

# State and Perspectives of Gastronomic Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Case of Herzegovina Region

Dajana Vukojević<sup>A\*</sup>, Siniša Berjan<sup>A</sup>, Hamid El Bilali<sup>B</sup>, Jana Čarkadžić<sup>C</sup>

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## Abstract

*Gastronomic tourism represents an important aspect in the tourism environment and is often a central segment of the tourist experience. The paper aims at analysing gastronomic tourism offer in the Herzegovina region (Bosnia and Herzegovina), taking into consideration its natural and cultural characteristics, and providing recommendations for its improvement. Primary data were collected by face-to-face interviews carried out with rural tourism stakeholders, managers of tourist organizations, owners of catering facilities, winery owners and local food producers as well as a survey with visitors (tourists). Field research was conducted in July 2019 in seven cities and/or municipalities of the Herzegovina region (Mostar, Trebinje, Capljina, Ljubuski, Bileca, Nevesinje and Gacko). The first part of the paper illustrates Herzegovina as a destination rich in natural and cultural attractions with a focus on traditional cuisine. In the second part, based on the research results, the situation is assessed and recommendations for the future development of gastronomic tourism are given in order to improve the existing tourist offer. Many actors in tourism (e.g. hotels, restaurants, local community, etc.) have realized the importance of gastronomy as a catalyst for the movement of tourists and stimulation of local, regional and national economic development. Typical products, such as domestic food and wine, have been given an adequate function to characterize the tourist offer and represent in many cases the main attraction. Herzegovina region is recognizable by its traditional cuisine, which represents an important asset for the future development of gastronomic tourism. Education and raising the awareness of all actors as well as local communities about gastronomic tourism is paramount for the sector development. Local entrepreneurial endeavours can benefit from connection and exchange with partners from Europe to create a recognizable gastronomic destination in the tourism market.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, gastronomy, gastronomic tourism, Herzegovina region, Bosnia and Herzegovina, rural tourism, sustainable development.*

<sup>A</sup> University of East Sarajevo, Vuka Karadžića 30, 71123 East Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>B</sup> International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies of Bari (CIHEAM-Bari), Valenzano (Bari), Italy

<sup>C</sup> Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures, Alipašina 53, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

\* Corresponding author: [dajana.vukojevic@ues.rs.ba](mailto:dajana.vukojevic@ues.rs.ba)

## Introduction

Gastronomy is often a central part of the tourist experience. In recent years, the movement for food consumption has become an increasingly massive activity (Hall, Mitchell, 2001; Hall, Sharples, 2003; Quan, Wang, 2004; Wolf, 2006; Kalenjuk et al., 2012a; Gagić et al., 2013; Pivac et al., 2016). The changes take place on both sides in the tourism marketplace driven by demanding or experienced travellers as well as by innovative tourist businesses. Therefore, tourism gastronomy as some researchers argue is considered one of the emerging trends in international tourism (Kalenjuk et al., 2012b; Kalenjuk, Tešenović, 2013; Akyürek, Erdem, 2019).

Gastronomy is certainly an important aspect of regional and ethnic identity given the fact that culinary is one of the basic elements of any culture. According to Timothy (2016:47) 'gastronomy encompasses many components in the context of cultural heritage. Folklore, religion, language, familial bonds, social structures, environmental determinism, celebrations and ceremonies, landscapes, culinary routes, smells and tastes are some of them'.

Many actors in tourism (e.g. hotels, restaurants, local community) have understood the importance of gastronomy as a driver of tourist movement and in economic development. Typical products, mainly domestic food and wine, are in many cases the main attraction in a territory and characterize the tourist offer of a country or its part as tourist destinations. Gastronomic tourism provides an authentic experience in a sophisticated style and a pleasant ambience, often associated with economic well-being, while consuming exclusive, high-quality locally grown products (Kalenjuk et al., 2011; Demirović et al., 2015). Furthermore, gastronomic tourism is an experiential journey that includes learning about different cultures and understanding the properties associated with tourism products, as well as culinary specialties produced in a particular region. Tourists are not simply satisfied by the biological needs of dining, but through dining they seek to better understand a regional food culture (Chan, 2018).

