

FROM FAIRY TALES TO LITERARY TOURISM: ENHANCING OGULIN'S TOURIST APPEAL

Abstract

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Purpose – Achieving more sustainable tourism that is also more satisfying for hosts and visitors is one of the key challenges in today's leisure and hospitality industry. Strategies to promote sustainability and increase the satisfaction of locals and tourists vary, but often include the promotion of niche tourism, such as literary tourism. The paper examines the importance of the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*, one of the most famous literary and children's festivals in Croatia, for increasing the tourist appeal of Ogulin as a destination among non-resident festival visitors.

Methodology – For data collection, a face-to-face survey of 62 non-resident festival visitors was conducted during the fall edition of the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* in 2023 using a structured questionnaire. In addition, a deeper understanding was gained through semi-structured interviews with festival visitors.

Findings – The questionnaire survey, combined with interviews, showed how the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* enhances the attractiveness of Ogulin for festival visitors by strengthening the link between literature, local identity and visitor experience. The results show the potential of literary tourism to generate meaningful cultural, social and economic impact at the local level. **Contribution** – Mass tourism on the Adriatic coast with numerous unsustainable practices still dominates Croatian tourism development. This article provides insights into the benefits of niche tourism, such as literary tourism, for shaping and enhancing the tourist appeal of a small town in a touristically less visited region.

Keywords: literary tourism, *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*, tourist appeal, place-making, tourist experience

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, demand for travel experiences that offer authenticity, transformative potential and the connection with the local community has grown significantly (UNWTO 2017). As these qualities are difficult to sustain in destinations that suffer from overtourism, less exposed destinations are gaining attention. Smaller towns and rural settlements, defined not only by population but also by limited cultural resources, are better suited to offer meaningful experiences (Scherf 2021). Without the market-driven pressures that often shape tourism in larger cities, these destinations are less prone to promoting simplified or superficial narratives (Richards 2021). As a result, 'smallness' is increasingly seen not as a limitation, but as a valued asset (Richards and Duif 2019).

Some of the advantages of smaller and rural destinations include greater connectedness to the natural environment, ease of socializing among both locals and tourists, a stronger sense of local identity and culture, and the absence of problems typical of large cities, such as social alienation, traffic congestion, and crime (Robertson 2001; Scherf 2021; Tomaz 2021). These characteristics make smaller and rural destinations an ideal candidate for the development of forms of tourism such as cultural, creative and arts (e.g. such as literary tourism), which result from a greater reliance on endogenous, place-based creativity (Richards 2014).

This coincides with the trend of increasing focus on intangible heritage and contemporary forms of creativity in tourism (OECD 2014), as a result of the creative turn in the social sciences, which manifests itself, among other things, in the shift of established paradigms in the field of meaning production: from investment in infrastructure for cultural production and consumption and an emphasis on cultural products and material heritage to a focus on atmosphere, appeal to all the senses, vibrancy, sense of place, quality of life and the embodiment of multiple narratives in space (as opposed to the dominant one) (Richards 2017; Richards and Duif 2019).

Such creativity-oriented forms of tourism are based on activities that create a social exchange between the local population and tourists that is much more intimate and direct than the usual scripted interactions typical of mass tourism (Richards 2014). This is also in line with the changing characteristics of the tourist experience, which should generate a positive impact on his identity, something that can be achieved through a good atmosphere (Nguyen et al. 2019), the development of place attachment (Ram et al. 2016), opportunities for entertainment (Armbrecht 2019), education (Molina-Gomez et al. 2021) and socializing (Marques et al. 2021), as well as a higher degree of active participation or co-creation of the experience itself, especially in collaboration with the local community (Richards 2018; Couret 2019).

Such a transformative experience, which carries a sense of playfulness, control and focus and offers a balance between one's abilities and challenges, is also referred to by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as an optimal experience. It allows us to enter the flow state, in which we are so focused on the activity that we lose track of time. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the task of a creative destination would be to provide conditions that give every tourist the opportunity to find such a balance for themselves. The level of creative engagement depends on the visitor—some are content with simply experiencing a creative atmosphere, while

others seek active participation. In both cases, the space is not pre-defined but shaped through individual presence, perception, and interaction (Dovey 2010; Crouch 2013).

The aim of this research is to explore the significance of the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*, one of the most visible literary festivals in Croatia, in increasing the tourist appeal of Ogulin as a destination among non-resident festival visitors. The following research questions will be answered: How and to what extent does the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* contribute to enhancing the destination image and tourist attractiveness of Ogulin among non-resident visitors? Which elements of visitor experience and place-making practices are crucial for overall satisfaction, intention to revisit and the willingness to recommend the destination further among friends and family?

Beyond this introduction, the paper is divided into several sections. Section 1 looks at the theoretical background of literary tourism, including the definition and the evolution, concept of literary place, forms of literary tourism and examples of good practice. Section 2 brings more details on the study area, particularly regarding natural and cultural factors decisive for the tourism development of Ogulin with emphasize on literary heritage. Section 3 outlines the methodology used and provides basic demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section 4 presents the research findings on various topics demonstrating the importance of the festival for Ogulin's tourist appeal. Section 5 offers a discussion and concluding remarks together with research limitations and suggestions for further research.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. The Origins and Evolution of Literary Tourism

Literary tourism is a form of tourism that should be observed within the broader context of cultural and creative tourism as well as heritage tourism (Squire 1996; Robinson and Andersen 2002; Busby and Klug 2001; Herbert 2001). It is commonly defined as a specific niche within cultural tourism that refers to travel to destinations associated with literature (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Butler 2022). Such travel, motivated by literature, allows the reader/visitor to have more direct contact with the author as well as with fictional characters and the setting itself, whether real or imagined (Busby and Klug 2001; Gurteen 2025).

