learn that olives have been grown in the area for the last 15 years. A young enthusiast and a visionary planted 12 olive trees 15 years ago and today there are 105 olives in his grove. He talked about how

he contacted the Institute for Adriatic Crops in Split to ask which sort of olives they would recommend planting at his location. Winters could be harsh sometimes in the Dalmatian Hinterland with snow up to 1meter deep and temperatures up to -20°C.

“They said that there was no chance that olives would grow here. They said that I should plant walnuts, almonds or grapes so I planted only twelve olive trees instead of around a hundred that I initially intended to plant” said the young olive grower.

Luckily his olives survived the winters in the Cetina Region so every year he would add more trees to his grove. He is not interested in a commercial exploitation of his olives but rather grows them for his personal use. That did not stop him from submitting his olive oil to a competition in Croatia where it won the gold medal from 270 other olive oils of mixed sorts. He finds the satisfaction in growing olives, making olive oil and finding that perfect balance of ripe and unripe olives used in oil production. However, he says, the risk of trying to live off agriculture in the Cetina Region is too high and he does not feel like he could do it at this moment. In 2013, he produced around 100 liters of oil (8-10kg of olives would give approximately 1 liter of oil) and he gave some to his friends and family, and some left for his personal use. To him, growing olives is just a pleasure and enjoyment and not a commercial experiment.

He told me the good, the bad and the ugly story of olive growing. The good in his case is that his grove is so far away from any other olive grove that the possibility of getting any pests is minimal. The bad is that all around his grove is neglected land and it

is difficult to keep his piece of land well taken care of when everything else around it is overgrown with weeds.

Figure 19 - Olive Grove in the Cetina Region



Source: Marina Pavletić

Well, the ugly part of the story could potentially even be life threatening as, according to his words, many of non-organic growers use pesticides too close to the harvest time. This may cause toxins to remain on olives that are later consumed and used for oil production.

Figure 20 - Olive Grove



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 5

Dalmatia is known for its sheep, and hard sheep cheese from the Island of Pag made at the Gligora Dairy (www.gligora.com) is world known and holds the most prestigious international awards (<http://www.worldchampioncheese.org/>). Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to any of the shepherds but I visited is a young man that has a herd of goats. He purchased his first 5-6 goats some 14-15 years ago. He was unemployed at that time and thought that he would try raising goats. He lives in a village approximately 10-12km away from the city of Sinj. Since he already lives in a rural environment, having a herd of goats did not present a problem. He tries to keep his herd of goats on a steady

number of around 50-60 goats with another 50-60 kids, as young goats are often called. As a goat farmer, although limited in a number of goats he takes care of, he can make enough to support himself because he has no family to support. Being single and living with parents certainly helps cut cost of living.

Figure 21 - Goat Farm in the Cetina Region



Source: Marina Pavletić

He sells young goats for around €100 per piece, and also sells milk and cheese. But his ambitions are limited to what he can do on his own and by himself. And that is not much, certainly not enough for any serious production or placement of organic food in tourism. In response to my question if he would advise young people to get into a farm business, he replied affirmatively. Living in the same household with his parents helps

him to keep his cost of living low. It is not unusual, especially in rural areas, to find several generations living together in the same household. It is not just socially accepted but even in some cases expected. The majority of these family farms are community supported agriculture (CSA) although they are not even aware of that. They succeed as farmers due to their friends, neighbors and family members who buy from them and keep them in business. As they are not really on the market, and do not have to search for new customers, they do not see any need to be certified organic although their production may be, and often is, completely organic.

Participant 6

Often farmers will get into the production of certain crops due to government offered incentives and subsidies. I interviewed a farmer who started growing lavender on some 3,000 sq. meters of land in 2008. Although farming is not his primary occupation, he, together with his family, is very involved in organic growing of lavender. Totally disappointed with the lack of agricultural activities in the region, he was excited to be able to get government incentives to purchase seed and necessary material to start his lavender production. He said:

We have God-given land and climate to grow healthy and organic crops that would be recognized not only in our region but also outside the region.

When asked about the problems and barriers he had to face in order to get incentives and start production, his answer was similar to what I had heard from others: issues with legal land ownership and lack of wholesalers and distribution channels. People are usually

given initial incentives to start growing certain crops, but then they are left to figure out on their own what to do with it and how to sell it.