The paper aims at analysing gastronomic tourism offer in the Herzegovina region, taking into consideration its natural and cultural peculiarities, and providing recommendations for its improvement. This exploratory study is intended to provide reliable information on the current situation of the sector in the Herzegovina region. Besides that, research is important for better understanding the perceptions of gastronomic tourism among different stakeholders and provides recommendations for the further development and improvement of gastronomic tourism as an important element of the tourist offer of the Herzegovina region.

## Literature review

Tourism gastronomy covers mainly the areas of indigenous dishes and wine tourism (Hall et al., 2003; Groves, 2001; Green, Dogherty, 2008; Cagli, 2012). Hall et al. (2003) define gastronomic tourism as visiting food producers, food festivals, catering facilities for food production and service, and certain destinations for tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of regional specialties, where food is the primary motive for travel. Instead of preparing food in restaurants and hotels for tourists, the journey of tourists in search of experiencing local dishes and drinks is within the reach of gastronomic tourism (Akgol, 2012). The gastronomic tourism industry covers any culinary experience. It involves cooking schools, cooks, gastronomic tour operators, and tourist guides, media, television programs and magazines related to gastronomy; as well as winemakers, vineyards, breweries, distilleries and producers (Cagli, 2012). Some of the shareholders of gastronomic tourism are individual grape grow-

ers, hotels, restaurants, tour operators, tourist agencies or individual tourists and local businesses (Alonso, Liu, 2011).

Sustainable gastronomy can be described as promoting cultural elements of dining in connection with environmental and socio-cultural reasons, and transferring them to future generations (Şimşek, Akdağ, 2017). Tourists that take an active or passive part in local food / beverage production/consumption are also cultural tourists as they learn about the culinary characteristics of the host area, thanks to its local dishes (Akgol, 2012). Gastronomic products contain strong references to the local because they represent the traditions, cultural heritage and identity of a certain geographical area and its community (Banjac et al., 2016). Gastronomic tourism stimulates local development because it can prolong the tourist season, diversify the rural economy, stimulate agriculture, create new jobs, contribute to regional attractiveness and local heritage promotion thus strengthening local identity and sense of belonging to a particular community. Gastronomic tourism is an alternative tourism type for rural areas for its ease of application and interesting nature. Yet, if the region has various types of food, then the society can use it as a tool to attract tourists which may create an economic impact (Guzel, Apaydin, 2016).

The focus of our research is tourism gastronomy of Herzegovina (south-east region of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The region is known for its unique and authentic culinary culture, thanks to the regional preserved cultural heritage. Indeed, gastronomy is an important aspect of the tourist offer in Herzegovina. The aim of the present paper was to analyze the gastronomic tourist offer in the region of Herzegovina, taking into account its natural and cultural characteristics and provide recommendations for both policymakers and tourist operators

Culinary heritage and style of preparing food and beverage are often associated, not only with a place of origin but with countries and wider geographical regions. Examples are found all over the world including Italy (famous foods as pasta and pizza), France, different parts of South and North America, Turkey (famous for kebab and donor kebab), Japan, China, Taiwan etc. Some destinations are well known for wine and beer production and consumption including Germany and Canada with beer tourism, France, New Zealand, Australia, Chile, South Africa for wine tourism. (Charters, Knight, 2002; Plummer et al., 2005; Getz, Brown, 2006; Sparks, 2007; McKercher et al., 2008). Gastronomy is certainly an important component of tourists' experience. Therefore, culinary traditions occupied the central stage of tourism development strategies of many countries and regions.

The literature suggests that the gastronomy increases the destination attractiveness, thus creates opportunities for the countries to brand their cuisines under the country's or region's name (Gurge, 2020). Also if the region has various types of food indigenous and distinct from other regions, then those can be leveraged to attract tourists which may create an economic impact. The scholars have also stated that the gastronomy tourism plays a significant role in destination branding. Destination branding is aimed at creating value to a destination by promoting a tourist destination through the building of a linked brand in order to assist the tourists to recognize and share the brand identity of a destination (Guruge, 2020).