Although some authors locate the beginnings of literary tourism in different historical periods — from the Roman Empire and the Romans visiting the ruins of Troy (inspired by Homer) (Robinson and Andersen 2002) to medieval pilgrimages inspired by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Westover 2012) and visits to Petrarch's house (Hendrix 2007) — most authors agree that literary-motivated mass travel began in the era of the Grand Tour. During the Grand Tour, a special emphasis was placed on the writer himself (almost to the point of a personality cult), which made visits to places connected to the author's personal life especially popular. This gave rise to the first literary tourism destinations such as Wordsworth's Lake District, Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon, Yorkshire, famous for the Brontë sisters, and many others (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018). It was not until the beginning of the 20th century, and especially in the 21st century, that the focus began to shift from the author to the place depicted in the literary text and to fictional characters, which consequently led to the development of film tourism.

1.2. Literary Place: Between Imagination and Geography

The literary place is a kind of intersection between the literary work, i.e. the imaginary, and the concrete geographical space, adding new layers of meaning (Butler 1986; Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018). The reader/tourist is motivated to find connections in the physical world with the author or the products of his imagination, whether in the form of fictional characters, certain locations from the work, or the landscape that served as inspiration for the writing (Herbert 1996; Magner 2013). Kaczmarek (2020) claims that the reader/tourist and the writer co-create the literary place, and this process is more authentic the less the tourist's experience is mediated and planned and the more it is personal and spontaneous. Thus, authenticity is always less dependent on the quantity and quality of objects associated with the author, and more dependent on the tourist's imagination - as the sum of personal experiences, sensations, thoughts and desires through which the author and/or fictional characters and narrative are evoked into the geographical space (Orr 2017).

While in the early days of literary tourism, the literary place was largely equated with the author's birthplace or the area that served as a template for the fictional setting, the use and significance of literature — and thus literary tourism — has evolved significantly in the 21st century. It has thus become one of the essential forms of creativity-based place-making strategies (Marques 2019).

There is an increasing move away from the usual standard, where literature is just another element of place marketing, towards the concept of literature as part of the narrative of the place and its identity (Marques and Richards 2014). As Gurteen (2025) argues using the example of Brontë Country, "text produces place," meaning that a literary place is not defined by natural or political boundaries, but is instead produced and affirmed by readers through their engagement with literary works and the biographical details of their authors. The aim is to create meaningful and content-rich connections with place (Herbert 1996), improve the quality of life for local people and encourage creativity and innovation.

1.3. Forms of Literary Tourism

The literary motivations for visiting a destination and consequently the forms of literary tourism and its manifestations in place are very diverse and relate to the following (Hoppen et al. 2014; Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Butler 2022):

- Visits to the author's home and objects related to his personal life;
- Visits to places associated with the literary text (places where the work was written or places that served as inspiration for the literary text);
- Literary walks that include places associated with the author or fictional characters (e.g. Leopold Bloom walking tour in Dublin, Mrs. Dalloway walking tour);
- Visits to literary festivals, fairs and competitions;
- Visits to libraries and bookshops, which may be motivated by the esthetics of the architectural building itself or by a desire to see particular editions of particular literary works;
- Visits to literary theme parks (e.g. Astrid Lindgren's World in Vimmerby, dedicated to Pippi Longstocking and other famous fictional characters);
- Stays in literary hotels that have a connection to literature, either to an author or a fictional narrative, and which may also have extensive book collections;
- Visits to literary cities/villages, with or without the UNESCO City of Literature designation, that are strongly rooted in literature as part of their identity;
- Visits to literary museums and interpretation centers;
- Participation in the staging of a literary text in locations associated with the text or the author.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, the link between place and literature is also evident in the presence of authors, their works or fictional characters through various forms of commemorative markers such as plaques, monuments, street names, buildings, bridges, cafés, libraries and the design of souvenirs (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Marques 2019). This corresponds to different place-making techniques and tools that aim to carefully design the space to improve the quality of life of the local population and achieve greater visitor satisfaction (Lew 2017; Vodanović Lukić 2021).

1.4. The Sustainability of Literary Tourism

Since in most cases it does not attract a large number of visitors —and thus does not significantly impact the environment and the community — while helping to relieve heavily visited destinations and reduce seasonality (Busby and Humbly 2000), literary tourism is considered a sustainable (Asadi et al. 2022; Rech et al. 2025; Minhyeok and Lee 2025) and responsible form of tourism (Zatelli et al. 2025). The benefits it brings to a place and its community are manifold:

- Economic: diversification of the local economy, especially in marginalized areas struggling with depopulation problems (O'Connor and Kim 2014; Alghureiby 2015; Asadi et al. 2022).
- Socio-cultural: promoting interaction between hosts and tourists; promoting education and preservation of cultural heritage; positive impact on destination identity; revitalization of space (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018).
- Personal: Strengthening awareness of one's own identity and the identity of others; promoting understanding of each other's culture (Ghetau and Esanu 2011).

1.5. Examples of Literary Place-Making

Among the most famous and successful literary destinations in Europe are Dublin, Edinburgh, Óbidos, Barcelona, Hay-on-Wye and many others.

