

TRADITIONAL GASTRONOMY PRODUCTS – USAGE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY OF SOUTHERN BAČKA (AP VOJVODINA)

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ABSTRACT

Traditional products have become an important part of touristic offer and a significant component on the menu of many catering establishments. Importing traditional products in their offer, catering establishments contribute to the development of consumers' knowledge of certain regions. From tourists' point of view, terms like authentic and traditional are synonymous to the term local, which presents an important factor in distinguishing between traditional products and commercial ones. The subject of this paper is the usage of traditional products in catering offers of southern Bačka (Vojvodina – Serbia). The main task of this paper is to present the structure of traditional products that are used in catering facilities and their qualities (market, production and technical characteristics) which affect the purchase choices. The main goal of this paper is to collect data about traditional food products that are being used in the meal preparation in catering establishments in the area and which characteristics are crucial for their selection.

Keywords: *Traditional products, food, hospitality, AP of Vojvodina*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional products are the main indicators of authentic taste and gastronomic heritage. They present a very important factor for the development of a unique touristic offer. In recent years, many literary sources have confirmed the importance of traditional food products as a significant part of cultural heritage of one nation. They are a part of the national gastronomy offer, which are characteristics for its dining places, and their flavors and aromas are characteristic. (Kalenjuk et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2022).

It is important to mention that terms traditional and authentic production are different when it comes to consumers' apprehension based on cultural differences and associations related to these terms. The differences are noticeable not only in different continents but also inside the same continent, for example people from Southern Europe connect traditional production with culture, heritage and national treasure, while on the north part of Europe these terms are associated with health and practicality. (Amilien, Hegnes, 2013; Kalenjuk et al. 2017).

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Traditional products are defined as a result of traditional production, culinary culture and heritage, and practice which presents identity and culture of certain geographical and territorial areas (Caputo et al., 2018). All traditional products have been used on the market throughout history, however consumers have perceived it without exact knowledge of the term traditional. Some authors claim that the traditional products are often being contemplated as a broad term which encompass quality aspects of different food products such as local cuisine or original ingredients, instead of seeing it as a concise and absolute term (Verbeke et al., 2016).

Special flavors and aromas, together with characteristic appearance, make traditional products alluring and desirable to consumers. Any compromise of original sensory characteristics of traditional products can lead to negative image of the product (Almli et al., 2011; Kalenjuk et al., 2015).

The peculiarity of local cuisine primarily refers to whether the ingredients are specific and unique to that geographical area as well as to whether it is being prepared traditionally and of traditional products only (Sidalı, Hemmerling, 2014).

With regard to this topic, the term local production is equivalent to the terms traditional and authentic. One can not observe culture or tradition without local gastronomy which completely affects the nature of the region or area. Often, local cuisine has been defined as authentic products which not only portray the touristic destination but also shape local culture and tradition (Grubor et al., 2022). Tourists, regardless of their primary motive for the arrival at a certain destination, have more respect for traditional products and demand traditional meals. This raises awareness about the usage of traditional products in catering offers, such as restaurants, inns, and other food and drinks objects (Alderighi et al., 2016)

Precisely, the subject of this work is the usage of traditional food products in catering offers in the Southern Bačka, the most developed administrative and economy area in Vojvodina (north region of Serbia). The task of this work is to inquiry traditional products which are purchased in catering industry and factors which influence the selection of these products that are being used in catering supply of this region, and all focused on tourism.

The aim of this work is to collect data about traditional products that catering facilities acquire and what is crucial in their selection, which characteristics are decisive in their purchase and supply to food and drink catering facilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional food is an important factor of cultural heritage. Production and sale of traditional food products provides deciding economic contribution to many regions and can contribute to diversification of rural areas and prevention of displacement (Guerrero et al., 2010; Kalenjuk et al., 2022). Their usage contributes largely to local economy which is the reason for incorporating these products into touristic offer. This means that gastronomic tourism can stimulate regional economy by creating new authentic supplies (Grubor et al., 2022).