Spatial variations in food production and consumption practices have been recorded for many years. Culinary variation and food/beverage consumption is connected to places of different geographical scale ranging from continents (e.g. Asian cuisine), over supra-national regions (e.g. Mediterranean food), to countries (e.g. Taste Sweden) and smaller national regions (e.g. Gourmet Bornholm) and are used for branding these places to tourists (Tommy, 2016). Food is an intangible heritage but produced and consumed within a geographic boundary (Ellis et al., 2018).

As more and more travellers want to experience new things such as authentic local lifestyles, customs and culinary culture in particular, a growing amount of research deals with the economic aspect of gastronomy in tourism. Other researchers (Sormaza et al., 2015) consider gastronomy, as a primary or secondary motivation, an essential aspect of the traveller's satisfaction.

## The regional context

Herzegovina has an abundance of natural and cultural values which are in themselves a tourist product, and which may be complementary to some other type of tourism. The cultural assets of this area, viewed through cultural and historical monuments, ethnographic and archaeological values, settlements and artistic achievements, contribute to a richer and more meaningful stay of tourists (Vukojević et al., 2018). The area of Herzegovina in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is recognizable by its traditional cuisine and its characteristics belong to the dinaric type. The basis of this traditional diet were products from cattle breeding and agriculture, with the addition of wild plants (Vukojević, 2010). This monotonous diet, dependent on biogeographical conditions and adapted to the seasons, decades and even centuries, has not changed much.

The diversity of natural resources and cultural heritage of Herzegovina is enriched by its outstanding local cuisine as well as the hospitality of the local population. Animal products (meat, milk, cream, cheese) are the result of cattle pasturing. Crops production is done in natural conditions and only manure is used for fertilization. Of the dairy products, the most representative ones are kajmak and cheese. Kajmak, stored in special goat or sheep leather bags, is an aged cheese and other types of cheese are "Torotan" - made from milk kept in wooden pots, so-called "Kalica", from which the kajmak (surface layer of milk) was picked; whole cheese - from whole milk; cottage cheese - rennet is poured into fresh, strained milk. Flour and grain dishes include bread and pies. Bread is most often made from wheat and corn flour (a specialty is bread baked on a stone plate and under a honeycomb). Pies occupy a significant place in traditional cuisine and the piecrusts are home-made, thanks to the skilled hands of local housewives. Cheese pies [from homemade cheese and eggs, greens (spinach, chard, and often herbs from pastures)] and potato pies are the most common ones. "Cicvara" dish with honey, a favourite specialty of Herzegovinians, is made from wheat flour and seasoned with cheese, cream, butter or oil. "Pura (kačamak)" is prepared from corn flour (with salt, cheese and butter) and eaten with cream or sour milk. "Priganice" are made from wheat flour, fried in oil and served warm (with cheese, young creamor marmalade). "Priješnac" is made from wheat or corn flour (with milk, cream, cheese, eggs). "Lojanica" is a priješnac with fat added while zeljanica is a priješnac with various greens (nettle, chard, spinach). Vegetable dishes include potatoes prepared in various ways: cooked or baked in the oven, eaten with cheese and cream. It is a special treat when it is topped with cream and baked in the oven or under a honeycomb.

There are different meat-based dishes. Dried meat is a traditional preparation for long, cold winters that has been preserved from oblivion and is still prepared according to the ancient method. Prosciutto is made from pork but there also exist dried beef, dried mutton and sausage. Lamb meat under the "sac" and on a spit is a prominent meat dish. The "Sac" is a large metal lid in the shape of a shallow bell that covers the dough for bread or meat for baking, and on which ashes and embers are then thrown. Restaurants throughout Herzegovina have kept this traditional way of baking under the sac. The meat prepared in this way remains juicy. As for fish, trout (brook trout) is a widely known Herzegovinian specialty prepared on a spit and

with cream. Mushrooms, freshly picked from pastures, are a favourite delicacy among the local population and prepared in different ways: grilled, with cream, in soup. Furthermore, honey production is in great development in Herzegovina.