Óbidos is a small Portuguese town whose tourist appeal originally came from its well-preserved architectural heritage within medieval walls. To revitalize the destination and reduce the problem of seasonality, the town gradually turned to literature, opening several bookshops, a literary hotel and organizing the FOLIO literary festival. Over time, Óbidos developed into a kind of art cluster and has held the title of UNESCO City of Literature since 2015 (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Marques 2019; Matias et al. 2022).

One of the most famous examples of literary festivals in Europe (and the world) is the Hay Festival, which takes place in the small Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye with a population of just 1,500. A number of bookshops opened in the town in the 1960s, and by the 1970s, the town of 39 bookshops was already known as *The Town of Books*. To create an even stronger link with literature, a literary festival was launched in 1988, which over time gained such popularity and influence that it became an emblematic example of the transformation and development of rural areas through literary tourism (Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Jenkins 2019).

2. STUDY AREA

2.1. Natural and Cultural Factors Shaping the Tourism Development of Ogulin

The town of Ogulin is located in the Ogulin-Plaški valley, a part of Mountainous Croatia situated at the crossroads of Gorski kotar and Lika. Statistical data show that tourism in Ogulin has experienced an upward trend in the last ten years, which is the result of prudent management of existing natural and cultural resources (Table 1).

Table 1: Accommodation Capacities, Tourist Arrivals and Overnight-Stays (Domestic and Foreign) in Town of Ogulin (2013-2023)

Year	Arrivals	Overnight-stay			Accommodation capacities (Number of beds)
		Domestic	Foreign	Total	
2013	8,039	7,571	8,310	15,881	461
2014	10,775	5,932	11,192	17,124	262
2015	11,548	6,800	11,177	17,977	377
2016	13,941	6,866	15,325	22,191	412
2017	18,862	7,714	20,109	27,823	501
2018	19,751	9,251	20,887	30,138	557
2019	20,378	22,631	10,698	33,329	654
2020	9,412	9,037	8,324	17,361	680
2021	19,228	17,100	16,183	33,283	681
2022	20,097	13,333	21,976	35,309	665
2023	23,696	13,696	25,945	39,641	724

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

Natural resources that are important for tourism development in Ogulin certainly include sites in the immediate vicinity (or in the town center itself), such as the Đula's Abyss, Klek Mountain, the artificial lakes Sabljaki and Bukovnik, Schmidt Lake and nearby places such as Bjelolasica Mountain, White and Samarske Rocks (Turk 2000).

Cultural resources important for the tourism development relate primarily to the centuries-old heritage of the Frankopan family, especially the Frankopan castle in Ogulin (16th century) with the local heritage museum, as well as the old town of Modruš (12th century). The art historian Željka Čorak (1998) considers Ogulin to be one of the most beautiful towns on the Croatian mainland and emphasizes its spatial qualities: the esthetically and visually attractive location between the Đula's Abyss and Mount Klek, the horticultural order and diversity and the overall picturesque character, which — apart from the natural elements woven into the town center — is based primarily on the intimate size and numerous decorative details on the architectural facades and town furnishings.

2.2. The Literary Reimagination of Ogulin

Given the many possibilities, there have also been numerous attempts to brand Ogulin in order to better present the city on a national scale. These included a focus on the Frankopan noble family, the archeological heritage in the area, winter tourism from Bjelolasica, mountain tourism related to Klek, the White and Samarske Rocks, and a stronger focus on the timber industry and agriculture (Selberg and Škrbić Alempijević 2013). Over time, however, a consensus has emerged among local stakeholders that Ogulin should base its identity primarily on its literary heritage. This mainly refers to the rich tradition of local legends and oral stories, which are closely linked to the spatial characteristics of the region, as well as to the fact that one of the most important Croatian children's book authors (nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in Literature), Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, was born in Ogulin (Batinić 2011).

Although Brlić-Mažuranić left Ogulin shortly after her birth, she returned several times during her youth. In her autobiography, she acknowledged the influence that Ogulin and its surroundings — especially Klek, Đula's Abyss and the Dobra River — had on her imagination and later work (Brlić-Mažuranić 1968). Even though her most famous collection of fairy tales, *Tales of Long Ago* (1916), was inspired by Slavic mythology and its settings are highly stylized and in some ways universal, connections to the concrete space of Ogulin can be established in some of them (Batinić 2011).

The symbolic and concrete linking of the physical space of Ogulin with its literary heritage began as early as 1974 (on the 100th anniversary of her birth), when a monument to I. Brlić-Mažuranić was erected in the town's main square, a memorial room was set up in the local museum and the elementary school was named after her.

However, as Škrbić Alempijević (2012) emphasizes, the marking of these toponyms did not contribute to the creation of an active culture of remembrance. This only emerged in 2006 with the project *Ogulin, the Homeland of Fairy Tales*, initiated by the city and county tourism associations to increase the visibility of Ogulin based on its literary heritage as a key feature. The project was realized through two main contents that are seen as a kind of continuation of the local literary tradition: the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* (launched in 2006) and the *Ivana's House of Fairy Tales* interpretation center with its accompanying themed trail (opened in 2013).

In the museum, the literary tradition is conveyed through visual and multimedia language, while during the festival the performing arts dominate — especially puppet, drama and street theater, music and storytelling (Ratković 2006). In addition, the festival program also includes educational, entertaining and creative workshops inspired by fairy tales, as well as lectures and exhibitions, often organized by various local associations.

