

Traditional food products and region recognition: Importance of geographical indication of origin in case of branding the tourist region of Western Serbia

Tradicionalni prehrambeni proizvodi i prepoznatljivost regiona: Značaj geografske oznake porekla u procesu brendiranja turističkog regiona Zapadne Srbije

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Abstract

The challenge of tourists' expectations is predicated on more authentic and traditional experiences as modern tourism grows. Local traditional food, which comprises autochthonous goods that have been consumed in that area since ancient times, is one of the experiences that such tourists are looking for. European legislation establishes geographical indications of origin to ensure that the items are authentic for that destination. This study aimed to evaluate respondents' perceptions of the authenticity of locally produced goods from Western Serbia's tourist region. Additionally, consideration was given to the significance of the geographic origin label in the Republic of Serbia, particularly in light of tourists' consumption and purchase of regionally authentic goods. A total of 504 respondents participated in the study. The findings indicate that traditional foods from this area are well-known to tourists, and guest households that serve these foods will have a competitive advantage.

Keywords: Western Serbia region, authentic local food products, regional branding, geographical indication of origin, food tourism

Sažetak

Sa razvojem savremenog turizma, pitanje očekivanja turista zasniva se na autentičnijim i tradicionalnim iskustvima. Jedno od iskustava koje takvi posetioци traže je domaća tradicionalna hrana, koja se sastoji od autohtonih proizvoda koji se od davnina konzumiraju u tom području. Da bi se osiguralo da su proizvodi zaista autentični za taj region, evropsko zakonodavstvo definiše i uvodi geografske oznake porekla. Cilj ovog rada bio je da se proceni autentičnost lokalnih proizvoda iz turističkog regiona Zapadne Srbije, kao i njihova prepoznatljivost od strane ispitanika. Pored toga, pažnja je posvećena značaju oznake geografskog porekla u Republici Srbiji, posebno kada je reč o potrošnji turista i njihovoj kupovini autentičnih proizvoda sa tog područja. Ukupan broj ispitanika koji su učestvovali u istraživanju iznosio je 504. Nalazi studije pokazuju da su tradicionalni prehrambeni proizvodi sa ovih prostora poznati među turistima, a ona gostujuća domaćinstva koja takve proizvode uvrste u svoju ponudu dobila bi konkurentnu prednost.

Кljučнereči: Region Zapadne Srbije, autentični lokalni prehrambeni proizvodi, regionalno brendiranje, geografska oznak aporekla, gastronomski turizam


1. Introduction

The changes in tourist behavior are bringing many challenges. The subject of tourist demand today is an increasingly authentic, unique, traditional experience. However, observing and partaking traditionally and

genuinely in the life of the local community provides the most memorable experiences for modern tourists. For example, Bedouin villages in North Africa (Ynetnews, 2007) or Siberian settlements in northern Russia (Sheresheva, 2018) have become extraordinary tourist attractions for many visitors who travel there to get to

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know the indigenous way of life of the local population. Such a trend helped and economically stimulated the local population to stay there and turn their everyday way of life into a tourist offer. In addition to a unique experience, such trips provide an opportunity for tourists to fully identify with residents. Aside from the opportunity to observe how they live, many tourists choose individual tourist destinations or tourist regions because of the authentic food and drinks served there.

After the mass tourism era, new forms of tourism have developed based on tourists' special interests. These tourists, among other things, are more knowledgeable about the place, have higher expectations, and are prepared to spend more to have an authentic local experience. One of the things these tourists are looking for is the local traditional cuisine, i.e., autochthonous products that have been consumed in that destination since ancient times. The authenticity of local products and the ways of their preparation have an important role in rural tourism planning and development. In rural European regions, where significant economic development is based on tourism activities, the hosts are competing to complement the stay of tourists in their households with traditional dishes. Modern hospitality and culinary trends aim to highlight the natural flavor, ingredients, texture, and structure of dishes to suit all of the needs of a modern tourist. (Stojanović et al., 2005, Gagić et al., 2014, Cvetković et al., 2016) Gastronomy is becoming an increasingly essential feature in the development of tourism destinations. As a result, each region's or destination's traditional food is one of its key potentials and identifying components. According to Milfelner et al. (2008), a tourist destination's cuisine, in certain circumstances, has outperformed the offer's support factor and has become a core travel experience for visitors, necessitating an understanding of gastronomy's added value in a tourist destination.