The richness of plants, forests and quality water provide bees with a healthy environment. It is known that the local honey and honey in the honeycomb are used not only as a food but also as a medicine. Drinks are made from fruits harvested from pastures and forests: dog-wood juice, raspberry juice, teas (linden, rosehip, St. John's wort). In addition, it is important the famous Herzegovinian vineyards from which world-famous wines are produced. Thanks to the climatic conditions and habitat, Herzegovinian fields have been turned into fruit plantations of cherry, sour cherry, plum, pear, apricot, peach, apple and other trees.

## Methods and Data

The paper is based on an extended literature review and primary data collected by face-to-face interviews with 30 rural tourism stakeholders including: (i) managers of tourist organizations (MTO) from Mostar and Trebinje cities; (ii) owners of the most popular catering facilities (CF) viz. *Stara Hercegovina*, *Studenac*, *Restoran Romansa* and *Restoran Shadrvan*; (iii) owners of several wineries viz. *Tvrđos*, *Vukoje*, *Andjelic*, *Sekulovic*, *Andjusic*, *Vera*, *Andrija*, *Berak*, *Vino Zadro*, *Podrum Brkić* and *Podrum Beric*; and (iv) local food producers (LFP). We also conducted a survey with 120 visitors (tourists), mainly foreigners. The research was conducted in July 2019 and it encompassed seven cities and/or municipalities of the Herzegovina region: Mostar, Trebinje, Capljina, Ljubuski, Bileca, Nevesinje and Gacko.

Apart from data about respondents (name, age, level of education, position, city/municipality) and opinions and perceptions about gastronomic tourism in the area, different issues were addressed with different actors of the gastronomic tourism industry:

- MTO: presence of ethnographic cuisine in the tourist offer; availability of information on the gastronomic offer in tourist guides and tourist maps; organization of events dedicated to food and wine.
- CF: available information via the internet and existence of adequate tourist signage on the ground for gastronomic offer facilities; provision of homemade and traditional food serving service; need for additional employment; application of good practices in gastronomic tourism.
- WO: available information via the internet and tourist signage for wineries; existence of adequate space to receive tourists; provision of homemade wine tasting service; need for additional employment; membership in an association of winemakers; cooperation with other wineries, travel agencies, tour operators.
- LFP (mainly dairy and honey producers): cooperation with CF and demand for local food supplies.
- Visitors (tourists): reasons to visit Herzegovina; main focus of their visit; main sources of information regarding tourist offer of the region; quality of available information; satisfaction with gastronomic offer and accommodation facilities; recognisability of Herzegovina as a destination of gastronomic tourism in their countries.

The survey with tourists was conducted in Mostar and Trebinje cities, which are the most popular tourism destinations in the region, while Capljina, Ljubuski, Bileca, Nevesinje and Gacko are more rural areas with significant number of producers of local food and wine.

Over 90 per cent of 120 surveyed tourists were from abroad (Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, Italy, Turkey, Portugal, France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Canada, China and Malaysia) In fact, we deliberately targeted international visitors.

Data analysis was performed using the Software Package for Statistical Analysis - the IBM SPSS 21. Differences between groups were analysed using a chi-square non-parametric test. A p-value of 0.05 was used as a cut-off level for statistical significance.

## Results and discussion

The results of the research indicate that attention is paid to ethnographic cuisine, traditional food is available on menus, and the gastronomic offer is promoted, but the gastronomic product of Herzegovina is still not sufficiently developed. The largest percentage of 85.8% of interviewed winery managers stated that the basic function of the winery is the sale of wine. Some wineries offer traditional food, 60% of them, while 40% of respondents do not offer traditional dishes. 70% of the surveyed winery managers answered that they are working on the organization of events dedicated to wine and that an increased number of visits to their winery has been noticed.