The festival, during which the everyday space of Ogulin (squares, parks, streets) is transformed into a fantastic fairytale realm (in the broadest sense of the genre), also motivates the visitors themselves to participate in the inspiration of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić — through the unique symbiosis of Ogulin's natural phenomena and cultural artifacts.

3. METHODOLOGY

The article is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research among non-resident visitors to the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* in Ogulin. The qualitative research, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was conducted in 2021 and involved 9 participants. The interviewees were selected using the random sampling method at the entry points of individual festival venues, mostly after the end of specific events (performances, workshops, storytelling sessions). The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and were time-limited due to parental care of minor children (as visitors are mostly families with young children) and the timing of the next event the visitors wanted to attend.

The interview questions focused mainly on perceptions of the relationship between the festival and the place, as well as specific elements related to literature (other than the festival itself) that make up the town's identity, their personal experiences of visiting the festival, and the personal benefits they derived from the visit. The interviews were transcribed and the codes were developed using the inductive coding approach.

The quantitative part of the research was conducted using structured questionnaires in a face-to-face survey of 62 non-resident festival visitors during the fall edition of the festival in 2023. The questionnaire survey collected data on numerous relevant aspects of literary tourism, e.g. experiences, motivation, types of attractions visited, length of stay, affective and social aspects of their visits and spatial elements they found most important in building their image of the town. The analysis was carried out by means of descriptive and correlation analysis using SPSS 25. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength of the relationships between the selected variables. The convention suggested by Cohen (1988) for small ($r = 0.10$), medium ($r = 0.30$) and large ($r = 0.50$) effects was used to interpret the sample correlation coefficients. All variables used for the correlation analysis were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

As Table 2 shows, respondents between the ages of 30 and 50 make up 82% of all participants, reflecting the fact that the majority of visitors are young families. In terms of education level, 35% of respondents have completed high school, while the rest have a higher degree. The vast majority of respondents are employed (91%), while only a few are unemployed, students or housewives.

Table 2: **Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (Questionnaire Survey)**

Characteristics	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	30.6
Female	69.3
Age group	
18-30	9.6
30-40	48.3
40-50	33.8
50-60	6.4
60-70	1.6

Characteristics	Percentage (%)
<i>Education level</i>	
High school	35.4
Bachelor's degree	12.9
Master's degree	43.5
Postgraduate degree (pre-Bologna)	6.4
Doctorate	1.6
<i>Employment status</i>	
Employed	91.9
Unemployed	3.2
Student	3.2
Homemaker	1.6

Source: Authors

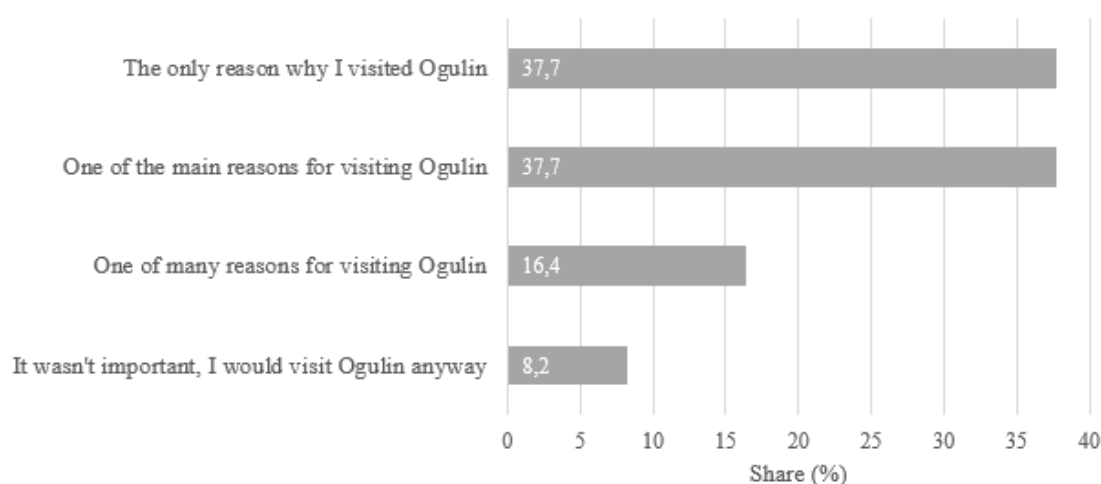
4. RESULTS

The chapter on the results is divided into six sections: The first provides insight into the role of the festival in the choice of Ogulin as a tourist destination; the second shows the impact of the festival on tourist overnight stays; the third section sheds light on the satisfaction level of festival visitors and their loyalty and willingness to recommend the festival to others; the fourth section provides an understanding of festival visitors' experience satisfaction; the fifth section examines the correlation between experience and satisfaction; and the last illustrates the importance of literary place-making practices for the tourist appeal of Ogulin.

4.1. The Festival's Role in Destination Choice

The questionnaire survey revealed that the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* is very important for increasing the attractiveness of Ogulin for festival visitors. For $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents (referring to visitors who participated in the questionnaire survey), the festival was the main reason (38%) or one of the main reasons for visiting Ogulin (38%). Only 8% of respondents answered that they would visit Ogulin even without the festival (Figure 1). This was also clearly confirmed in the semi-structured interviews. Several interviewees emphasized that they would not stop in Ogulin without the festival (and/or *Ivana's House of Fairy Tales*), but would only pass through, mostly on a hike to Mount Klek.

