

Gastronomy for Tourism Development

Potential of the Western Balkans

Edited by

Almir Peštek, Marko Kukanja,
and Sanda Renko



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Gastronomy for Tourism Development: Potential of the Western Balkans

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Preface

The book, *Gastronomy for Tourism Development: Potential of the Western Balkans*, is dedicated to the countries belonging to the Western Balkans region (for this book, countries consisting of former Yugoslav republics belonging to the south-eastern Europe), except Slovenia (the Central Europe), which are all striving to foster their economic growth and social well-being by heavily relying on the tourism sector as their major source of income. Although this region has been a popular subject matter for the academic community, there is a lack of literature on the growing concern of gastronomy for the tourism development of the region. The common gastronomic heritage of the Western Balkans presents a unique opportunity to develop a unique gastronomic and tourism product that goes far beyond the different national identities. Today, several dishes, preparation methods and service procedures are recognised as the Gastronomy of the Balkans, presenting a fascinating 'melange' of Western Europe, Mediterranean and oriental culinary traditions with a special local (the Balkan) touch. Taking into consideration that the Western Balkan countries are following the most tourist developed countries of Central Europe which are nowadays keen to develop authentic and recognisable gastronomic tourism products, this book addresses the growing need for more research and expands the current knowledge base about tourism and gastronomic potentials of the region. Accordingly, the book can be considered as a theoretical and practical guide towards a gastronomic future for the Western Balkans, showing drivers, potentials and barriers affecting the region in its effort to become a prominent European food destination of the twenty-first century.

The book consists of 10 chapters and is the work of the team of renowned researchers from the region who attempted to multidisciplinary and holistically present the different aspects of gastronomy of the region, addressing topics such as gastronomy and regional identity, the importance of specific food products for gastronomy and tourism development, the challenges of gastro-tourism development in different countries of the region, the importance of the image of local cuisine for gastronomy and tourism development, the presentation of the best practices in strategic development of gastronomy, exploration of the interlinkages between gastronomy and events in DMOs' strategic activities, the importance of restaurants' online reputation for destination competitiveness, the importance of gastronomy for further tourism and economic development of the region and the financial potentials of gastronomy for future tourism development.

Therefore, this book can be considered as a systematic overview and critical examination of the situation in the region, providing some new insights into the area. Readers can also find theoretical explanations of specific phenomenon related to gastronomy development, supported by empirical explanations in the cases of different countries in the region. We strongly believe that this book will be of interest to academics, students, practitioners, policymakers, governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as other stakeholders that wish to be informed about the challenges, progress and current trends in regional gastronomy development.

The editors would like to express their sincere thanks to all the contributors and the reviewers of the manuscripts.

Editors

Chapter 1

Gastronomy and Regional Identity: Balkan versus National Cuisine

Ana Jovičić Vuković and Aleksandra Terzić

Abstract

Being the basic need of humans, but also an attractive element of the tourist offer, gastronomy is related to the attractiveness of a destination, and Balkan gastronomy is considered to be one of the most positive aspects of the tourist image of the region. This study aims to investigate the locals' perception of gastronomic specificity of 'Balkan food' and national (local) food as well. Furthermore, the study investigated how 'Balkan food' is perceived in terms of its tourist potential, uniqueness, quality, nutrition and its general role in the creation of a joint 'Balkan' tourist brand. The methodology included a historical approach and a survey which involved 110 respondents. Out of 21 traditional dishes identified in the official tourist promotional activities of selected countries and a review of the relevant literature, the following are identified as regional 'Balkan' dishes: 'pečenje', 'musaka', 'ćevapi' and 'sarma'. The following are identified as national dishes: 'pastrmajlija', 'sogan dolma', 'raštan', 'pašticada', 'burek' and 'svadbarski kupus'. The results indicated that some nations have specific knowledge of certain dishes being considered national and regionally present, while other nations show a lack of knowledge of food origin and regional presence in identified countries. Furthermore, the results showed that different dimensions of Balkan cuisine significantly contribute to the tourist potential of the region, while the contribution of its nutritive characteristics is perceived as less important. Results showed that 'Balkan food' is considered to be important for the improvement of the 'Balkans' image and promotion, as well as important for the creation of the regional tourism brand.