To ensure that the products sold to tourists are truly authentic for that region, European legislation defines and introduces geographical indications of origin as part of intellectual property. Since they rely on local food products, numerous European regions today attract a significant number of tourists and thus influence destination recognition. The indications of geographical origin bring many advantages – promotion of tourist offer, increasing employment, enhanced SMEs' competitiveness, etc. (Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022) Given the enormous demand for items that have become a trademark of particular areas on the worldwide market, they must be protected to avoid being exploited in large and uncontrolled manufacturing. Failing to do so could jeopardize not only the economic profit of traditional producers but also the exclusivity and authenticity of the tourist region itself. Bearing in mind that the authenticity of the product requires something more than the raw materials used in the production, these are primarily geographical characteristics that indirectly affect the quality of the final product, such as relief, climate, altitude, humidity, insolation, etc. The autochthonous way of preparation and production is also something that makes such products authentic for that

area, and it was necessary to find a solution that would guarantee the recognition of the origin of those products. According to Rachão et al. (2019), products with strong territorial attachments are viewed as potential micro-attractors in contemporary tourism demand, in which authenticity, local traditions, and tacit knowledge are pre-conditions for self-development (in intellectual and leisure ways).

To better understand the position and significance of this area for the country, it is necessary to note that the Republic of Serbia has five statistical regions.ⁱ (Panić et al., 2021) However, official statistical data is only accessible for four of them.ⁱⁱ The region of Western Serbia, along with the central part of the country (Šumadija) superficially represents the largest statistical region in the country, and at the same time, historically, it has always been the most dominant when it comes to social phenomena and processes. When it comes to the region, especially its tradition, it is important to emphasize its geographical characteristics in the first place. The area is mostly hilly and contains two of the country's five national parks and numerous natural and anthropogenic resources, which attract both foreign and domestic tourists. In addition to natural resources, cultural and historical heritage is often a motive for tourists to visit this part of the country. This affects the raising of the overall quality of the tourist offer in this region. One of the main characteristics of the local population in this part of the country is that they very often emphasize and present their history and tradition, which they are very proud of, and one of the most impressive things is traditional food. The specificity of traditional products and methods of production represent a unique experience that is often the reason why tourists visit certain regions. Furthermore, the previously stated geographical characteristics give the culinary items produced in this area a distinct quality. The region of Western Serbia is well known for many local authentic products. As such, through the protection and promotion of the products' geographical indicators, it has a significant opportunity to improve its position in the tourism market.

In this regard, research questions are defined as follows:

- Q1 To what extent is the indication of geographical origin important and how does it affect the recognition of the region in the branding process?
- Q2 To what extent do tourists recognize and connect a product with a geographical indication of origin with the region of Western Serbia?
- Q3 How important is it for tourists to consume autochthonous food as the indicator of an authentic tourist experience?
- Q4 Will tourists tend to visit the Western Serbia region if the accommodation facilities use geographically labeled products?

2. Literature review

When it comes to tourism destinations and their raising competitiveness Perić et al. (2020) imply that one of the most difficult issues in gaining a competitive advantage in the tourism industry is tourism destination branding. The

complexity of the experiences that visitors might expect has been made clear through branding, which has become a significant tool for tourism destinations. (Almeyda-Ibáñez et al. 2017).

In the tourist offer, more and more attention is paid to the promotion and consumption of local food products. Food is often related to a certain region from which it originates and where it is produced, thus becoming a symbol of a certain locality as the authenticity of a destination. According to the mentioned, the geographical origin of products is most often associated with food (Kilibarda et al., 2018). Hall et al. (2003) point out that the cost of food and drink during the trip is not negligible, i.e., it represents an important component in the tourism industry, and the bearers of the tourist offer, as well as local authorities, have a significant benefit and interest. Thanks to the efforts of the European Commission to accurately assess the impact of food on the social dynamics of a particular destination, the correlation of food, gastronomy, and territory has been identified as a potential that can be used for diversification and innovative steps of EU regional strategies (Cavicchi et al., 2016).