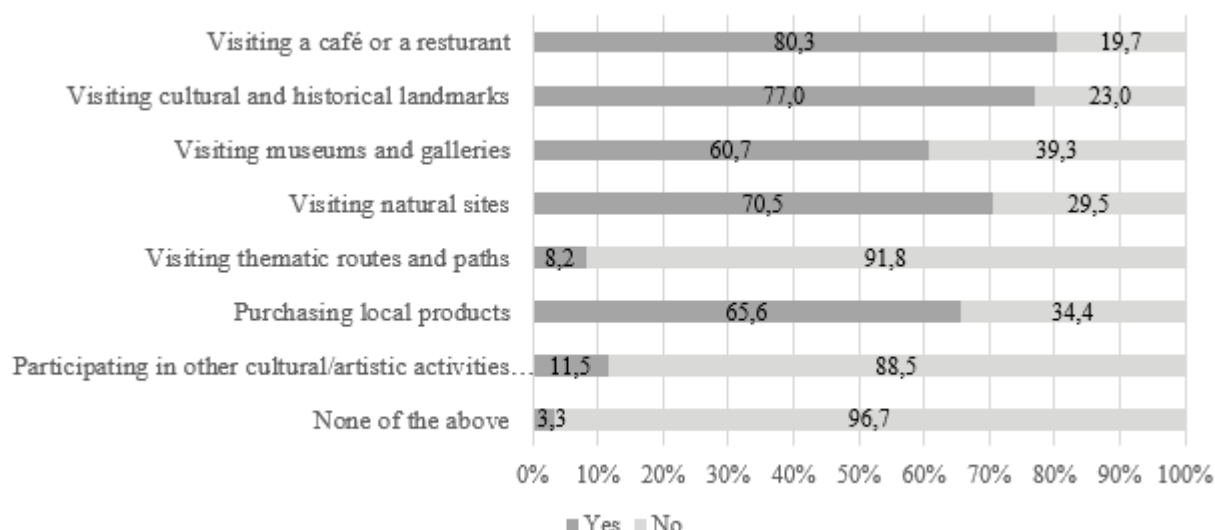
Figure 1: The Importance of the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* for the Decision to Visit Ogulin



Source: Authors

The attractiveness of Ogulin as a tourist destination beyond the festival was also noticeable: 77% of respondents visited cultural attractions and 71% of respondents visited natural attractions during their stay in Ogulin. The impact on the local economy (although limited by the duration and number of visitors) is also noticeable, with 80% of respondents visiting a café or restaurant, 65% buying local products and 61% visiting a museum or gallery (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Activities During the Festival Visit

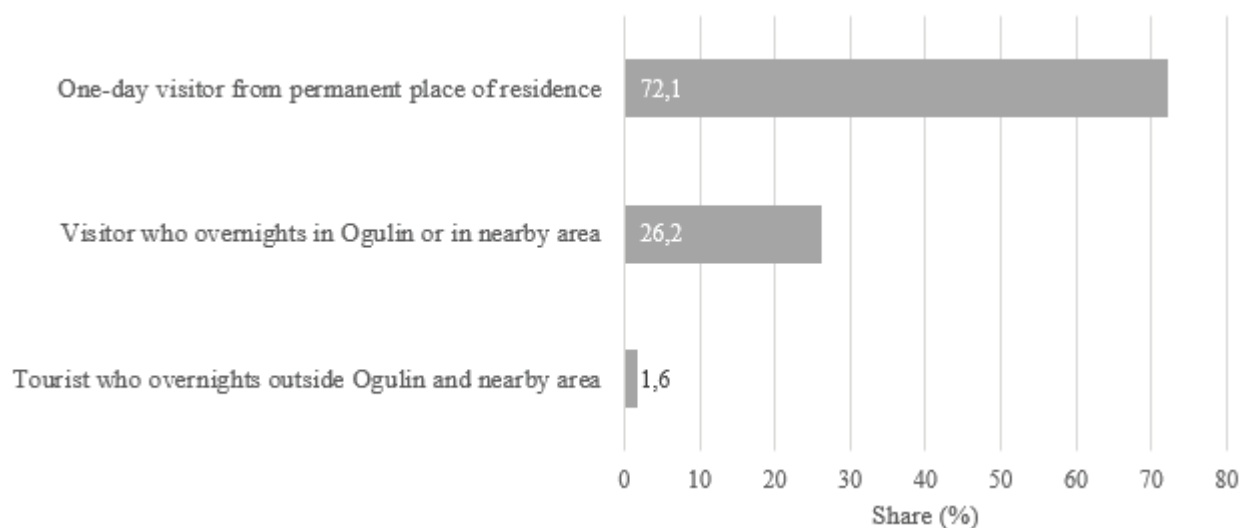


Source: Authors

4.2. The Festival's Impact on Tourist Overnight Stays

However, the percentage of overnight visitors is much more modest (26%), which is due to the fact that most of the respondents only came for one day (Figure 3). This was to be expected and was confirmed when analyzing the respondents' places of origin, as almost half of them came from Zagreb (27%) or Rijeka (21%), the capital and the macro-regional center of Northern Littoral, both of which are only one and a half to two hours' drive from Ogulin.