Keywords: Food; Balkan; gastronomy; regional identity; local cuisine; national dishes; tourism brand

Introduction

The gastronomy of the Balkans has been considered to be the most positive aspect in terms of foreign tourist image of the region. All Balkan countries have recognised the special significance of gastronomy as a national tourism brand, which is evident in their promotional activities and marketing campaigns. However, this is done more or less unconsciously and with a lack of knowledge what is considered traditional local food and what shared regional food is. There are also disputes about what is perceived as a national variation of originally ‘Turkish’, ‘Greek’, ‘Bulgarian’, ‘Serbian’, ‘Bosnian’, ‘Macedonian’, ‘Croatian’ and ‘Montenegrin’ dishes. Even though there are similarities within the gastronomic offer between Balkan countries, there are also some differences as well, which are mostly reflected in the preparation methods of certain products, such as ‘kajmak’, ‘kulen’, ‘kobasica’, ‘pljeskavica’, ‘ćevapi’, ‘svadbarski kupus’, ‘salčići’ and ‘baklava’ (Vuksanović, 2017). Moreover, the image as a culinary destination is still weak for some Balkan countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia, while on the other hand Croatia’s image (especially for some Mediterranean dishes) has been more recognisable (Milohanović & Brščić, 2008; Peštek & Činjurević, 2014).

The tourism development process in south-eastern Europe (SEE) is marked by great potential and many problems. Even though SEE is emerging as a relatively new tourist destination, the term ‘Balkan’ is still used quite widely by international visitors to the region, regardless of the country that they are visiting (Smith et al., 2018). Shared territory and history, along with the intermingling of nations and cultures through migration flows, cultural exchange and strong civilisational impacts (Byzantium, Turkey, Austro-Hungarian Empire and Mediterranean countries), as well as common culture of living, resulted in the creation of a special identity of the Balkans, which is reflected in its multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism (Terzić, Bjeljic, Karadžoski, & Jovanović, 2018). Although from a political perspective the image of the Balkans had a negative connotation for a very long time which is still present, from the tourism perspective, and especially in terms of gastronomy, the term ‘Balkans’ has started to reflect a more positive image recently. In specific tourist expressions, the term ‘Balkans’ describes special charm with unparalleled experience of life and impressions of the regional character of the territory which transcends the country boundaries, the cuisine, a tourist offer full of challenges, as well as joy, special atmosphere, cultural traditions and ethnic-based conflicts rooted deeply in history. Experiences rated as being ‘Balkan’ related appear mostly in a context where satisfaction is the dominant feeling; therefore, from the tourism perspective the term ‘Balkans’ does not necessarily carry unfavourable connotations, as it does in political and historical contexts (Smith et al., 2018).

Brands can transmit emotions that consumers recall or experience when they think of a specific symbol, product, service, organisation or location. Strong brands have the potential not only to attract consumers, but also to appeal to investment and business (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Simeon, 2006). Supra-national brands can have an impact on visitor flows if the countries are quite similar and small or when they are relatively unknown, which can be the case in the Balkans (Smith et al., 2018). Such geographical names can even represent the service itself,

