

# Traditional and Authentic Food of Vojvodina's Ethnic Groups

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Gastronomic heritage and traditional and authentic gastronomy are significant factors for tourism development. Gastronomic heritage is a part of cultural heritage which has been the subject of numerous research works recently. The national cuisine, specific to a place, characterizes the local culture and is considered to be authentic cuisine. It is also a tool for attracting tourists seeking authenticity. Preserving the gastronomic heritage serves not only to attract tourism, but is also territorial capital offering social and economic benefits for local areas, and contributes to preserving the uniqueness of the different ethnic groups in the area.

Keywords: gastronomic heritage ; authentic food ; traditional food ; tourism ; gastronomy ; ethnicity

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## 1. Gastronomic Heritage

Gastronomic heritage has to a great extent begun to draw attention of European researchers, which can be seen in the research conducted by Lin et al. <sup>[1]</sup>. Their research explains the increase of the significance of gastronomic heritage together with, i.e., UNESCO's activities to preserve cultural heritage <sup>[1]</sup>.

Romagnoli <sup>[2]</sup> states that gastronomic heritage includes a wide range of knowledge about food and culinary skills which communities consider their mutual heritage and common social practices. Gastronomic heritage encompasses a large number of socio-cultural aspects, such as agricultural products, different kinds of dishes, methods of food preparation, the equipment used for preparing dishes, and the way of consuming them <sup>[3][4][5]</sup>. Bessière and Tibère <sup>[3]</sup> state that gastronomic heritage represents a marker of the regional identity and underlines the complexity of this field of research, which is increasingly receiving attention <sup>[6][3]</sup>.

As some authors state in their research, gastronomic heritage represents the main factor of differentiating tourist destinations due to the increasing interest of visitors in authentic food as the primary motive for visiting a tourist area and region <sup>[4]</sup>, conditioned by supply and demand <sup>[7][8]</sup>. Bessière and Tibère <sup>[9]</sup> state in their research that when travelling, tourists form an image of a destination based on the gastronomic heritage of local residents and the visited place, i.e., they create a symbolic connection with the local population and gastronomy. It is interesting to mention that the demands of a tourist market sometimes have a negative influence on the gastronomic heritage of a region. It is presented in the research conducted in Vietnam, where gastronomic heritage in restaurant offers was influenced by a self-created multidirectional process, which changed the display of their traditional gastronomy to tourists <sup>[10]</sup>.

## 2. Traditional and Authentic Food

When talking about traditional and authentic food, it is important to mention cultural differences in interpretation and associations with this term. In their research, Guerrero et al. <sup>[11]</sup> observed differences within the European continent, saying that in Southern Europe, traditional food is something related to heritage, culture, and history, whereas Central and Northern Europe associate this term with practicality, health, and convenience <sup>[12]</sup>.

Traditional food, which represents a part of heritage and culture and is a reflection of history, has been in the process of revival in recent years, being increasingly in demand <sup>[13]</sup> and on offer <sup>[14]</sup> in hospitality and tourism. Batal et al. <sup>[15]</sup> highlight its significance because of its nutritional, cultural, spiritual, and economic value, while Guerrero et al. <sup>[16]</sup> state in their research that in order to get a better position in the market, traditional food requires an improvement in health and safety quality, as well as innovation.

The authenticity of local food refers to whether the ingredients or dishes are unique for a geographical location; whether the food is prepared traditionally; whether it is prepared with local ingredients; or whether it is prepared by or in the manner of a native <sup>[17][18]</sup>. Therefore, a restaurant is considered authentic when the food and experience of consuming it reflect the culture of their referred ethnicity <sup>[19]</sup>. Timothy <sup>[20]</sup> states that the authenticity of food which derives from traditionalism includes recipes, ingredients, methods of thermal processing, smells, customs of consuming food and beverages, social connotations, related organizations and festivals, hunting, and forming traditions <sup>[20]</sup>.