Traditional and local products and meals have an important role in visitors' perception of touristic destination. Consummation of these products contributes to the understanding of culture and tradition (Kiralova, Malec, 2021). Apart from authentic experience and learning, one of the important reasons for visiting a touristic destination is the consummation of the local cuisine and the desire to try something new. Traditional food is not only functional part of a travel, but also sensual, symbolic, ritualistic and brings new experience. Authenticity and local heritage such as wine and food are decisive factors for the development of gastronomy but also other selective types of tourism (Pavione et al., 2017). Consumers are especially interested in green products, based on their influence on personal space but also on sustainability of traditional production which is mainly perceived as organic production with minimal needs of transportation. This altogether affects the growth of competition between catering facilities because this is valuable for consumers (Iraldo et al., 2017; Singh, Singh, 2017). Traditional meals, with their specific ingredients, recipes, heat treatment meth-

ods, customs and social norms, completely portray the culture of a certain place and help it to create authenticity and recognition all around the world (Wang, Mattila, 2015).

Raising awareness and knowledge of consumers about traditional products is an important task for producers but the government also. The authors emphasize that one of the solutions is to introduce the label “traditional” which would differentiate traditional products from other types of products. This would enable to fill the gap in consumers’ knowledge (Vukaspvić, 2014). Similarly in the AP of Vojvodina the label TASQ has been created (<https://tasq.rs/sr/>). Traditional food products are very important means of touristic organization in order to present identity and culture of a certain destination, which contributes to increase in products values (Tsai, Wang, 2017).

Local cuisine, characteristic dining places are one of the most important means for attracting tourists who seek authentic experience and adventure. The importance of conservation of gastronomic culture of a certain region does not aim only to attract tourists. Its role is seen as wealth and capital of a territory which has significant role influence in emphasizing that area in relation to its surroundings (Djerčan, 2017). Homemade meals made of traditional products have a great potential for the development of tourism, which are thus used for the promotion of certain touristic locations. This influenced the caterers to offer and advocate for the promotion of authentic traditional food. Thus, traditional meals made of traditional products support the extra value of catering facilities offer (Kovacs, 2014). Vahonacker et al. carried out the analysis of the main components which are used for the identification of consumers based on the ways which conceptualize and define traditional food products. Consumers see traditional products differently depending on the origin, culture and habits of a certain country (Guerrero et al., 2010). This theory is being confirmed with the survey conducted among consumers in Croatia and Austria. The respondents from Croatia related the term traditional with long tradition of production and authentic recipes, while the survey in Austria showed that characteristic elements of traditional products are defined as traditionally prepared food and food passed down between generations (Cerjak et al., 2014).

All knowledge about and traditional production of vegetables and products made of vegetables are on the brink because of the loss of agricultural land, usage of new types of industrialization, stigma associated to appliance of traditional types of vegetables and altered ways of life (Dweba, Mearns, 2011). Local gastronomy includes products which are grown in the same area they are being served. Traditional production is passed down between generations and it can be seen as a concise overview of a way of life and cultural spirit of domestic residents and at the same time can be used as means for promotion and economic development of a place (Horng, Tsai, 2010).

The authors claim there is a wide range of knowledge about food and culinary skills for the preparation of meals which communities claim to be gastronomy heritage. This includes great number of socio-cultural factors, such as agricultural products, traditional products, food preparation methods, equipment being used in the production but also the ways of usage and consumption of those products (Ramagnoli, 2019). Consumers often believe that the buying of traditional products is an ethical step, but they frequently perceive it as festive food and not as an everyday grocery. Special flavor and high quality, as well as nostalgia, influence the decision when buying (Caputo et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire used to collect data is modeled after the research conducted by the authors Curtis and Cowee (2009). In order to have a better insight into the field certain alterations of the questionnaire were made. The research involved collecting socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents and features of catering establishments they work in, and after that data about the type of traditional products they acquire. The main part refers to getting data about preference characteristics of the products acquired. The features are grouped into market-oriented (sensory quality, nutritional quality, the uniqueness of the offer, placement on market, menu diver-

sity), production (manufacturers familiarity, organic production, ecological production, local production, freshness of the products) and technical (simplicity of preparation, conversance of production process, price, brand, and seasonality). The research was conducted in catering establishments, i.e. among owners, executives, managers and kitchen staff in catering establishments in southern Bačka in AP of Vojvodina. In every catering establishment one person in manager or head position was surveyed. For survey purposes questionnaires were distributed in 160 catering establishments, and during March and April 2022, 127 of completed questionnaires were collected, whose results are being shown in this research. The data collected are statistically processed through descriptive statistics application (average values and standard deviations). In order to get data about characteristics of traditional products, the Likert scale was used which is the most adequate for achieving results. The respondents specify the importance of the traditional products characteristics via five level item 1 -5 (1 stands for unimportant, while 5 presents extremely important). The results were shown tabular.

STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of socio-demographic characteristics

Based on the data about socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents shown in Chart 1, it could be stated that from the total number of tested, 82 (64.57 %) are men, while 45 (35.43 %) are women. According to Berk, there are two age groups that include the age of early maturity, and third group that includes middle and old ages (Berk, 2008) Most respondents belong to the group of old ages (35.43%), then comes the early maturity group 33.86% and the youth group (30.71%). In terms of education, the results itself differ and 3 out of 4 answer options are covered. However, the largest number of the respondents has a high school diploma (66.9 %), almost 5 times less respondents have completed higher education (13.4%). There are no respondents with master's degree. The field of education of tested representatives of catering establishments is quite diverse. The largest number has the hospitality and tourism degree (54.3 %), and a significantly smaller number of 10 % has alimentary or agricultural school degree. The rest of 18,9 % are the respondents with grammar school degree, school of electrical engineering degree, engineering degree, art degree, textile school degree and other similar schools.

Table 1. Gender and age structure of the respondents (n=127)

	N	PERCENT (%)
GENDER		
Male	82	64.57
Female	45	35.43
AGE		
30 years old	39	30.71
From 30 to 40 years old	43	33.86
Over 40 years old	45	35.43
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
Secondary	85	66.9
Tertiary	17	13.4
University education	25	19.7
MD / PhD	0	0

	N	PERCENT (%)
FIELD OF EDUCATION		
Hospitality, tourism	69	54.3
Economy, law and management	21	16.5
Alimentary technology, agriculture	13	10
Other schools	24	18.9
JOB POSITION		
Chef	34	26.8
Sous chef	26	20.5
Food and drink manager	25	19.7
Manager / owner of the object	42	33.1

Source: Authors (2022)

Structural analysis of researched catering establishments

In terms of types of catering establishments and kitchen operation mode, more than half (50.4 %) of them are a la cart establishments, while 29.1 % are the fast food establishments, and the rest (2.4%) are the employees of mass catering restaurants. In terms of kind of catering establishments, 39.4% offers food combinations to its consumers, while the least percent of them offers national food offer (12.6% catering establishments).

Table 2. Type and kind of catering establishments offer (n=127)

	N	PERCENT (%)
TYPE OF CATERING ESTABLISHMENT		
Mass catering restaurants	3	2.4
A la carte restaurant	64	50.4
Fast food restaurant	37	29.1
Other types of food and drinks establishments	23	18.1
KINDS OF OFFER IN CATERING ESTABLISHMENTS		
International food offer	32	25.2
National food offer	16	12.6
Homemade food offer	29	22.8
Combination of food offer	50	39.4

Source: Authors (2022)

Analysis of traditional products in catering establishments

In comparison to catering establishments that do not purchase traditional food products, the respondents who acquire these products stated that these are products they offer as a part of their company's supply. 81 respondents participated in this part. The largest number of tested respondents (18.79%) stated that the use paprika-flavored sausage as a traditional product in preparation of their specialties. After that comes cheese (16.67% of answers). In relation to these two products of animal origin, one plant based product is used, red-pepper chutney (ajvar), in 14.54% of catering establishments. In addition to these products, one should mention other products that are being mentioned once or twice in the sample. These are pork cracklings, hot vegetable chutney (ljutenica), apple juice, fish, honey, conserve, jam, eggs, bread and other products (8.51%).