by becoming a symbiotic brand which gains greater significance with distance (Kavaratzis, Warnaby, & Ashworth, 2014; Kozma, 1995; Papp-Váry, 2013; Smith et al., 2018). Furthermore, the term 'Balkans' in the international tourism sense for a long time has marked a specific region, notwithstanding some countries' hesitation about being subsumed under the 'Balkan' label (even fragmented and lumped together to an entity called 'The Western Balkans', as in the case of the countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania). For example, this is particularly true in the case of Asian tour operators (Bofulin, Raspor, Stranjančević, Bulatović, & Lacmanović, 2016). This region is identified with vast tourism potential, but also with underdeveloped infrastructure and low-quality services, lack of strategic planning, formal and informal barriers within the tourism industry, present inter-ethnic tensions, etc. (Ahn et al., 2009; Bofulin et al., 2016). Many authors agree that raising the collective consciousness of joint cultural heritage throughout the Balkans and their incorporation into joint tourist products is imposed as the first task in creating attractiveness for tourists outside the Balkan region. However, it is important to explore the ambivalence of different layers of identity in a cultural and historical context to identify the potential for coherent design and the shaping of tourist products (Dragičević Šešić & Rogać Mijatović, 2014), and gastronomy is one aspect of this effort.

According to Smith et al. (2018), based on different tourism-related image elements of the Balkans, gastronomy has the strongest appeal and potential for tourism 'export'. For example, when describing Balkan gastronomy, foreign tourists tend to label the offer of a given catering facility as being 'typically Balkan', and they give mostly appreciative reviews in terms of food quality and service, stating that 'standards of Balkan cuisine tend to be usually high'.

This study includes a literature review on gastronomy and tourism-related topics with a special focus on the Balkan region. Moreover, a historic approach will be applied by using basic food reflections of the Balkan Peninsula given by Jovan Cvijić (1918, 1922), to perceive the basic food habits and regional disparities, traditional local dishes and potential changes in food choice and preparation methods of different Balkan nations. A statistical outlook on the tourism flows in the Balkan region will also be given, indicating that most tourists in the Balkan region originate from the region itself. Therefore, their perception of local food should matter the most, having in mind that such tourists have specific knowledge about the local gastronomy and specific expectations as well. Furthermore, a special survey was conducted to indicate the locals' perception of gastronomic specificity of Balkan food and local food as well. A special questionnaire was prepared and submitted to the people from the Balkan region to identify which dishes, present in tourist promotional campaigns of Balkan states, are commonly perceived as traditional national (local dishes) and/or as regional Balkan dishes (popular 'Balkan food'). In this study we used a 'double-lens method'¹: the

¹'Building on the insights of disciplinary ancestors and contemporaries, opens vistas for future work encompassing public and personal worlds. The double lens refers to a theoretical eye holding both worlds in focus, in all their plenitude, variability, specificity, and complexity' (Linger, 2005, p. 2).

perception of each respondent is seen at the same time as locals' perception (having specific knowledge on national/local cuisine due to their origin) and potential tourists' perceptions (having specific expectations, knowledge and opinion towards gastronomy of other Balkan countries).

This study is aimed to give answers to the following research questions:

RQ1. Is there a specific image of gastronomic dishes which can be considered as shared regional 'Balkan' food along with the specific national 'local' traditional dishes which can be perceived as unique and original by local communities and tourists from the region?

RQ2. Is there a specific knowledge retained on what is ours and what is the 'neighbors' and is it possible to identify joint 'Balkan gastronomy'?

RQ3. How is 'Balkan food' perceived in terms of its main attributes (tourist potential, uniqueness, quality and nutrition) and its general role in the creation of a joint 'Balkan' tourist brand?

Gastronomy as Tourism Potential

Being the basic need of humans, but also an attractive element of the tourist offer, gastronomy is related to the attractiveness of the destination, as illustrated in several different studies (Getz & Brown, 2006; Richards, 2002; Vuksanović, 2017). Furthermore, it is evident that during travel and vacation, a significant number of tourists seek food that is familiar to them, but there are also the curious ones that would prefer exotic food (Richards, 2002). Consumption levels for local food during travel depend on individual affinities of tourists, but also on characteristics of local cuisines, such as preparation methods, variety, novelty, authenticity, quality, etc. (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). Consumers are becoming increasingly involved in the development of new products and services; therefore, observing their desires, needs and motives is extremely important for market positioning of different food products (Gagić, Jovičić, Tešanović, & Kalenjuk, 2014).