### **3. Local Food**

Apart from the term traditional and authentic food, the term local food is equally important for this subject. Here, it is important to point out that culture and tradition cannot be observed without the involvement of local gastronomy, which fully affects the character of a region or a country <sup>[21]</sup>. Local food is often defined as authentic products which not only symbolize a tourist destination but also express the local traditional culture <sup>[22]</sup>. A local gastronomy includes the use of gastronomic products cultivated in the same region where the food is served <sup>[23]</sup>. Bessi re <sup>[6]</sup> adds that it is passed down from generation to generation and can be considered a concise overview of the lifestyle and cultural spirit of the local population, and is used as a strategic tool for the promotion of the social and economic development of a destination <sup>[24]</sup>.

Local food has the potential to enhance the visitors' experience by connecting consumers with the culture and heritage of a region <sup>[22]</sup>; it enables tourists to gain a better understanding of the unique and authentic characteristics of a specific culture <sup>[25][26]</sup>. It contributes to the brand identity, increases destination attractiveness, and promotes the economic development of a district by mimicking local agricultural industry and avoiding the import of expensive foreign food <sup>[25][26]</sup>. As such, increasing food and beverages visibility in the tourism market can help to build and strengthen the image of culinary heritage <sup>[21]</sup>. However, it is important to mention that, according to a study conducted by Zepeda and Li <sup>[27]</sup>, the selection of local food by consumers depends solely on their attitudes and habits, and that incomes and demographic characteristics have absolutely no influence.

Local food and beverages play an important role during tourist visits to particular destinations with a strong gastronomic identity. Tasting local food is a way to become acquainted with and understand the local culture. In addition to having an exciting, learning, and/or authentic experience, perhaps one of the reasons to visit a destination to consume its local food is to get away from everyday routine to try something new <sup>[28][29]</sup>.

### **4. Tourism and Food**

Tourism is a significant industry sector in which, regardless of the reason for visiting a destination, tourists have a physiological need for food <sup>[30]</sup>. Food is an important resource of tourism and can be their basic motive for visiting <sup>[31]</sup>. It is not only a functional component of travel, but is also sensual, experiential, symbolic, and ritualistic <sup>[29]</sup>. Authenticity and local heritage (food, wine, craftsmanship) are determining factors not only of the so-called food tourism, but also of other alternative forms of tourism (e.g., experiential, slow, sustainable tourism) <sup>[32]</sup>.

New, unfamiliar food represents a starting point for tourists who explore new cultures and lifestyles. The research by Horng and Tsai <sup>[23]</sup> showed that food tourism offers a new niche market and economic welfare, and that it creates a competitive advantage for tourist destinations. Food is recognized as an important part of the touristic experience, which intensifies it in a positive manner.

More and more tourist destinations are in demand because of their unique gastronomy, where gastronomy is the central feature of a tourist attraction. One of the resources that can attract tourists is local, authentic, safe, and unique food and gastronomy <sup>[33]</sup>. Many authors acknowledge a positive relationship between tourists' satisfaction with traditional and local food and their intention to revisit a destination <sup>[33][34]</sup>. Alderighi et al. <sup>[35]</sup> state that the more tourists visiting a certain destination respect local products, the greater their intention to visit the destination, regardless of the primary motive for visiting the destination. They also emphasize the significance of raising awareness about the use of local products among local operators, i.e., restaurants, inns, and other facilities that offer food and beverage services in tourism <sup>[35]</sup>.

### **5. Gastronomic Heritage of Vojvodina**

Vojvodina is an agricultural region occupying an area of 21,614 km<sup>2</sup> with 40% arable land and which influenced the cultural and gastronomic heritage in combination with natural characteristics of the region to be the center of different forms of tourism (e.g., rural tourism, wine tourism, religious tourism, event tourism) <sup>[36][37]</sup>.

