Gastronomic tourism in rural areas of Vojvodina (North Serbia) – Dispersion, condition and offer of authentic restaurants “messuages”

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ABSTRACT

The food offer is the best reflection of how preserved culture and tradition of peoples who inhabit specific areas are. In Vojvodina, they are most diverse in messuages (sr. “salaš”) (rural farm houses where people who were engaged in agriculture and cattle-breeding started living more than a century ago). Isolated from the modern world, messuages have nowadays gained popularity, and are often called the symbols of Pannonian Plain. This paper will try to show the dispersion, significance and possibilities of old Vojvodina households which were turned into very popular hospitality facilities with national and traditional food, and thus contributed to gastronomic tourism and rural development, as well as the economy of the region. What is even more valuable besides the preserved setting are preserved authentic tastes, local cuisine, mixture of influence of people who inhabited or who still inhabit this region, such as Hungarians, Slovaks, Serbs, Bosniaks, Ruthenians, Germans and other nations.

Keywords: Gastronomic tourism, Food, Villages, Rural tourism, Vojvodina, Serbia
1. INTRODUCTION

The most acceptable and cited definition of gastronomic tourism as a selective form of tourist movement was produced by Hall and Mitchell (2006) who stated that it is about tourist movement which is realized by visiting and tasting at primary and secondary food and beverages producers, by attaining food and drink manifestations and by consuming authentic specialties in different hospitality facilities. Here we talk about a more and more popular form of tourist movement (Kalenjuk, 2014; Kalenjuk, 2017a) in which local and authentic food and drink play a significant role in rural environments (Baum, 2011; Kalenjuk et al., 2012a; Đerčan et al., 2017).

Vojvodina is a multicultural region where a large number of cuisines is mixed together (Kalenjuk et al., 2017), a mixture of ethnic groups with their gastronomic characteristics has influenced that it has become a favorable destination for the development of gastronomic tourism. Numerous tourist organizations have recognized the potentials of authentic food and have included them in their offer, developing a form of tourism, which is known worldwide as food tourism (Boniface, 2003), culinary (Wolf, 2006; Ignatov & Smith, 2006), tasting (Boniface, 2003) and gourmet tourism (Kalenjuk, 2017b).

The culture of nutrition is a reflection of complex living conditions and the influence of numerous factors of food culture which differs from one village to the other, even from one household to the other (Stojanović & Čerović, 2008). Messuages used to be summer dwellings of plowmen, whereas today most of these objects have been turned into hospitality facilities which are recognizable by tambura players, hospitality, rich and tasty dishes (Tešanović et al., 2009).

Demirovic (2012) clearly states that messuages represent an earlier way of living and working in agriculture, that is, a particular social phenomenon in the Pannonian region and they symbolize a former struggle of peasants in a desert. Under the term „messuage we understand a house for dwelling with economy buildings and infield, where people constantly or occasionally live, and whose existence is based upon their own agricultural production“ (Demirović, 2012).

The autonomous region of Vojvodina occupies an area of 21,614 square kilometers with 1,779,128 ha of agricultural land. According to the 2013 census it is inhabited by 1,912,095 people (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2014) in 467 settlements in 45 municipalities, of which 52 are towns, and the rest of 415 are rural settlements where 44.4% of the total population live (The census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, 2011), which gives importance to activation of food in the function of tourism. According to the research conducted by Božin (2018) there is a total of 65 messuages in the territory of Vojvodina, which have been transformed from old abandoned country households into hospitality facilities for providing food and drink, and even accommodation services.

The subject of this paper is to show dispersion, importance and possibilities of old Vojvodina households in villages which have been transformed into very popular hospitality facilities of national and traditional food thus contributing to the rural development and economy of the region.
2. ADVANTAGES OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS AND VICE VERSA

Thanks to the dynamic historical events combined with the fertile plain, rural areas of Vojvodina represent places with possibly the most preserved gastronomic tradition and authenticity (Banjac et al., 2016). Here, tourism should be observed as an economic branch with important social and economic functions which contributes to highlighting and better evaluation of agricultural environment (Henderson, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004; Gagic et al., 2014). Through gastronomy which has been preserved in villages, tourists get acquainted with the culture and traditions of the visited region, as well as characteristic tastes and scents which they take with them in the form of authentic experiences.

Studies have shown that tourism workers still haven’t sufficiently developed awareness of the advantages of authentic and local food on the development of the region (Kalenjuk et al., 2013a; Kalenjuk et al., 2013b). In the previous development policies and concepts regarding the development of food of rural population and tourists, the appropriate developmental role, opposed to its basic role, wasn’t given (Kalenjuk et al., 2011).

3. THE CONDITION AND PERSPECTIVES OF VOJVODINA MESSUAGES

In rural areas such as messuages as hospitality and tourism facilities today, food has become recognized worldwide as a part of (Hall & Mitchell, 2001) local culture; tourism promotion; components of local agricultural and economic development, and a regional factor influenced by the patterns of consumption and observed desire of tourists, which is very important (Kalenjuk et al., 2011).