According to Tešanović and Koprivica (2007), *local dishes* are identified as being created in specific households or restaurants or are traditionally made in a certain village or town, and are made of traditional local food. *National dishes* are considered to be a set of local/regional dishes that are usually prepared within a country. Even though culinary practices can be transferred from distant cultures (oriental or Byzantine cuisine) and have been common for a long time in that area, they are still considered national dishes, such as 'sarma', 'gulaš', 'paprikaš', 'pečenje', 'čevapi', etc. *International dishes* are already affirmed dishes of various world-renowned cuisines, like Italian Pizza, Esterhazy steak, etc. (Kalenjuk, Tešanović, & Gagić, 2015).

It is widely accepted that traditional dishes represent local food culture; however, as a part of living culture, they are constantly changing along with social development. In modern societies, local cuisines are becoming more open to external influences and to assimilation with other cuisines (Mintz, 1996; Vuksanović, 2017). Chang et al. (2010) and Kittler and Sucher (2004) identify

culturally specific behaviour in nutrition habits of people by identifying primary food (basic food that is consumed on an everyday basis), secondary food (regularly consumed, but not every day) and peripheral food (eaten occasionally). It is considered that primary food (basic food) is strongly connected to the culture, and its change or modification is most strongly opposed. Considering the importance of food in everyday life, tourism-related experiences of food and the global availability of recipes from distant places, we consume a great variety of dishes. Some dishes tend to be quite untypical to the original local traditions; therefore, the food the locals eat today can be drastically different from the food their ancestors ate. Even though innovations in cuisine are inevitable (Handler & Linnekin, 1984), we must acknowledge that tourists still prefer traditional food and preparation methods, as it is considered to be a cultural symbol of the history of the region and nations being visited (Vuksanović, 2017). It is argued that the link between the national cuisine and tourism depends on the degree to which they reached the kitchen as part of social culture, and thus the national identity. This relationship between geographical locations, culture and the gastronomy or the enology of a region sometimes extends to promotional efforts in creating a distinctive image of a typical local, regional or even national food and wine destination. In this way, food can often be used as a tool to guide passengers or tourists to visit countries and regions (Petrevska & Deleva, 2014).

Historical Background of the Balkan Gastronomy

The multicultural mosaic of the Balkans was developed by the construction of parallel ethnic identities in close acculturation processes, often using the same narratives, in spite of diverse religious affiliations, while each of the Balkan ethnic identities incorporated in itself both the material and the immaterial heritage (Terzić, Bjeljac, & Krivošević, 2015). As new 'Balkan' tourist products are introduced, those narratives should be taken into account, indicating that tourism might be able to contribute to overcoming barriers – contemporary borders of nation-states, lack of mediated information and deliberate politically coloured manipulation (Dragičević Šešić & Rogač Mijatović, 2014).

The first scientifically based representation of 'the Balkan Peninsula' as a unique region, in terms of geographical and cultural scope, was given by Jovan Cvijić (1918). Here, he also added some remarks on food and gastronomy of the Balkans, which can serve as the starting point in the identification of original local dishes that nowadays are an important part of the tourism offer of the region itself. As Cvijić remarks, Mediterranean people of the Balkan Peninsula (Croats, Montenegrins, Greeks, Turks and Albanians) produce and eat more wine, olives, wheat bread, honey, sea fish and olive oil. These are the basic foods. The use of vegetables, fruits and various herbs and spices is more variable than in the continental parts of the Peninsula. Marine populations mainly cultivate vines and olives; thus, wheat bread, oil and wine are the basis of their diet. Vegetables are more diversified than on the continental block; in particular, there are several types of cabbage, ghee, cauliflower and salads which remain green for most of the year. Southern fruits are important