The structure of the inhabitants has changed throughout history, and so have the habits of preparing and enjoying food. Throughout history, the gastronomy of Vojvodina was largely influenced by Austrian, German, and Hungarian cuisine. In addition to these cultures and cuisines, Turkey has had a significant influence, along with the migrations of the Slovak, Russian, Ukrainian, Rusyn, and other ethnic groups that have brought their food preparation habits <sup>[38]</sup>.

Research conducted in hospitality facilities of the region have shown that the offerings in restaurants in Vojvodina are not authentic enough, i.e., that there is a low representation of traditional dishes of certain ethnic groups <sup>[39][38]</sup>.

## **6. Gastronomic Characteristics of Ethnic Groups in Vojvodina**

A characteristic of almost all ethnic groups in Vojvodina (Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Croatians, Montenegrins, Roma, etc.) is the production and consumption of various cured meat products, smoked meat, and different kinds of sausages. In addition, a large number of traditional vegetable and fruit dishes, various dough products, sweet dishes, and preserves are of great importance <sup>[39][38]</sup>. Similar dishes among ethnic groups are very common, where differences can be only in the name or in a phase of preparation, an ingredient, or a spice <sup>[38]</sup>.

Hungarian cuisine is basically caloric, quite spicy, and piquant. Basic ingredients of animal origin are pork, veal, beef, and poultry. Pork lard and goose fat are often used in the preparation of dishes, as well as garlic and onions, cream, whole cheese, walnuts, and poppy seeds, and combinations of meat dishes with sweet flavors are common <sup>[38]</sup>. Research conducted among the Hungarian population in Vojvodina shows a significant preservation of the traditional preparation of dishes in their homes, the homes of their descendants, and in the homes of co-nationals <sup>[31]</sup>.

Slovakian cuisine is characterized by strong, hot, and very spicy food, with a pronounced use of pork and the preparation of different kinds of dishes made of dough and sweets <sup>[40]</sup>. The research conducted among members of this ethnic group showed that Slovakian inhabitants mostly independently produce certain kinds of food products, among which sausage products have a significant place. The greatest preservation of traditional dishes can be seen in the preparation of desserts and dough dishes <sup>[41]</sup>.

Croatian cuisine seems to be a mixture of cuisines from the surrounding area, with a great assimilation with Serbian cuisine. However, the dishes fully contain certain authentic segments that distinguish them from others, among which there are different kinds of meat specialties, yeast dough dishes, pies, and cakes <sup>[39]</sup>.

TOV <sup>[42]</sup> presents Romanian gastronomy as a simple cuisine, emphasizing that in the mixture of surrounding influences on Romanian cuisine, habits in the preparation and consumption of meat and vegetable soups, tripe, or veal legs, seasoned with lemon juice, cream, or vinegar, have been formed and preserved. Porridge made of corn flour, eaten as a main dish or a side dish or instead of bread, can often be found on the table. Most widely used are pork and chicken, but veal, fish, bacon, ham, and various cured meat products are also used <sup>[40][42]</sup>.

Starting from the variety of available foodstuffs in the region where they came from, Montenegrins, just as all other ethnic groups, have tried to preserve as much of the of their cuisine as possible. Unable to preserve certain Mediterranean characteristics, they adapted to available foodstuffs. An integral part of their cuisine in Vojvodina is dairy products, cured meat, and meat products. Different types of dough and porridge are widely used. Different types of meat, lamb, and veal are prepared, and dishes based on sea and river fish are present in their diet <sup>[39]</sup>.

By investigating the characteristics of the gastronomy of the Roma population in Vojvodina, it was found that the prefix in the name of a dish shows that something is exclusively of Roma origin. In Roma cuisine, dishes made from vegetables but in which meat is cooked or stewed are dominant. Paprika is the dominant spice, but pepper, salt, garlic, and onions are also used. With respect to its gastronomic characteristics, Roma food is considered to be medium hot to very hot cuisine, which is still preserved among the elderly members of this ethnic group <sup>[42]</sup>.

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