The European Union has recognized the danger of misuse of products, loss of indigenous raw materials in production, as well as traditions and methods of preparation and for that reason encouraged its members to protect indigenous products according to geographical indicators or designations. According to their definition (European Commission, 2021), geographical indications imply the protection of:

- Agricultural and food products;
- Alcoholic wine drinks;
- Aromatized wines.

Thus, the EU has defined the rules according to which products can be stamped with a certificate of geographical origin, based on three different parameters:

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) means that every part of the process from production to final preparation must take place in a certain region. (European Commission, 2021) For example, mozzarella *Gioia del Colle* is a type of cheese made from dairy raw materials that are exclusively from that area. In addition, the formal decision to protect this product (European Commission, 2019) indicates which regions it refers to, i.e., which types of cows can be used, how they are fed, all the way to product textures and colors. For wines, on the other hand, this means that the grapes must come exclusively from the geographical area in which the wine is produced.

On the other hand, the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) means that for most products at least one of the stages of production, processing, or preparation takes place in the region that wants to protect that product. (European Commission, 2021) Thus, the Italian region of Bolzano has protected traditional bread "*Südtiroler Schüttelbrot*" / "*Schüttelbrot Alto Adige*", where it is mandatory that the dough is produced in this region, as well as that the final production must be in

Bolzano. The exact raw materials that must be used in production have been determined, however, they do not necessarily have to be from this region (EUR – Lex, 2022).

Finally, when it comes to the geographical indication of alcoholic beverages and aromatized wines (GI), at least one of the stages of distillation or preparation must take place in the region. (European Commission, 2021) However, raw materials do not have to be from that region. Among others, this label confirms the geographical origin of aromatized wines such as Turin vermouth; Nurnberg mulled wine – *Glühwein*, and Samoborbermet.

In order to make everything transparent and accessible to the public, the European Commission has established a digital register (eAmbrosia, 2022) in which it is possible to find all protected marks as well as defined conditions related to the criteria for obtaining such a mark.

Geographical indications serve as a link between the geographical area and the product itself. By nurturing this connection, the area gains greater recognition and encourages the local community to make a stronger commitment to its survival, while increasing the sense of belonging and pride, and the product itself raises its exclusivity, maintains traditional quality and connection with the history and culture of that geographical area.

Although there is a Law on Geographical Indications in Serbia, which stipulates what conditions a certain product must meet to be entered into the Register, in practice it does not have a significant impact on the branding and recognisability of domestic tourist regions. In Serbia, the registration of products according to the request for protection of geographical origin is performed by the Sector for Distinguishing Groups for Design and Geographical Indications, at Intellectual Property Office. Currently, a total of 65 domestic geographical indications and 12 foreign geographical indications of products available in Serbia are listed in the Register of this Sector. (Intellectual Property Office, 2021) Among domestic designations of geographical origin, individual products from each region in Serbia are protected, which provides a good basis to use these products, or at least some of them, as authentic value and quality based on which the region builds its recognisability. Mantrov (2014) emphasizes that by obtaining such a label, the product not only becomes more appreciated and recognizable in that specific geographical area but also beyond those borders. This shows that such products could have a strong impact on the region's positioning in the tourism market. Exclusivity and guaranteed authenticity of the products would raise the quality of the overall tourist offer of the region and contribute to a better tourist experience for tourists. Hall (2003) emphasizes this close connection between tourism and food products, adding that the strength of this connection is of great importance for the branding and promotion of a tourist destination. Food, according to several authors, such as Bessiere (1998) and Hall et al. (2003), can have a major impact on tourists'

destination choice and, more importantly, on their satisfaction. Traditionally prepared food with the use of local ingredients, served by people wearing traditional costumes, increases the overall interest and desire of tourists to participate in gastronomic activities (Arslan, 2010; Sormaz, 2017). Sormaz (2017) also adds that, after all, gastronomic tourism has largely developed specifically thanks to such activities at the destination, and this has positively affected local economies and at the same time made the cultural and commercial policies of these communities more efficient.