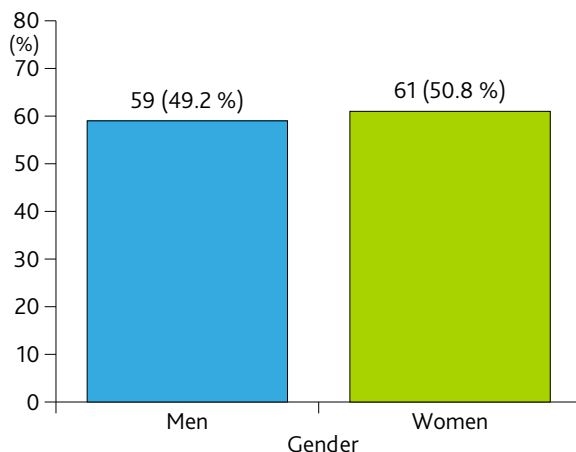
It is noticeable that not enough is done to organize food festivals and promote ethnographic cuisine, as well as follow global trends and good practices worldwide. Around half of the respondents consider that tourist signage on the ground is not adequate and should be much improved. Road infrastructure is somewhere obsolete and its reconstruction is highly requested to allow easier access to tourists. More than 70% of winery and catering facilities owners think that information on gastronomic offers available on the internet, tourist guides and tourist maps, are sufficient. Meanwhile, around 75% of the interviewed restaurants serve local and traditional food for guests while 2/3 of wineries possess adequate space to accept tourists.

Managers of local tourist organizations evaluate the engagement of all stakeholders in the organization of food and wine events as positive. Regarding membership in winery associations, most winery owners stated that they are active in national but not international associations. In addition, around 60% of them cooperate with other wineries, travel agencies and tour operators. Almost all respondents did not express a need for additional labour employment. Overall respondents' perception is that wine culture is not yet developed enough despite the huge potential of the region and that more resources – time and money – must be invested in promotion.

As part of the field research, a questionnaire was prepared for tourists about the motives and satisfaction of their visit to the Herzegovina region. This research was carried out in Mostar and Trebinje cities, where tourism facilities are most developed. Out of a total of 120 respondents, 49.2% were men while 50.8% were women.

The main reasons for visiting Herzegovina were food tasting (56.7% respondents) and new knowledge about traditional food (50.8%). However, only 16.7% of respondents stated that the main reason for visiting Herzegovina was getting to know places where traditional food was made, for only 40.9% was stay in rural facilities, for 45.5% was to learn how food and wine go together, and for 45.8% was to enjoy a culture of food, romance and elegance.

We also examined the behaviour of tourists during visits to Herzegovina. Most of the respondents (52.5%) toured restaurants, where 63.3% tasted traditional food daily and 80.8% of them stated that traditional food was always offered on the menus in the restaurants. More than two-thirds of respondents (79.2%) were introduced to green aspects of eco-tourism while 70.8% of them got acquainted with the culture and lifestyle in Herzegovina (Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Gender frequency

**Table 1.** Tourists' behaviour during a visit to Herzegovina region

Tourists' behaviour	Number	%
<b>We toured restaurants and tasted traditional food</b>		
Yes	63	52.5
No	57	47.5
<b>We were introduced to the green aspects of eco-tourism</b>		
Yes	95	79.2
No	25	20.8
<b>We daily tasted traditional food</b>		
Yes	76	63.3
No	44	36.7
<b>We got acquainted with the culture and lifestyle in this area</b>		
Yes	85	70.8
No	35	29.2
<b>Traditional food was always offered on the menus in the restaurants</b>		
Yes	97	80.8
No	23	19.2

\*Source: Authors' elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

Most of the respondents (51.7%) got to know about traditional restaurants through guides and the internet and 58.3% stated that the necessary information about restaurants was available and useful. However, 64.2% of the respondents stated that gastronomic tourism in Herzegovina needs to be improved (Table 2).



