

The main aim of the study is to document traditional knowledge about wild edible plants in the islands of Dalmatia (a historical coastal region of southern Croatia). This region is famous for using many species of wild leafy vegetables for food, mainly in the springtime. This is an important and often overlooked part of the Mediterranean Diet. Local people also utilize many species of fruits, and until the 1960s they even collected some edible roots. I will record which species of plants are used, and what cooking techniques are applied. Attention will also be paid to recording memories of emergency food plants used during World War II and the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995). The broader cultural context of the use of these plants will be recorded, such as stories, songs, rhymes etc.

I plan to make an inventory of the plants used on each of the selected islands, including the frequency of use and their status (still used, disappearing or extinct use). I will analyze the numbers of wild edible plants used in the context of island biogeography theory (e.g. mean number of species listed per informant in relation to island size, population density and isolation).

I plan to make around seven trips to Croatia to collect field data. Plant specimens will be identified in the field, or later in Poland. They will be deposited in herbariums of Warsaw University or Zagreb University. I will conduct interviews on at least 12 islands. The preliminary choice of islands is as follows: the five largest islands in Dalmatia: Korčula, Brač, Hvar, Pag, Ugljan and a selection of seven smaller islands. I plan to conduct at least 180 interviews, i.e. 15 interviews per island. The main part of each interview will start from a structured questionnaire, which will be followed (or preceded) by an unstructured conversation about the plants used. Interviews will be conducted in Croatian. In order to combine the aim of preserving traditional knowledge and studying the diversity between the islands I will select so called key informants, people who are perceived as the most knowledgeable, such as old farmers or shepherds. I will select middle-aged or elderly informants (40-80 years old or more) who were born and lived on the island, and who either work on farms or have a herd of animals. Some of those people still remember the famine which struck Dalmatia during World War II.

A few processes occurring in the Dalmatian islands endanger the continuity of traditional plant knowledge, mainly the development of tourism, depopulation and the abandonment of agriculture and animal husbandry. As ethnobotanical data from the Dalmatian islands are extremely scarce at present, this study will enable preservation of an important part of the cultural heritage of Dalmatia – the region where, from all the Slavic countries, probably the largest number of wild food species is used. It is likely that we will record the food use of species, which have never been recorded as edible before. An innovative aspect of the study is the application of island biogeography theory, never applied in ethnobotany before.