for food and for sale, such as olives, grapes, figs, almonds and cherries (a special type of marasca cherry, which is grown along the Adriatic coast from Kaštel to Neretva, of which well-known Maraskino is made in Zadar and Šibenik). Further, various herbs are grown such as roach, pelin, laurel and rosemary, from which a special quality oil is traditionally made in Hvar and Pelješac (Croatia). In the Skadar Lake (Albania), an important part of the diet and export is the Skadar Lake bleak and eel. Fishing is also well developed in Macedonia, especially at Ohrid and Dorian lakes. On the other hand, they eat far less meat and milk products than in the continental regions and, if any, mostly sheep and goat meat (Cvijić, 1922). North of the Balkan and Sharr Mountains (Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Bosnia) there are huge agricultural lands under cereal cultivation, and the best cattle, pigs, horses and sheep are grown here. There are also large orchards with plums, apples, pears and walnuts in Serbia and Bosnia (where plum brandy 'šljivovica' and jam are highly respected among the locals). Cattle's breeding is extremely developed in inner parts of the Balkans, and the pig has traditionally been one of the sources of wealth in the Šumadija region of Serbia (Cvijić, 1922).

In northern parts of the Balkans, as well in Albania, corn dominates, and in the coastal and transitional area wheat bread. Corn is grown more than wheat, except for the eastern part of the Lower Danube plate, because the continental population prefers to eat cornbread. In addition to wheat and corn, oats, barley and rye are cultivated, but millet and buckwheat less so. In the mountainous areas, rye bread is frequently used. Cornbread, well baked, in most of the northern regions, is called 'proja'. Shepherds eat 'kačamak' (a dish made from corn) with 'Urda' cheese; otherwise, cornbread is called 'palenta' or 'mamaliyuga' as a folk food in the Danube region. A large number of dishes are made from corn flour, eggs and 'kajmak' (skorupa) in the Dinaric areas, especially eggs (with pro-flour), 'cicvara', 'cymbur' (cooked egg with cream) and others. Dinaric people mainly eat vegetables, milk and white milk products (various cheeses and creams), but fewer meat products. Favourite vegetables are cabbage, then cherry, beans, onions, peppers and eggplant, which are preserved for the winter (so-called *turšija*). There is a growing importance of potatoes in the diet of the Balkans. In rural areas, beef is rarely eaten, but more often in towns. In winter, dry meat is cooked from beef, mostly in the Old Vlah area, and is exported as ham and parsley. Lamb and mutton are used more, while pork is frequently used especially in Serbia and Montenegro, where every family prepares large quantities of pig trout and bacon for winter. Among the Dinaric shepherds, the main part of their diet is 'kačamak', 'proja', milk, white figs, mushrooms, sheep meat, but fewer vegetables. There is thus a difference in nutrition among the residents living in areas west of the Carpathian-Balkan ports and those on the Lower Danube plate. These latter are very economical, and they consume mainly bread and dairy products, eggplant and peppers (usually very hot peppers). Raw peppers are especially important foods of the population of these areas, as illustrated when the walls of their houses are wrapped in autumn with pepper wreaths which are then dried and made ready for winter. Therefore, peppers are not only used as a spice but are a significant part of the diet. In the areas that were under the influence of the Byzantine civilisation, every meal is very spicy, while in the Dinaric areas of the patriarchal regime spices

are used less. Thus, Central European impacts are also spread, as the population of Moravian Serbia imitates their compatriots from the Vojvodina region. The famous Austro-Hungarian cuisine, especially Hungarian, is regarded as too fat and very spicy (Cvijić, 1922). Therefore, we can conclude that the first evidence of gastronomic specificity of the Balkans was identified by Cvijić, who clearly distinguished between the ‘Mediterranean diet’ and the ‘Balkan diet’.