Figure 3: Type of Visit



Source: Authors

Nevertheless, the data on tourist visits show the high occupancy rate of accommodation establishments during the festival. In the last five-year period (2020-2024), the average occupancy rate during the festival days was 68.7%, while in the last two years it rose to around 80% (Table 3). In addition, the share of domestic tourists in both arrivals and overnight stays during the festival days accounts for more than 1/4 of the total share of domestic tourists in June and September when the festival takes place (Table 3). This undoubtedly confirms that the festival has an important economic impact and contributes to increasing the tourist attractiveness of Ogulin.

Table 3: Occupancy of Accommodation Capacities, Shares of Arrivals and Overnight Stays of Domestic and Foreign Tourists During Festival Days (2020–2024)

Years	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Average 2020-2024
Occupancy rate of accommodation capacities (number of tourists/number of beds) (%)	40.9	65.4	76.3	81.7	79.0	68.7
Share of tourist arrivals (total) during festival days in monthly arrivals (%)	20.9	16.0	15.6	13.8	14.4	16.2
Share of domestic tourist arrivals during festival days in monthly arrivals of domestic tourists (%)	28.5	25.4	28.7	18.1	32.7	26.7
Share of foreign tourist arrivals during festival days in monthly arrivals of foreign tourists (%)	11.1	11.3	10.8	12.9	10.7	11.4
Share of tourist overnight stays (total) during festival days in monthly tourist turnover (%)	28.8	16.9	14.4	13.4	15.1	17.7
Share of domestic tourist overnight stays during festival days in monthly overnight stays of domestic tourists (%)	41.5	25.4	24.2	18.1	30.8	28.0
Share of foreign tourist overnight stays during festival days in monthly overnight stays of foreign tourists (%)	9.3	10.1	10.0	11.8	10.9	10.4

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics

4.3. Festival Visitors' Satisfaction, Recommendation and Loyalty

Furthermore, on the 7-point Likert scale, respondents expressed a very strong intention to attend the festival again (6.4). They also strongly agreed that they would recommend the festival to their friends and family (6.6). This was also confirmed by the fact that for almost a third of all visitors surveyed, personal recommendations from (extended) family members and friends were the most important way of obtaining information for today's visit (29%) (Table 4).

Table 4: Satisfaction, Recommendation and Loyalty of Visitors of *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*

	Mean	Standard deviation
I will recommend <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> to friends and family.	6.56	0.76
I believe attending the <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> was the right decision.	6.56	0.81
Overall, I am satisfied with <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> .	6.38	0.86
I will continue to attend <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> .	6.38	1.05

Source: Authors

4.4. Festival Visitors' Experience Satisfaction

The analysis of the survey now focuses on the festival itself to examine what, according to the results above, makes it a success for visitors and the main reason for visiting Ogulin for many of them. First and foremost, the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* is clearly a family event. 89% of visitors surveyed came with their family members (and another 1.6% attended the festival with their spouse only), while 8% of visitors came with friends. Unsurprisingly, the answer *spending time with family and friends* was cited as the most important reason for attending the festival (4.8 on the 5-point Likert scale). This was closely followed by the answer *I like this festival* and, interestingly, the answer *visiting Ogulin* (both 4.6). It is also an event where active participation is a very important aspect of the experience: over 60% of respondents have participated in the festival's events and workshops.

Previous research on (arts) festivals has highlighted numerous aspects relevant to visitors' experiences, such as the atmosphere (Nguyen et al. 2019), socializing (including with locals) (Marques et al. 2021), place attachment (Ram et al. 2016), education (Molina-Gomez et al. 2021), fun and immersion (Armbrecht 2019). We examined some of these in the questionnaire (Table 5). The highest rated experiences include the atmosphere of friendliness, welcome and contact with the locals, closely followed by enjoyment and fun.

A high level of enthusiasm for the festival program was also shared by some of the visitors interviewed: *I enjoy listening to them tell stories so much, I don't even know how to put it into words (O2). / You just sit on blankets in the grass and listen to them (the storytellers). I mean, it's really for every generation (O2).*

Table 5: *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival Visitors' Experience Satisfaction*

	Mean	Standard deviation
There is an atmosphere of friendliness and warmth at the <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> .	6.65	0.68
The atmosphere of the <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> makes me feel welcome, comfortable and at ease.	6.40	0.86
Interacting with locals at the festival enriched my experience.	6.00	1.29
I really enjoyed this festival.	5.98	1.17
I had fun while participating in the festival.	5.98	1.18
Festival contributed to my sense of belonging to Ogulin.	5.76	1.51
I classify my experience at the <i>Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival</i> as highly educational.	5.63	1.41
Because of interactions with locals at the festival, I didn't feel as an ordinary tourist.	5.61	1.99
The festival has a unique and fantastic atmosphere.	5.53	1.35
Participating in the festival took me away from reality and helped me genuinely enjoy the moment.	5.46	1.54
Because of interactions with locals at the festival, I think I know this place better.	5.34	2.12
While participating, I forgot that time was passing.	5.24	1.58
Participating in this festival stirred my imagination.	5.02	1.77
I became so involved when I participated in the festival that I forgot everything else.	4.94	1.74

Source: Authors

Also of particular relevance to this study is the very highly rated statement *The festival has helped me feel a sense of belonging to Ogulin*, which clearly reflects the importance of the festival in strengthening the aspect of place among visitors. In addition, visitors stated that participating in the festival program significantly helped them achieve a state of immersion and detachment from everyday life.