Local traditional products emphasize the authenticity of the destination and can be largely identified with the culture and history of the people who have lived there since ancient times. The way the product is prepared, the raw materials and tools used in the preparation, the way it is served, and similar details help tourists to learn more about the area in which they are staying and positively affect the overall tourist experience. Authenticity is recognized as a universal value and the main driving force that plays a crucial role in tourists' decision-making process when it comes to travelling to a destination. (Daugstad et al., 2013; Frisvoll, 2013) Furthermore, the authentic experience is probably not an objective by itself, but rather a way for the visitor to improve the quality of his or her trip. (Ramkissoon et al., 2018) According to Rachão et al., (2019) traditional food production spaces are being re-engineered into places of tourist consumption, which can provide more economic benefits for private stakeholders, but at the same time may provoke a commodification of immaterial heritage (e.g., local culinary know-how) into a "tourist-friendly".

Given that local cuisine is recognized as an authentic product, Sims (2009) emphasizes the overall importance of local food for highlighting tradition and culture. To single out such products and get them at the right value, highlighting geographical indications is very important. The indication of geographical origin, in addition to authenticity, guarantees a certain quality since it is a confirmation that the product is made according to a traditional recipe. This label represents, in a way, a symbol of that diversity and clearly diversifies a quality product from one that is not of the required quality (Kilibarda et al., 2018).

Regions within the EU have made good use of this way of protecting their local products and services and valorized it not only by offering it as part of the tourist offer but also in a way that they managed to brand the destination and thus become more visible and attractive in the tourism market.

Destination branding as a topic became important in the last decade of the 20th century (Popesku, 2016) As a powerful tool, destination branding has a significant part in building the positioning of a tourist destination. (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020) Tourism destination as a term has many definitions. It implies a combination of different products and services and refers to a location that offers a variety of activities as well as related tourism facilities and services that tourists (or groups of tourists) choose to visit

(McIntyre, 1993). The recognizability of a tourist destination is a significant feature from the point of view of a tourist.

When choosing a tourism destination, tourists are taking into consideration many factors like natural and anthropogenic resources, location, accommodation, food, etc. Demographic characteristics of tourist demand are related to their behavior and decision-making process. They significantly influence how certain tourists make decisions when it comes to buying and consuming different products and services. Members of the same demographic cohort are assumed to have similar attitudes, interests, and behavior patterns compared to other demographic cohorts. This arises from the fact that they were born in a similar period, and experienced common situations and life events that affected them. Numerous authors define different years for the year range which defines belonging to one cohort. Silent Generation (born till 1945), Baby boomers (1945-1960), Generation X (1961-1980), Generation Y (1981-1995), and Generation Z (born after 1995) appear most frequently in the literature. (Gajić, 2019) When it comes to decision-making, each of these generations has its particular traits. It's the same when it comes to deciding on a tourist destination and type of travel.

Communication with target segments is very important in the process of attracting tourists to a particular destination. The prevalence of new technologies and the changes that have occurred in the consumption of media need to be taken into consideration when communicating with the target segment. It is necessary to carefully create a message that will be directed to the target group and choose the right time and platform through which the message will be placed.

3. Legal Aspect of Protected Designation of Origin

Geographical indications guarantee controlled and specific product quality, so they have a powerful marketing impact and give the authorized user an advantage over competitors in the market. Geographical indications specify natural products (water, stone, etc.), agricultural products (cabbage, garlic, raspberries, etc.), food products (cheese, sausage, etc.), industrial products (beer, etc.), home-made products (carpet, embroidery, etc.) and services ("Čigota", etc.) (Intellectual Property Office, 2021). The largest number of products marked with geographical indications are agricultural and food products. The indication of the geographical origin of the product is based on the geographical indication and the name of the origin.