Messuages in Vojvodina are grouped according to the urban environments in the vicinity of which they are located, and being such they are recognized by tourists. They are grouped in the following way:

- Sombor messuages (rural areas around the town of Sombor) – besides comfortable houses and hospitality facilities, messuages with no water and power supply are offered, which provide a completely authentic experience and are equipped with old, traditional furniture;
- Cenej messuages (messuages around Novi Sad) – rich and well-developed agriculture of this area has provided a large number of different messuages and gastronomic specialties;
- Becej messuages (around Subotica) in the north part of Backa are characteristic because they were formed at the site of former medieval villages (Demirović & Njegovac, 2014).

A good side of this selective form of tourism is that gastronomic destinations are usually available throughout the year, at any time of the day and in all weather conditions (Richards, 2002), which gives it a special economic advantage. With the aim of developing food as an attraction of the rural environment, four recommendations are given (Quan & Wang, 2004):
— promoting gastronomy of certain rural areas through hospitality food and drink offers;
— turning food products into main tourist attractions (authentic local specialties, cheeses, meats, products etc), then schools for preparing local specialties and selling souvenirs, which can also be in the form of food (homemade cheese, prosciutto, jam)
— food of a destination can be a part of a larger tourism event (tourist food event) and
— food can be used to improve the attractiveness of a destination through visiting active country households, messuages – restaurants, even small food producers and closed facilities which have been converted into country food museums (e.g. Bread museum in Pecinci).

As already mentioned, there are 65 registered messuages in Vojvodina, which try to preserve an authentic, traditional spirit and provide enjoyment with local food and drink. In Vojvodina, they are synonymous with good food and good time. A list of some of the messuages follows, and dispersion of only a half is shown in Figure 1 (http://www.salasi.info/sr/pocetna).

Many messuages have got their names after last names of their first owners, some were named after nicknames of their present owners, or even lots where they are situated, and there are those which were given new names after certain characteristics (the rabbit’s messuage, deer, chubby, thick shade, messuage of heart, green court, stork’s messuage, and similar), among messuages with authentic food offer which attracts gastronomic tourists we should highlight: Salaš 137, Salaš Ćuvardić, Our Salaš Sombor, Mitin Salaš, Majkin Salaš, Rokin Salaš, Katal Salaš, Salaš Jelen, Zekin Salaš, Salaš Stremen, Salaš Volić, Salaš 84, Our Salaš 325, Salaš Capriolo, Dida Hornjakov, Babin Salaš, Salaš Djeram, Cvetni Salaš, Perkov Salaš, Salaš Debeli Lad, Lekin Salaš, Salaš Jakšić, Salaš from the heart, Salaš Tatić, Salaš Curan, Rodin Salaš, Salaš Đorđević, Salaš Stojšić, Salaš Ruža Majur, Pajin Salaš, Cvejin Salaš, Brkin Salaš, Bucin Salaš, Salaš šumski čardak, Salaš Bošnjak, Salaš Zeleni Dvor, Salaš Kucora (http://www.salasi.info/sr/pocetna) and many other equally good and recognizable. Examples of authenticity of the environment of the first opened messuage in Vojvodina, Salaš 137 is shown in Figures 2 and 3, and some of their specialties are shown in Figure 4.

4. GASTRONOMIC IDENTITY OF VOJVODINA MESSUAGES

Visitors of hospitality messuages can taste authentic traditional dishes such as guineafowl soup, pheasant, goose and even pigeon soup, as well as dishes of roast, breaded or stewed meat combined with stews and salads, though which we can taste the influences of ancestors. The most popular dishes are: goulash, pepper stew, beans, stuffed peppers, sarma, tomato and pepper stew etc. (Tešanović et al., 2009).

Desserts as well as most dishes in Vojvodina are a mixture of influences of Germany, Austria, Hungary and other ethic groups which inhabit this region. One should taste different dessert such as: strudels, doughnuts, poppy noodles, gomboces, pies and similar. Vojvodina cuisine is famous for leavened dough cakes, of which strudels are the most famous. Most often used fillings for strudels are: poppy, walnuts, fruit jam, carob, pumkin and sour cherries. A village Novo Milosevo is famous for this authentic dessert and Strudlijada event, where a
strudel for the Guiness Book of Records was made in 2008. The strudel was 13 meters and 95 centimeters long (Kalenjuk et al., 2012b).

In the variety of desserts in Vojvodina, gugelhupf is only one, famous as a dessert of aristocracy. The gugelhupf is a unique, old cake which originates in German cuisine. It can be recognized by its specific shape, and is often described as a “cake with a hole”. The wine gugelhupf or bermet gugelhupf is a specialty prepared in combination with red bermet, local sweet aromatic wine, figs and chocolate (Kalenjuk, 2017b).