Semi-structured interviews deepened the understanding of the observed aspects that are important to the visitors. For example, survey participants indicated that contact with locals was important not only to enjoy the festival (6.0 on the 7-point Likert scale), but also to not feel like ordinary tourists (5.6) and to get to know the place better (5.3). The interviews also confirmed these responses, with statements such as: *It feels like a local festival to me (O2). / (The festival) helps to connect (with the locals) (O2). / Everyone is open to working together, to talking, everyone is communicative (O9)*. However, some of the interviews also revealed that for some visitors, contact with the locals never really took place or that it was exclusively of a business nature while shopping or being served in the restaurants.

4.5. Correlation Between Experience and Satisfaction

As one of the research objectives was to investigate the overall satisfaction of non-resident visitors in relation to literary tourism, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted. Three variables, namely "Overall, I am satisfied with the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*" (satisfaction), "I will continue to attend *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*" (intention) and "I will recommend *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* to friends and family" (recommendation) were correlated with variables representing different aspects of the visitor experience. All reported correlations are statistically significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Unsurprisingly, satisfaction is highly positively correlated with enjoyment ("I really enjoyed this festival"; $r = 0.789$, $N = 61$) and fun ("I had fun while participating at the festival", $r = 0.709$, $N = 61$). A high positive correlation was also found between satisfaction and the unique atmosphere of the festival ("Festival has a unique and fantastic atmosphere", $r = 0.686$, $N = 61$). In addition, the experience of having an adventure ("Participating in this festival was an adventure", $r = 0.684$, $N = 61$), an "memorable" ($r = 0.669$, $N = 61$) or "a once in a lifetime" experience ($r = 0.642$, $N = 61$) was found to highly correlate with overall satisfaction. The social aspect of the festival, which is expressed in the variable "I felt part of a larger group at the festival", is also important, as it correlates strongly positively with satisfaction ($r = 0.677$, $N = 60$). Among the few variables that have a Pearson coefficient between 0.5 and 0.6, we particularly emphasize: "I classify my experience at the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* as highly educational" ($r = 0.511$, $N = 61$).

The intention to visit the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* was highly positively correlated with a similar but smaller selection of variables and the correlation was slightly lower. For example, “having fun” ($r=0.564$, $N=61$) and “feeling part of a larger group” ($r=0.564$, $N=60$) had the highest Pearson coefficients. These were followed by: “Participating in this festival was memorable to me” ($r=0.536$, $N=61$), “I really enjoyed this festival” ($r=0.506$, $N=61$) and “Participating in this festival was an adventure” ($r=0.500$, $N=61$).

Recommending the festival to friends and family, which plays an important role in obtaining information about the festival, followed almost the same correlation pattern as the intention to attend in person. Enjoyment ($r=0.674$, $N=61$), fun ($r=0.651$, $N=61$), “a once in a lifetime” ($r=0.595$, $N=61$) or “memorable” experience ($r=0.574$, $N=61$) showed the highest positive correlation with the intention to recommend. Finally, “I felt part of a larger group at the festival” ($r=0.541$, $N=60$), “a unique atmosphere” ($r=0.536$, $N=61$) and an adventurous experience ($r=0.524$, $N=61$) were also highly positively correlated.

4.6. The Significance of Literary Place-Making Practices

The interviews and questionnaires also revealed the extent to which both the festival and the physical setting and facilities, some of which are directly related to the festival, but also facilities that are available in the city throughout the year, contribute to Ogulin’s appeal as a destination for literary tourism. When asked to rate specific elements of Ogulin’s tourism offer and the spatial design of the town, visitors rated positively, for example, the sense of security (which is partly due to the size of Ogulin) and the spatial distribution of individual events within the town as well as elements such as the quality of public space design, street furniture, greenery and public art.

Respondents were also asked to name literature-related objects, facilities and decorations that they had noticed during their stay in Ogulin. Their answers revealed a remarkable awareness of numerous artifacts, mainly related to Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić’s fairy tales. Firstly, *Ivana’s House of Fairy Tales*, which is visited by many tourists during their visit to the festival, but also her statue or the fact that the local elementary school is named after the famous Croatian children’s author or the local café named after one of her fictional characters, as well as various festival scenes.

The park above the famous Đula’s Abyss left a lasting impression on the visitors, as it is not only beautiful, but also full of characters and symbols from Ivana’s fairy tales, which can also be found on the street furniture around it. They also noticed specially designed Plexiglas panels marking a literary themed route through Ogulin and the surrounding area, e.g. at Lake Sabljaki or Schmidt Lake, where the festival activities also take place.

In the visitors’ perception, there is obviously the idea that the town is connected to literature; its settings and ambience are very important for the festival itself (e.g. the castle, the river gorge, the nearby lakes, the mountains), but also vice versa. We summarize with the respondents’ statements: *More than any other town in Croatia, it is associated with literature* (O2). / *Ogulin is really a fairytale town* (O6). / *I absolutely associate Ogulin with this festival* (O9).

Some of the recommendations for possible improvements relate primarily to better management of the schedule, as many activities and events overlap, a more diverse gastronomic offer at the festival stands and better media coverage. However, one of the interviewees expressed concern that the uniqueness of the festival, particularly its sense of smallness, openness and friendliness, should not be *commercialized and turned into trash* (O2).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the diversity of manifestations of literary tourism (Hoppen et al. 2014; Baleiro and Quinteiro 2018; Marques 2019; Butler 2022), it is evident that Ogulin embodies several different forms: a literary festival, an interpretation center, a memorial space dedicated to the author in the museum, a walking tour as well as a marked thematic trail, performances of literary texts in a place linked to the text and the author (birthplace), and a whole series of commemorative signs (a bust of the author, a memorial plaque near the former birthplace, a school named after the author, the name of a café) as well as various visual and esthetic references to the fictional world of I. Brlić-Mažuranić’s works, which are reflected in the urban equipment and street furniture (e.g., park pavilions decorated with the motif of a fictional character, display boards with stylized fictional characters, public art and climbing frames for children designed in the style of fairy-tale characters).