A product originating in the territory of a particular country or a narrower territorial locality, which is essentially related to its quality and other characteristics, may be marked with a geographical indication ("controlled geographical indication"). The conditions for issuing a permit for being marked with a geographical indication refer to the origin of goods from a certain area, quality and other characteristics related to geographical origin, and the fact that at least one phase in the production

process of those goods is carried out in a specific geographical area.

The name of origin is the name of a specific place, region, or country, which indicates agricultural, food, or other similar products ("controlled name of origin"). The conditions for issuing a license for the use of the name of origin of a certain product are origin from a certain area, that its quality and other characteristics are extremely related to the fact of that origin, and that all production and processing are performed in that area.

Authorized users of the name of origin, i.e., geographical indication have the right to use the name of origin, i.e., geographical indication for an unlimited period, i.e., the status of the authorized user can be extended every three years. In terms of marketing, authorized users have the right to display labels on all advertising printed materials, packaging, and "other forms of an offer, instructions, invoices, business correspondence and other forms of business documentation, as well as import and export of products marked with that name, i.e., that geographical origin." (Intellectual Property Office, 2021)

4. Methodology

The idea of this research was to determine how essential it is for an average domestic tourist to be able to recognize products associated with a certain rural tourism area. Moreover, this paper aimed to emphasize the importance of the authentic local products of the tourist region of Western Serbia and their recognisability to tourists. Furthermore, the importance of having a geographic origin in the Republic of Serbia was highlighted, particularly when it comes to tourists consuming and purchasing specific products from a specific location. Also, the idea was to find out the importance of the "seal of protected origin" (of a product) as a factor in choosing a specific product or tourist region by domestic tourists.

The research was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire in the second half of 2021. The online questionnaire was anonymous, and it was distributed through social media due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The average time required to complete the survey was approximately 9 minutes. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions in total, divided into four main parts – demographics, tourism destination decision-making, authentic local food products of Western Serbia, and seal of protected geographical origin. The questionnaire was designed to motivate respondents to give unambiguous and specific answers that would be relevant to this research, and at the same time to acquaint the respondents with the basic principles of products of protected origin. Analysis of the data collected through the survey was conducted using SPSS 23.0, a statistical package program. For normally distributed variables, Pearson correlation was used to conduct correlative analysis.

The number of respondents who participated in this research was 513. After removing incomplete answers, the

number of respondents who participated in the research and fully completed the survey came to a total of 504 respondents (n=504): 145 (28.77%) male and 359 (71.23%) female (Table 1). For the purposes of the analysis, and especially to define various preferences towards different generations, the respondents were divided into four age groups. The largest number of respondents were members of Generation Y (25-39 years old), with over half of the respondents fitting into that group (51.2% of respondents). The second-largest number of respondents were members of Generation X (31% of respondents) between 40 and 59 years of age. The percentage of the youngest respondents, i.e., those who were younger than 25 was 13.2%. Respondents over the age of 59, members of Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation were the least represented group in this survey (4.6%). Having in mind the way of collecting data, i.e., the presence of the mentioned generations on social media, such results are not surprising.

The level of education of the respondents showed the largest number of those who had completed university studies and obtained a four-year university degree (44.8%). Immediately after that, there were respondents who had completed their master's studies (22.4%). The percentage of respondents with high school completion was 19%, while the percentage of those with completed three years of higher education was 10.4%. PhDs made up the smallest percentage of responders (3.4%).