I took over my neighbor's parcel with lavender, about 2,000 m², because he lost interest as it became too hard for him to do everything on his own.

He talked passionately about different possibilities for lavender use and shared ideas and his vision of the future for the Cetina Region that he sees in organic agriculture and tourism. He makes lavender oil but in very limited amounts. He estimates that with an investment of €4,000 or €5,000 he will be able to purchase a much larger boiler needed to produce the oil. However, dealing with bureaucracy in order to achieve that goal is something that he just wasn't ready to do at this moment. He would love to see changes in the government approach to incentives and organic farming. He says that incentives should be only the beginning of the farmer-government cooperation, not the end of it as it is today. He sees himself as a person who could, with the appropriate help and support, be the leader of lavender production in the Cetina Region where he could motivate others to get into this business. He believes that more than a hundred households in the Cetina Region could find their interest in growing lavender but there is something even more important that he says about it:

It is not all about the money. When a person is busy and has something to do, then there is no place for lethargy.

Positive energy and enthusiasm are rare but not impossible to find right now in the Cetina Region. Lethargy is much more frequent to find as for decades this area has not been exposed to new, inventive and positive projects and ideas. Even when solutions

to their problems look so obvious and logical such as growing food for the nearby tourist region, making a step in that direction seems to be next to impossible.

Figure 22 - Lavender field in the Cetina Region



Source: Marina Pavletić

Figure 23 - Lavender Field 2



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 7

The land in the Cetina Region is partially owned by the local and national government, and those interested in agriculture could apply with the government agency to lease government land and grow crops. Sometimes life happens and plans, although carefully made, have to be changed or adjusted to the new situation. Family issues could become a barrier to successful farming when, without a family support a farmer could easily give up. Such is the case of a newly planted almond farm in the Cetina Region that could easily fall apart and stop existing due to a family member leaving the business. Almond trees take at least five years until their first harvest; that requires long-term investment and dedication of all family members. Without it, success is almost impossible to achieve.

Figure 24 - Newly planted almond farm



Source: Marina Pavletić

Participant 8

Joining the European Union had an adverse effect on one of the largest cheese producer in the Cetina Region. The company used to pride itself for its eco-cheese. Once Croatia joined the EU, the company had to discontinue labeling their cheese as eco-cheese due to not being in compliance with the strict rules and regulation of the European Union. I tried to set up an interview with the company's owner on several occasions, but I had no luck as he was very busy and often in meetings. I was, however, able to talk to one of the dairy farm owners who supply the cheese company with milk. He explained that, to keep the eco-label on the cheese, the company had to use organic milk that they could not do, due to the lack of organic milk availability in the region. I asked the dairy farm owner if he would consider going organic, but he did not show interest in switching to organic as he would not be able to deliver the quantity he can deliver now, and he

believes that could hurt his business. He was in the business of producing milk and the more he produced, the better off he believed he would be.

Participant 9

Several families in the region have been involved in agritourism, offering accommodation as well as homemade food. I visited one of the families who have had their own agritourism business for the last ten years. I wanted to learn about their experience in agritourism, their views on the prospects of those in the Cetina Region, their guests and the importance of the food they prepare for their guests. As Croatia's tourism still heavily depends on its beaches and the sun that lasts for two or three summer months, with global climate changes and the danger of long exposures to the sun, Croatia's Ministry of Tourism in its strategic plan put more emphasis on the development of agritourism. According to my host, that is still in the beginning phase, and agritourism in the Cetina Region is not as developed as it could or should be. He admits that the food his family grows on their farm and prepares for their guests is mostly organic, but it happened not so much by choice but rather due to high prices of fertilizers and pesticides. Their guests are encouraged to pick their own vegetables and fruits from the farm, and that is, according to his words, always an incredible experience for many. He believes that agritourism and organic agriculture could bring higher economic benefit to Cetina Region. However, as one of the reasons that is not happening yet he sees in lack of desire for hard work among local population. "It's not worth it" is what he hears people saying about agritourism and agriculture (organic or conventional).