Given the rootedness in a specific geographical space and the existing culture of remembrance of the local community (Selberg and Škrbić Alempijević 2013), it can be confidently stated that Ogulin’s use of a literary narrative in the process of place-making (Marques and Richards 2014) is not only driven by a superficial marketing presentation of the destination without foundation, but rather by the deepening of meaningful and content-rich connections with the place (Herbert 1996). Here, as in the case of Sel, a Norwegian literary tourism destination (Selberg and Škrbić Alempijević 2013), the focus is not on the author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić herself, but on the fictional world of her fairy tales, which is largely the result of her inspiration with the phantasmagorical elements of the Ogulin landscape, something that visitors can also experience for themselves as they explore the place, continuing, simultaneously, the creation of the *literary* in the space (Kaczmarek 2020).

In the process of getting to know a destination, the festival plays a key role (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998), as it brings with it an atmosphere of spontaneity and vibrancy that increases the vitality and attractiveness of the place as well as its tourist appeal (Zeppel and Hall 1992; Smith 2015), while also having numerous positive socio-cultural and economic impacts for the local community (McGuckin 2023). As in the case of the town of Hay-on-Wye (Jenkins 2019), the launch of the festival in Ogulin aimed to further strengthen the connection with the literary heritage, which had a positive impact on the identity of the place, its revitalization, preservation and heritage activation. In addition, the data on the occupancy rate of accommodation facilities during the festival, as well as tourist arrivals and overnight stays by domestic tourists, clearly confirm that the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* also has an important economic impact.

Such an approach to place-making that focuses on creativity, vibrancy, sense of place and atmosphere (Richards 2017; Richards and Duif 2019) can lead to a more authentic, i.e. less touristy, visitor experience, which was largely confirmed by the results of this research. The participants interviewed confirmed how important the festival was in changing their perception of Ogulin, which is in line with a study of visitors to the same festival conducted about ten years earlier (Selberg and Škrbić Alempijević 2013).

In addition to the strong association of Ogulin with literature in the perception of visitors, another important element in the evaluation of Ogulin as a destination is certainly the high level of perceived safety and the possibility of establishing close contact with the local community (at least for some of the visitors), which according to Richards and Duif (2019) can be categorized among the advantages resulting from the smallness of a place. In addition to contact with the locals, the opportunity to socialize with family and friends is extremely important for visitors to the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival*, which is also the case for many other festivals (Marques et al. 2021).

Given the significant proportion of visitors who actively participated in educational and entertaining festival workshops, the element of co-creation (Richards 2018; Couret 2019), i.e. active participation in the production of meaning within the festival, where the visitor has the power to influence and reshape the atmosphere and space (Dovey 2010), is an important part of the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* experience.

The affective elements of the experience, such as fun, enjoyment and immersion, were also rated highly, which is consistent with the findings of research on other participatory events (Armbrecht 2019). This shows that many of the visitors surveyed managed to have the so-called optimal experience and enter the state of flow, in which they forget everything else due to the complete focus on the activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

The festival atmosphere (the highest rated aspect of the experience) played an important role in this. Respondents agreed that it was unique and fantastic, friendly and warm. According to other studies, for example that of a Korean jazz festival (Nguyen et al. 2019), the atmosphere can be of crucial importance for the high degree of visitor satisfaction.

The degree of attachment to the place, i.e. the sense of greater belonging thanks to the festival, is also present among visitors. According to research by Ram et al. (2016), place attachment is particularly important to overall visitor satisfaction of secondary visitor attractions.

The educational aspect of the experience, which is often somewhat overlooked by visitors in other studies on festival experiences (Molina-Gomez et al. 2021), received high ratings in Ogulin, which may also support the thesis about the importance of festivals in the context of the democratization of cultural production and consumption, especially of those cultural artifacts that were often reserved for higher social classes (such as literature) (Rossetti and Quinn 2019).

The correlation analysis revealed a strong link between certain aspects of the visitor experience, such as the unique and fantastic atmosphere, the sense of adventure, the educational value, the fun factor, and their overall satisfaction, intention to visit the festival again and recommend it to family and friends. These are key elements that should be given special attention in the future management of the festival and destination in order to maintain or increase visitor satisfaction.

The aim of this research was to draw on the example of Ogulin's literary heritage and its efforts to build a literary tourism product to show how local culture and identity are used to create a tourist destination and with what success from the visitors' perspective. The results of the research can contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of creative place-making in the Croatian context, but also in a broader sense, especially considering the strong anchoring in local culture, tradition and identity.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers valuable insights into the role of literary festivals in destination development, its main limitation is the small, unrepresentative sample. The depth and number of interviews and surveys was limited by the unwillingness of visitors to participate due to childcare commitments and a busy festival program that did not allow sufficient time.

Further research could include a larger number of visitors to make the sample more representative and also involve the local community in the study to investigate their satisfaction and perceptions of the success of the festival and the literary tourism offer in Ogulin. The proposed research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how literary festivals such as the *Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival* can serve as strategic tools for sustainable regional tourism development and management.

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