Table 1. Demographic structure of respondents

	Frequency (N = 504)	
	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	145	28.77
Female	359	71.23
<i>Age</i>		
Under 25 years	66	13.2
25 - 39	258	51.2
40 - 59	157	31.0
Above 59 years	23	4.6
<i>Education</i>		
High school diploma	96	19.0
Bachelor's degree (3 years)	51	10.4
University degree	227	44.8
Master's degree	113	22.4
PhD	17	3.4

Source: Author's calculation

Researchers usually opt to use the research instrument of the Likert scale, because it is the most suitable for measuring affective variables, such as motivation and self-efficacy, while enabling the collection of a large amount of data. (Nemoto et al., 2014) Likert scale was set from 1 to 5 – where 1 was defined as "I completely disagree", 2 was defined as "I disagree", 3 was defined as "Neutral", 4 was defined as "I agree" and 5 was defined as "I completely agree". The Likert scale was used to identify which traditional product from the region of Western Serbia had the highest degree of compliance with the region it originated from. It was used to measure the extent to which respondents relate specific traditional products to the Western Serbian region. This was done to determine which traditional product had the highest

degree of compliance with the region it originated from. Also, the Likert scale was used to express the level of agreement with the statement of the importance of making the products consumed during the tourist stay in an authentic and traditional way.

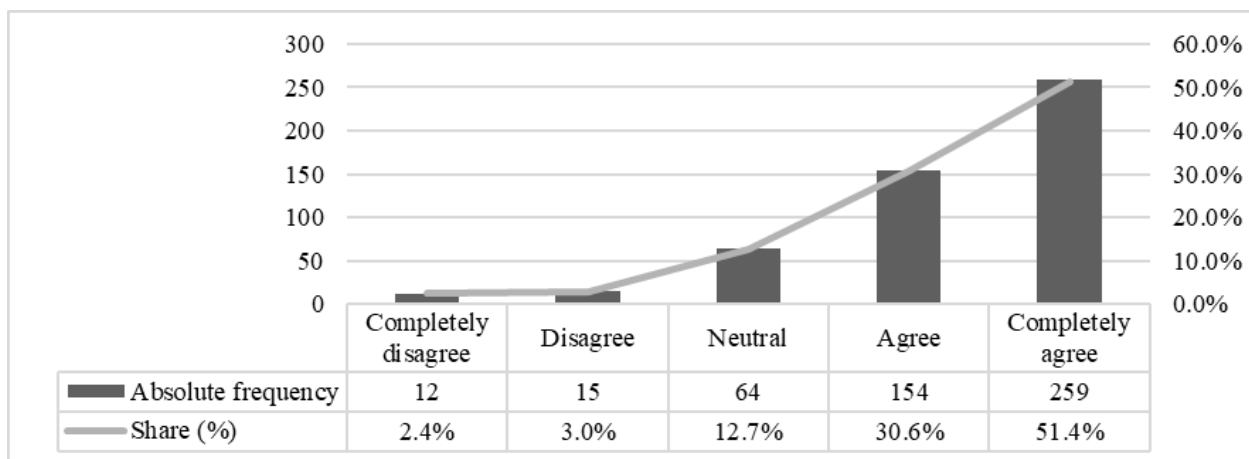
5. Results and Discussion

When it comes to travelling in the region of Western Serbia, almost every respondent has visited this region at least once. When asked if they had ever travelled to this region, as many as 491 respondents (97.4%) answered affirmatively, while 6 people (1.2%) had never visited this region before. Finally, 7 respondents (1.4%) couldn't confirm whether they had ever been to this region. This shows the great popularity of this region among domestic tourists. In addition, it was important to determine where tourists usually stayed during their stay in the region of Western Serbia, i.e., what type of accommodation they usually chose. It was important to understand that, especially in the context of the representation of traditional local food products in the tourist offer, i.e., creating a better tourist experience through their consumption. Authenticity and uniqueness in the presentation of tradition in tourism will ensure that tourism products are high-quality ones and thus will be set apart from the competition. (Pavlović et al., 2016) As different types of accommodation facilities are available in this region, respondents were allowed to choose one of the most common types of accommodation or to enter the type of accommodation in which they stayed during their visit to the region. By far the largest number of respondents (58.9%) chose private accommodation i.e., local households that they rented during their stay. This

means that the highest frequency of tourists is in these types of accommodations and that traditional households have an excellent starting point to place more local products within their offer. Hotels, which are certainly a more organized and complex system, are chosen by only 20.4% of respondents. However, even in this case, a greater presence of indigenous food, especially those purchased from local producers should contribute to increasing the overall tourist experience.