However, the official from the Ministry of Agriculture in Sinj had a different opinion about the reasons for not having organic farmers in the region: as she is in contact with farmers on a daily bases her experience is that mostly elderly households are involved in agriculture and they are not physically capable of maintaining their land. She sees problems in laws and regulations which are just copied from the books of the European Union, but not adjusted to Croatian farms or the ability of Croatian farmers to produce large amounts of food. As Croatia has a large number of war veterans, many of them suffer from the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and are retired but still physically capable of working in agriculture. However, the law says that if they decide to get back into the labor force, they have to give up a portion of their retirement. For many of them getting back to the labor force ends up being financially too risky so, even if they start working on a farm, they are not officially registered. What she also sees as a huge problem is the fact that farmers have to wear many hats to make be able to make some money. In her opinion farmers should be on their land and do what farmers do best, and business part of it should be done by someone else: marketing, sales, price negotiation and similar. At this moment, due to lack of the middle man between farmers and wholesalers or distribution channels, farmers have to do everything on their own. Often, instead of cooperating with each other, they become competitors and undercut each other's prices which brings gain only to wholesalers but not to farmers.

Discussion

I have heard many different opinions on organic farming, organic food production and its placement in tourism. All participants have ideas and suggestions but many of them have limited means to change the existing situation. Getting paid for the produce is

often a problem in Croatian agriculture as guaranteed prices are not set in advance, and often the value of the input is higher than the value of the output. Sometimes, when the selling price is lower than the cost of production, farmers would rather throw away their produce than try to sell it at all. Insecurity of payments or prices is a big problem and for many, it is a turn off when considering getting into the business of agriculture.

Government agencies and the Ministry of Agriculture do not communicate their rules and regulations to farmers well, and lack of policy consistency is a problem. I was happy to see and hear some success stories of organic farmers in northern part of Croatia; although each of the farmers I visited was in a different type of food production, there were similarities that were most likely crucial for their success:

- It is a family business – often three generations were working together
- High level of education (B.A. and higher)
- Own distribution channels/ contracts
- Over 100 hectares of land

However, none of them ever thought of selling their products directly to hotels or restaurants during the tourist season, as they were not too close to the coastal part of Croatia. All of them have already established markets much closer to home; it did not make any sense for them to go anywhere else.

Many organic farmers have issues with marketing and promotion of their products and there is an evident need for cooperation and clustering, especially among small producers. Great farmers are not always great administrators or sales people, and they need help which clustering may provide. Better marketing and promotion of organic

products is needed to take full advantage of the organic certification that farms have. Education of organic farmers is also of high importance as organic food production, marketing, and business in general cannot succeed if a farmer does not understand all aspects of his/her business.

In coastal parts of Croatia it is evident that many farmers left agriculture for jobs in tourism. So, if local farmers found new careers in tourism and abandoned their farms, as the chef explained, who supplies the organic food store in the city? Not surprisingly, the majority of food and cosmetic articles found at the store were produced in Austria, Germany, Italy, even Greece and Turkey. Among several hundred of different articles at the store, no more than twenty were produced in Croatia. Although occasionally some fresh fruits and vegetables do come from domestic organic farms, local farmers are mostly described as unreliable. That caused specialty grocery stores and some restaurants to buy their organic products elsewhere or to completely discontinue selling or serving organic food. The largest specialty store in Croatia is Bio&Bio, a chain owned by Biovega Company. Through twenty years of existence, they opened 13 Bio&Bio stores all over Croatia, have 170 employees and in 2010 they acquired an organic farm where many of their own fruits and vegetables come from. A variety of around 3000 different organic products could be found on shelves of their stores, but still almost two-thirds of their assortment is imported. However, I have also heard complaints from organic growers who claim that their organic produce gets mixed with non-organic and sold as organic which causes mistrust of customers in their produce and label. The problem is certainly that each grower, in order to sell his/her produce, is forced to deal with customers directly as organized networks do not exist. The same goes for the lack of

organic food in hotels and restaurants; organic food farmers' markets do not exist and for large restaurants, any uncertainty in produce or meat supplies is unacceptable.

The lack of farming in coastal part of Croatia should make the Cetina Region even more attractive as food producing area. However, reasons for the lack of agricultural activities and food production in the Cetina Region are more complex. In March of 2013, the Institute of Social Studies Ivo Pilar from Zagreb published results of a study that was conducted in the Cetina Region in fall of 2012. The objective of the study was to find the new ways for natural, human and cultural resources management of the Cetina Region and perspectives for the economic development. Just by comparing demographics from 1991 to 2011, it is obvious that the Cetina Region lost almost 25% of its population and today in the Cetina Region lives between 45-48,000 people which is almost the same as in 1900 (Curkovic Nimac, 2013, p. 8).