After meat dishes, the most important dishes for residents of Vojvodina are pastry dishes. With a reason! The fertile plain has enabled the growth of grain thus serving at a table numerous leavened and unleavened breads and pastries. Bread is often eaten only with lard spreading and seasoned with cayenne pepper or jam, but here we also have: Vojvodina style bread, flat bread, buns, rolls, muffins with cracklings or cheese, salt sticks, Ukrainian pirogs,

Figure 1. Dispersity of a half of Vojvodina messuages
(source: http://www.salasi.info/sr/pocetna)
cabbage rolls and pies. Thick noodles are served with goulash, perkelt or pepper stew, whereas thin noodles, dumplings and dough pellets are ingredients of homemade soups.

To get acquainted with and experience rural Vojvodina from the most authentic perspective is possible in messuages by the river, unique hospitality facilities. Traditional hospitality facilities are situated on the banks of the Danube and the Tisa rivers, in the near or farther area around inhabited places. According to the structure and quality of authentic gastronomic offer, environment and atmosphere with music of tambura players, visitors are offered specialties such as: fish baked on a disk harrow or grill, fish chowder, fish and pepper stew with dumplings or homemade noodles prepared in fish pots on wood, smoked river fish, and many other dishes (Kalenjuk et al., 2017a).

Figure 2. The exterior of Salaš 137
(source: http://salas137.rs)

Abundance of forest in Vojvodina has enabled an offer of game dishes. Therefore there are numerous hunting specialties in the gastronomic heritage of Vojvodina: venison pepper stew prepared with red wine, wild boar goulash with white wine and homemade smoked sausages, partridges stuffed with goose liver, wild duck in cream sauce, Vojvodina style hunting steak and many other dishes.

The most authentic fruit brandy is mulberry brandy, and its production dates back in the period of Maria Theresa when all important roads were mulberry avenues. Mulberry has an important spiritual value, and one of the older trees is located in Orlovat village and is protected by the government. Besides mulberry brandy, brandies which are characteristic of
messuages include quince, honey, and then apricot, plum, apple, vine and pear brandies. But there is also homemade bear and wine.

Vojvodina is a significant producer of fruit, which is processed throughout the year into different products, and one of the inevitable products is fruit juice. Different kinds of homemade fruit juice can be found in the market and hospitality facilities: beetroot, tomato, quince, apricot, peach, pumpkin, plum, thorn, sour cherry, strawberry, elderberry, rose, and even herbs.

Figure 3. The interior of Salaš 137 (Source: http://salas137.rs/)

Mokrin is synonymous with rolled cheese, but if you travel to the west, you can taste Sombor cheese in a small vat, in the south you will be served smoked cheese, Pivnice sheese, Irig cheese, goat cheese, or even donkey milk cheese in Zasavica, which is one of the most expensive kind of cheese in the world (1kg, 1,000 EUR) (Kalenjuk et al., 2017b).

Once highly valued, and again nowadays very sought after in messuages is Mangulica, a breed of pig, meat. The meat is different from other breeds because it is darker, more succulent and has a stronger smell and it is much present in southern parts of Vojvodina, as well as in northern parts. Srem (the mountainous area in Vojvodina) is among common people divided into pork (southern) and wine (northern) part. According to this, pigs breeding, culture and tradition have affected that the jewels of Vojvodina table become sausage products. Apart from a big range of sausages which differ by the technology of production, ingredients and combination of seasonings which give them a unique flavor, there are three fermented products which are protected in the Srem region: Srem kulen (spice sausage), Srem sausage and Srem salami.
It is important to mention Petrovska kielbasa. This national specialty was created in the 18th century when a large number of Slovaks inhabited Petrovac and its surroundings, bringing along recipes for their meat products. It received its unique sensory character after the end of trading with Turks, when the supply of some seasonings stopped. Pepper was among these seasonings, and it was replaced with red hot pepper. The protected Petrovac sausage is a fermented pork meat product with a pleasant, mild scent of smoke and flavor of a mature product, with a pleasantly hot, but not sour taste. But also Lemes kulen from the village of Lemes in the Svetozar Miletic Municipality. Here we also have other meat products such as ham, bacon, prosciutto and similar (Banjac et al., 2016; Kalenjuk et al., 2017b).

![Figure 4: Specialties of Salaš 137](source: http://salas137.rs)

5. CONCLUSION

Messuages are symbols of the Pannonian Plain, good food and national music. They are unavoidable destinations of national and foreign tourists. These hospitality facilities have managed to preserve culture and traditions of the northern region of Serbia – Vojvodina. The gastronomic identity of Vojvodina messuages is diverse and rich, created by mixing a large number of cuisines of nations who inhabited this region throughout history or who still inhabit it. They gained their significance with the adaptation in the 1990s with greater expansion in the last three years. Today, they represent unique hospitality facilities. Messuages offer authentic traditional dishes and high quality local drinks, but there are those which, in addition to tasting, offer cooking courses and spending time in a real rural environment.
The offer of authentic and drink in messuages significantly contributes to the rural and economic development of the region, but the increase in the number of messuages and activation of local communities, which perhaps have the greatest benefit from these facilities, can contribute even more.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the Provincial Secretariat for Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Vojvodina Province, Republic of Serbia – Project: The effects of the development of rural tourism in Vojvodina, No. 142-451-3683/2017-01/02, for the financial support.

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