**Table 2.** Availability of information on restaurants and assessment of gastronomic tourism in Herzegovina region

Availability of information and assessment of gastronomic tourism	Number	%
I got to know about traditional restaurants through guides and the internet		
Yes	62	51.7
No	58	48.3
Necessary information about restaurants is available and useful		
Yes	70	58.3
No	50	41.7
Offer of gastronomic tourism in Herzegovina needs to be improved		
Yes	77	64.2
No	43	35.8

\*Source: Authors' elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

Table 3 shows that women report statistically significantly ( $\chi^2=8.162$ ;  $p=0.004$ ) more often (26.2%) that the main reason to visit Herzegovina was getting to know places where traditional food was made. Also, significantly ( $\chi^2=7.546$ ;  $p=0.006$ ) more women (70.5%) declared that necessary information about restaurants were available and useful when compared to men (45.8%). However, significantly more men ( $\chi^2=6.220$ ;  $p=0.009$ ) (81.4%) stated that they got acquainted with the culture and lifestyle in Herzegovina when compared to women (60.7%)

**Table 3.** Main reasons to visit Herzegovina

Main reasons for visiting, availability of information and acquaintance with the culture	Gender number (%)		$\chi^2$	P
	Men	Women		
Main reason to visit Herzegovina was getting to know places where traditional food was made				
Yes	4 (6.8)	16 (26.2)	8.162	0.004
No	55 (93.2)	45 (73.8)		
Necessary information about restaurants is available and useful				
Yes	27 (45.8)	43 (70.5)	7.546	0.006
No	43 (75.8)	18 (29.5)		
We got acquainted with the culture of life in this area				
Yes	48 (81.4)	37 (60.7)	6.220	0.009
No	11 (18.6)	24 (39.3)		

\*Source: Authors' elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

## Conclusions

Herzegovina region has a traditional cuisine, culture of growing vines and wine production that needs to be applied in the model of gastronomic tourism development. In the region and beyond, Herzegovina is perceived as a cultural specificity of BiH and the Western Balkans. However, for this area to develop as an attractive tourist region in the market sense, natural and anthropogenic comparative advantages are not enough and it is necessary to create attrac-



tive and competitive tourist products. This would mean that the portfolio of tourist offer in Herzegovina needs to open to the whole world and attract tourists from all continents.

Based on the research results in this paper, it is noticeable that gastronomic tourism is not sufficiently developed.

In order to improve the gastronomic tourism offer in Herzegovina, research indicates the need for education on gastronomic tourism concept. One of the elementary entrepreneurial activities in gastronomic tourism is to increase the quality of space and create a hospitable environment for tourists' reception, primarily accommodation facilities, and improve the offer in rural areas with an emphasis on ethno-gastronomic offer. Research has pointed to the need for better business connections with partners from Europe and the adoption of good practices to create a recognizable gastronomic destination in the tourism market. Food and wine should become the basis for the organization of cultural and entertainment events in which tourists should be more involved. In this sense, the recommendations would be: (i) to develop and implement projects in gastronomy and gastronomic tourism that directly impact their development; (ii) to hold panels, workshops, summer schools and seminars on gastronomic tourism; (iii) to better inform foreign and domestic tourists and attract their attention about gastronomic tourism; (iv) to organize national and international gastronomic festivals.

Gastronomic tourism and tourism in general have not been sufficiently complemented so far in Herzegovina. There are a few examples that gastronomic tourism is the primary motive for visiting Herzegovina. The results of the research indicate that a much higher degree of cooperation between the tourism sector and Herzegovinian food and wine producers is essential. It is necessary to improve the existing tourist offer based on examples of good practice in developed tourist regions worldwide, and in a strategic sense to position gastronomic tourism through the integrated tourist offer of Herzegovina. It is necessary to affirm Herzegovina as a region of gastronomic tourism that is recognizable at the international level. Only together, food producers, winemakers and the tourism sector can create a special form of tourism that will be based on food and wine in rural areas and vineyards, which become places of their cultural and gastronomic experience of the destination they visit, as well as the primary motive for their arrival. The development of gastronomic tourism can bring about numerous economic and social benefits such as an increase in territorial competitiveness and, with a better valorisation of natural and traditional assets, contribute to addressing the current problem of depopulation of Herzegovinian rural areas.

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