The level of education, based on the 2001 Census, shows that 47% of the population in the Cetina Region, 15 years of age and older had finished high school, but only 6.2% had a college degree or higher which was way below the national average of 11.9% (Curkovic Nimac, 2013, p. 16). Although less than perfect work habits of the local population were mentioned in the study, it is the apathy caused by disappointment in the government, and disastrous economic situation as a result of closing down largest employers in the areas that is seen as the barrier to changes (Curkovic Nimac, 2013, p. 28-35). "What's the point" attitude as well as the lack of ideas and investments helps keep the status quo. And partially due to that attitude, agricultural sector in the Cetina Region is minimal. Some participants in the study from the Cetina Region were entertaining a thought of growing gluten free grains, such as millet, in the valley.

However, the lack of machinery for the harvest of millet stopped them in their attempt to proceed. This type of grain would have most certainly found its place in hotels and restaurants along the Adriatic Coast as well as specialty food stores due to the growing need and demand for it.

Many will say that locally grown may be more attractive to tourists than organic. Stories that I have heard during my stay in Croatia tell something else; often the elderly who sell their locally grown excess fruits and vegetables on farmers market, use either too much pesticides or too late in a season, allowing toxins to remain on crops without really understanding the danger of it. “Locally grown” unfortunately, does not always translate into “healthy”, but “organic & locally grown” is certainly the best choice. I was under impression that a large number of people in the Cetina Region are still not aware of the business potential for this type of agriculture. For a long time being a farmer was considered being less successful and often less educated. Organic farming requires a high level of knowledge and continuous education through workshops and lectures; this is still in the beginning phase in Croatia.

Having a farm means having a title to the land in use. That is not always possible for Croatia’s farmers as Croatia inherited a messy land registry system from the previous political system. For decades there was no enforcement of laws and regulations to transfer land ownership to new owners, once the original owner passed away. Without clean ownership and title to the land, farmers were not able to apply for loans, or get subsidies and incentives from the government. In the meantime many of those who inherited land lost their jobs, and the only income they had were unemployment checks. Without income and a clean land title they could not purchase seeds and work on their

land. And that is just one of the reasons why agricultural land in the Cetina Region is not in use. In my previous conversation with the owner of one of the organic certification agencies, she mentioned that the Land Registry is a disaster and that Croatia had six years before entering the EU to clean up the Land Registry to avoid land ownership issues. It was done only partially, and there are still many land owners who have limited use of their land due to not having a clean land title.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The overarching goal of this study was to analyze how Croatia currently produces organic food in the context of how this will improve opportunities for tourists and the tourism industry. A case study approach was chosen as the appropriate research method focusing primarily on the Cetina Region. Consequently, the researcher spent a two-month period during the summer of 2014 on-site in Croatia. Through an extensive and systematic review of the literature, it emerges that Croatia is in a unique position to build on its rich and diverse culinary history by developing tourist experiences geared toward the organic food traveler.

The study attempted to answer three research questions: (1) What is the role of organically grown food in the development of tourism within the European Union? (2) How can Croatia define its role in the organic food market within the tourist sector? (3) What are the potentials and challenges for organic food production in the Cetina Region?

Literature review was used to answer the first question and in part the second question, while the case study approach was used to answer the second and the third question. Data was collected through in-person semi-structured interviews, emails with open-ended questions and observations.

Summary of findings

The analysis of the literature review shows that organic farming is important to the European Union countries in more than one way: it is one of the factors of rural development as well as the important factor in agritourism. Support of, and investment in organic farming is often channeled to tourism activities on a farm. Eco-labels in tourism sector have become a way to attract environmentally conscious tourists to hotels and restaurants which promote and serve organic food, and promote energy efficiency and waste management. Organic farming employs, directly and indirectly, millions of people in the European Union, while eco/culinary/agritourism has become more attractive to many. Literature shows strong support for organic farming and food production in Croatia. This support is visible in new policies, different action plans and incentives to farmers. However, many laws that regulate organic farming are not adjusted to Croatia's conditions and are difficult to enforce. The study results show that barriers to successful organic farming are many: small parcel sizes, Land Registry issues, lack of control, non-existent organic food market, lack of trust in domestic organic labels, lack of government policies continuation, farmers' education level, and overall apathy of local population, some of which is a legacy of the previous political system. These are some of the findings that prevent organic farming and locally produced organic food to find its place in the tourist sector. Demand for organic food exists but supply of locally produced organic food is insufficient.