The fact that the products consumed during the tourist stay are prepared authentically and traditionally can be financially worthwhile for the owners of tourist households, which is also demonstrated by the data (Chart 1). More than half of the respondents (51.4%) stated that it was very important for the product consumed during the stay to be prepared in that particular way. Such products are now available outside the region, but it is very important to clearly define and confirm the authenticity of the geographical origin so that many consumers would not be misled. If we add 30.6% of respondents who also responded affirmatively to this question, we can conclude that more than 80% of total respondents are looking for an authentic gastronomy experience during their tourist stay in this region which gives a positive answer to the defined research question. Only 5.4% of the respondents believe this is not a significant aspect of their tourism experience. Considering the results of the research and the fact that the vast majority of respondents emphasize the importance of preparing products authentically and traditionally, which they consume when visiting the region of Western Serbia, can be a good indicator and guideline for tourist households when creating a tourist offer.

Chart 1. The importance of making the products consumed during the tourist stay in an authentic and traditional way



Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 23.0

The research question that tourists would prefer to go to the region of Western Serbia if traditional local products with a clearly marked geographical indication were used in the accommodation facilities was tested by Pearson's correlation (Table 2) in which a strong connection was found between the influence of geographical seals on the choice of a particular product and the willingness to pay a higher price for a product that possesses such a seal. In addition, a strong link was found between the influence of

the existence of a seal of geographical origin on the choice of a particular product and a clear indication in the description of the facility. This means that the facilities, by indicating the information to serve food or products with a certificate of geographical origin, would have a larger number of guests who would thus go to that facility in a targeted manner because they would rather spend money on such products.

A strong link was established between the preferences of tourists to consume local traditional products and the

knowledge that those products were indeed produced in an authentic and traditional way.

Table 2. Correlation analysis

	B	C	D	E	F
A	.555** .000	.351** .000	.307** .000	.388** .000	.372** .000
B		.299** .000	.350** .000	.343** .000	.356** .000
C			.653** .000	.676** .000	.623** .000
D				.609** .000	.520** .000
E					.527** .000

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 23.0

Table 3. Correlation analysis interpretation

A	During my tourist stay in the region of Western Serbia, it is important to me that the products I consume are produced authentically and traditionally (Authentic and traditional production)
B	During my tourist stay in the region of Western Serbia, I prefer to consume local products. (Consumption of autochthonous food products)
C	The existence of a stamp of geographical origin would influence my choice of a certain food product. (Choice based on the stamp of geographical origin)
D	The existence of a stamp of the geographical origin of a product can influence the creation of greater trust among tourists when choosing products that have that stamp (Existence of stamp and influence on trust)
E	From the tourist's point of view, it is important to me that the stamp of protected geographical origin is clearly highlighted in the description of the accommodation facility as a confirmation that authentic traditional products are served in that place. (Importance of highlighting the stamp of PFO as confirmation of serving authentic traditional products in a facility)
F	If a local product had an official certificate of traditional/authentic production, I would be willing to pay more compared to a commercial product (Willingness to pay more for the existence of certificate)

Source: Authors' interpretation

According to the results presented above, tourists who are willing to pay more for products that have a geographical indication of origin are more interested to make their choice on the existence of such a label. The existence of such a label significantly affects their choice of products to be consumed during their stay at the destination.

Also, tourists who are willing to pay more for food with a geographical indication of origin emphasize the significance of highlighting the label of serving authentic products within the facility. As a result, it can be argued that these tourists would be willing to pay more for accommodation services, given the fact that they will be able to purchase authentic local products, which may be one of the reasons for a higher accommodation price.

It's also worth mentioning that tourists are more ready to taste local food products from Western Serbia, but as a result, their demand and preference for these products prepared in an authentic and traditional method rise accordingly. Consequently, it can be argued that accommodation facilities in rural households that offer such products or work with local producers might gain a considerable competitive advantage and therefore create more revenue. Additionally, similar viewpoints confirm the theory that local food products from this region have a high level of recognition among tourists and, as a result, can benefit the tourist destination to gain more recognition.