Table 3. Traditional product that are frequently used in catering establishments (n=81)

PRODUCTS	NUMBER	PERCENT (%)
Cheese	47	16.67
Cream	30	10.64
Sausage	18	6.38
Paprika-flavoured sausage	53	18.79
Ham	7	2.48
Bacon	34	12.06
Smoked ham	5	1.77
Red pepper chutney	41	14.54
Cabbage	10	3.55
Pepper	13	4.61
Other products	24	8.51
Total:	282	100
Other products: hot vegetable chutney, elderberry juice and apple juice, pork cracklings, marmalade, jam, honey, conserve, fish, eggs, bread, prunes...		

Source: Authors (2022)

Analysis of characteristics of traditional products

The respondents had to assess the importance of characteristics that a traditional product ought to have. In order to understand them better, these characteristics are grouped in three basic groups, marketable, production and technical factors. The results acquired were shown in Chart 6. First group consists of marketable factors and according to caterers, the most important is the sensory quality with 4.25 out of 5, while the least important is the nutritional quality with 3.75 out of 5.

The second group consists of production factors, and the most important factor is the product freshness with 4.56 out of 5 (with the slightest structural deviation of 0.79) which presents the most prominent characteristic from all the groups mentioned, while the least important production factor with 3.28 is the organic production, which is the least significant product characteristic of all groups mentioned. The last group consists of technical factors, and , according to caterers, the most important is the price with the 4.36, while the least important characteristic is the brand with 3.51 (standard deviation of 1.25).

Table 4. The importance of characteristics of traditional products (n=127)

Nº	CHARACTERISTICS	MARKETABLE FACTORS	PRODUCTION FACTORS	TECHNICAL FACTORS
1.	Sensory quality	4.25 (SD=1.01)		
2.	Nutritional quality	3.75 (SD=0.99)		
3.	Uniqueness of the offer	3.85 (SD=1.02)		
4.	Market placement	3.89 (SD=1.07)		
5.	Menu diversity	4.06 (SD=0.97)		
6.	Familiarity of the manufacturer		4.03 (SD=1.08)	
7.	Organic production		3.28 (SD=1.24)	
8.	Ecological production		3.49 (SD=1.14)	
9.	Local production		4.05 (SD=0.90)	
10.	Product freshness		4.56 (SD=0.79)	
11.	Preparation simplicity			4.06 (SD=0.90)
12.	Familiarity of the production process			3.80 (SD=1.13)
13.	Price			4.36 (SD=0.92)
14.	Brand			3.51 (SD=1.25)
15.	Seasonality			4.07 (SD=0.99)

Source: Authors (2022)

These results show that caterers from this region mostly want to acquire a fresh product, with good sensory qualities with affordable prices. These results are expected because it is imperative to the catering establishments to have good and health safe product which is affordable, while the other characteristics are in the background.

CONCLUSION

Based on the researched literature about traditional food products and based on the research conducted among carriers of the catering offer in the south of Bačka in Vojvodina (Northern Serbia), the following was concluded:

Traditional products are used in catering establishments but their capacities are not fully exploited, due to low level of catering staff training, but it is of noticeable significance for the development of touristic offer. When it comes to the products that are bought frequently, there is data that traditional products of animal origin have the slightest advantage in comparison to plant-based products. The most represented products are paprika-flavored sausage and bacon, but also cheese and cream that were made of milk. Great prevalence of red pepper chutney was recorded, while the rest such as hot vegetable chutney, elderberry juice, honey, jam and marmalade are poorly distributed. The analysis of characteristics of traditional products lead to the partition of these into three groups in order to determine which factors contribute the most in traditional products choice. The most important characteristic of the traditional products is the product freshness, as an integral part of the product characteristics, and the least important characteristic of these products is the organic production which belongs to the same group of factors. Regarding marketable factors, there is a difference in importance between sensory and nutritional quality, whereby caterers consider sensory quality to be the most important characteristic of marketable factors, and the least important is the nutritional quality. According to the caterers, the price is the most im-

portant, while the least important characteristic traditional products in Vojvodina. Considering mean values of some groups of factors, technical and marketable factors are equally important, while the production factors are considered to be less important when choosing traditional products.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be focused on more profound and complex data analysis which would give insights into causes and consequences of these stances of catering establishment management. Additionally, the research would be confirmed and more significant through perception of detailed economic, ecologic, and cultural effects on this subject.

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