Conclusions

After spending two months searching for answers to my research questions through existing literature, laws and regulations, listening to the participant's and

comparing my findings from different parts of Croatia and the European Union, I see Croatia as a big puzzle with all the right pieces but not in the right places. Through the case study, I intended to find answers to my research questions about the importance, and the role of organic food in development of tourism, and to attempt to understand the contradictory situation in Croatia where a high number of tourists in Dalmatia does not lead to a higher level of food production, specifically organic food production in the Cetina Region.

Organic agriculture and food production are a large business in the European Union, and understanding the health and nutritional benefits of organically grown food lead to a higher demand for this food among the European Union population. The tourism sector has also recognized this demand and, as shown in the literature and on the case of BioHotels, this niche market keeps growing every year. As the newest member of the European Union, Croatia has an advantage of large rural areas inland and along the Adriatic Coast that could easily be used for organic agriculture, but it is a slow process due to inconsistency in Croatian laws and regulations and a lack of adjustment of newly adopted EU laws to the Croatian reality. Demand for organic products among tourists exists, but the study shows that cooperation between organic farmers and tourist sector is almost non-existent.

Different government policies are not in sync with each other which cause problems to potential organic growers and the placement of their products in tourism. Small parcels and unsolved land ownership issues are a huge barrier to potential farmers in Cetina Region. Although some issues could be solved through clustering and co-ops, it is not yet common to see organic farmers' united entry to the market. Higher education of

younger generations at universities within the European Union may hold the key to the problem and be a right step to the cultural changes in the area. With new knowledge acquired internationally, they may be more open to cooperation and better understand how to take advantage of the agricultural area in the heart of Dalmatia, such as the Cetina Region. The need for higher education institution such as community college or similar is shown; with only 6.2% of population in Cetina Region with college degree or higher, it is obvious that many of college students who leave the area do not come back once they get their degree. Community college level of educational institution could allow local population to acquire knowledge on tourism, marketing or organic agriculture without leaving their town, and would allow them to apply the acquired knowledge locally and fasten the process of rural development in the region.

Limitations of the study

The study also has its limitations, as, due to a large number of tourists booking their accommodation through different booking platforms, it was difficult to get their opinion on organic food availability in Croatia, or their demand for it. Also, the study was conducted in late May, June and early July of 2014, and the highest tourist season in Croatia is traditionally July and August. The study made a conclusion on tourists' demand for organic food products based on answers of interviewees from the tourism sector and specialty food grocery stores.

Implications for future research

Future research on this topic should include surveys among tourists who book their private accommodation vacation through booking platforms such as Airbnb,

Holiday Lettings or Booking.com. Croatia's membership in the European Union is just two years old. Therefore, more time should be allowed before further research takes place, as to be able to compare changes to the present situation in Cetina region and to see whether the demand for organic food triggers changes in government policies or initiates any level of organic food production in the area.

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL NOT NEEDED FOR HSRIB PROJECT NUMBER 14-03-22

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: March 18, 2014

To: Lucius Hallett, Principal Investigator
Marina Pavletic, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 14-03-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled "Tourism and Organic Food Production in Croatia: Case Study of Cetina Region." has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing a product and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL TO USE PHOTOS FROM THE TOURIST BOARD SINJ WEBSITE

WMU Webmail Plus - Google Chrome

← → ↻ <https://webmail.wmich.edu/zimbra/h/printmessage?id=23940> 🔍 ⭐ ⚙

WMU Webmail Plus mbb3018@wmich.edu

RE: Approval to use photos from the website

From : Jelena Bilic <info@visitsinj.com>
Subject : RE: Approval to use photos from the website
To : 'Marina Pavletic' <marina.pavletic@wmich.edu>

Thu, Jul 30, 2015 04:41 AM

Dear Mrs Pavletic,

I confirm that you can use two of the Alka photos from the website www.visitsinj.com in your master's thesis (non-commercial use).

If you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

Jelena Bilić, dipl.oec.
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