The Balkans as a Tourist Destination – Statistical Outlook

International tourism is a category of tourism in which tourists have a longer radius of motion outside their national boundaries and perform three activities: passing through international borders, exchanging their national currency for foreign currency and staying in some accommodation facility (Metodijeski & Temelkov, 2014). Tourism as an industry in the various Balkan states falls under the jurisdiction of different ministries, and different national tourist organisations have been established for promotional activities and coordination of tourism development on national and local levels. All Balkan countries have developed and adopted national strategies for the development of tourism, but due to the similarities of the countries situated on the Balkan Peninsula, the creation of a common regional, that is, ‘Balkan’, tourist product is of crucial importance, especially directed towards the international tourism market (Metodijeski & Temelkov, 2014). Furthermore, the study of Čerović, Knežević, Matović, and Brdar (2015) indicates that although the number of tourist arrivals is increasing in the Western Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia), tourism makes a modest contribution to their economic growth. On the other hand, a study conducted by Selimi, Sadiku, and Sadiku (2017) indicates that there is a strong positive impact of tourism in the economic results of the Balkan countries as far as tourist arrivals are concerned. The fixed effects are highest in Croatia and Albania and lowest in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in North Macedonia (Selimi et al., 2017). It is not surprising that Greece and Croatia are the leading destinations in the region according to the number of tourists as well as income generated by tourism, followed by the other countries with access to the Adriatic Sea: Albania and Montenegro. This group is followed by landlocked countries of Serbia, B&H and Macedonia. Although access to the sea and coastal tourism still play an important role in the destination attractiveness in this region, countries without access to the sea (e.g. Serbia) are catching up fast (Bofulin et al., 2016). These studies especially outline the need for regional cooperation of neighbouring countries as a strategic priority in terms of future tourism development.

Official tourism statistics of the region (Table 1) indicate that regional tourist flows within the Balkan region are quite evident. Such regional tourist distribution is especially evident within continental parts of the Balkan Peninsula (Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia) where tourists from the region have over 30% share in total foreign tourist arrivals and overnight stays. On the other hand, coastal countries, such as Croatia, Greece and Bulgaria, have a different distribution of foreign visitors and a more modest share of those originating from the Balkans, while Montenegro is considered the traditional seaside

Table 1. Most Visited Balkan Tourist Destinations and the Share of Tourists from the Region.

Country	Number of Tourists		
	Foreign	Domestic	From Region
Albania (2017)	5,117,700	4,851,622	Over 81% (45.5% Kosovo, 12% North Macedonia, 8.7% Greece)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017)	739,000	210,000	252,472 (34.2%)
Bulgaria (2017)	3,910,159	1,372,289	712,021 (18.2%)
Croatia (2017)	15,593,000	1,838,000	649,000 (4.2%)
Greece (2017)	27,194,000	5,492,000	13.3% (data from 2015)
Macedonia (2015)	485,530	330,537	169,782 (34.9%)
Montenegro (2017)	1,877,212	122,797	716,322 (38.2%)
Serbia (2017)	1,497,173	1,588,693	490,075 ^a (32.7%)

^aThe tourists from the region included persons originating from Balkan countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece, Serbia (73% of territory) and Croatia (45% of territory).

Sources: Statistical yearbooks of the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, 2015–2018. [Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2019](#); [Federal Office of Statistics of Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019](#); [Institute of Statistics Albania, 2019](#); [National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2019](#); [Statistical Office of Montenegro – MONSTAT, 2019](#); [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019](#)

destination for tourists from the region (38.2% share). Such regional distribution of tourists within the Balkans indicates close connectivity between the Balkan states, providing specific knowledge about different states, destinations and tourist products offered within the Balkan cultural space. Balkan gastronomy is something tourists have to consume within their tourist package wherever they choose to go within the Balkans, disregarding their main motivation or destination choice. Food is something that is provided and consumed on daily basis. There are some statistically confirmed differences in consumption patterns and satisfaction levels of local Serbian food among tourists from the region (Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia), as well as in consumption of gastronomic dishes of the two biggest urban centres, Belgrade and Novi Sad, due to differences in the gastronomic offer ([Vuksanović, Tešanović, & Portić, 2019](#)).

Identification of Regional and National (Local/Traditional) Dishes within the Balkan Scope

Previous studies ([Amblard, Prugnard, & Giraud, 2011](#); [Bradatan, 2003](#)) confirmed the existence of a specific Balkan cuisine because people from the