On the ground of those data, it can be concluded that products with a certificate or geographical indication of origin would be one of the main arguments of tourist households, but also other types of accommodation for tourists to choose from during their stay in the region of Western Serbia.

Traditions are often a motivation for travelling, a tourist railway that includes new cultures and experiences, including performing arts, handicrafts, rituals, and kitchens. (Koumara-Tsitsou et al., 2021). Traditional food plays a very important role in positioning tourist destinations, especially in terms of competitiveness and differentiation in the tourism market (Gregorash, 2018). The following characteristics of local cuisine may be used to describe its cultural significance: the authenticity of the cuisine, appealing names of dishes, representativeness of dishes, dishes connected to folklore, and the reputation of local cuisine. (Vukolić et al., 2022) Tourists enjoy consuming indigenous foods, especially locally produced foods that are specific to a particular region (Rand et al., 2003), which contributes to the fact that the most important experience for tourists today is something that is different and memorable, and quality traditional food can be the main tool to achieve that goal. This was confirmed in this research, where over half of the respondents (51.2%) said they preferred to consume locally produced products during their tourist stay in that region. If we consider that local production often requires

conventional production methods, which is also associated with the application of organic production practices, the recommendation would be to protect either

the process or the final gastronomic product, which will achieve continuous quality and recognition (Thøgersen et al., 2017).

Table 4. -Identification of traditional food products in the region of Western Serbia

Traditional product	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cow cheese from Sjenica (<i>Sjениčki kravljji sir</i>)	3.760	1.2512
Smoked beef ham from Užice (<i>Goveđa užička pršuta</i>)	3.930	1.1832
Bacon from Užice (<i>Užička slanina</i>)	3.258	1.3413
Sheep cheese from Sjenica (<i>Sjениčki ovčiji sir</i>)	3.480	1.3421
Smoked pork ham from Užice (<i>Svinjska užička pršuta</i>)	3.670	1.2475
Raspberry from Arilje (<i>Ariljska malina</i>)	4.000	1.1793
Milk cream from Zlatibor (<i>Zlatiborski kajmak</i>)	4.274	1.0513
Buckwheat Product (Proizvodi od heljde)	2.730	1.4203
Cheese from Zlatar (<i>Zlatarski sir</i>)	3.892	1.1980
Dry Fermented Beef Sausage from Sjenica (<i>Sjениčki sudžuk</i>)	3.502	1.3407

Source: Authors' calculation based on SPSS 23.0

Ten distinct food items from this region were identified for the purpose of the research (Table 4). Cow and sheep cheese from Sjenica (*Sjениčki kravljji i ovčiji sir*) is soft full-fat cheese in brine produced from raw cow's/ sheep's milk, with regular-shaped slices of 10 to 15 cm in length, width, and 3 to 5 cm in height, and weighing 250 to 350 grams. (Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2012, 2014) Dry beef ham from Užice (*Užička goveđa pršuta*) is a beef product made using traditional methods in the Zlatibor mountain region from the finest grade sections of the beef body (leg, back, steak). It takes around 4 weeks to complete the production process (7 days salting, 21 days drying, and smoking) as well as for the smoked pork ham whereas the traditional method of preparation consists of using the finest parts of the pork's leg and back. (Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia, 1996) The same traditional methods are used for the production of bacon from Užice where pork halves are used as a raw material. Raspberry from Arilje is one of the most recognized products from Serbia on the global market. Serbia is one of the largest exporters of raspberry worldwide. *Kajmak* is a creamy, thick dairy delicacy derived from fresh cow milk. This traditional dish is served as a starter or as a simple side dish with other traditional Serbian dishes. For ages, the same recipes have been used to make *kajmak* in households. Buckwheat represents one of the most often and extensively used food items in the southern part of this region, around Zlatar Mountain. It's utilized in a variety of traditional recipes, and most of the locals grow it for their own consumption within their households. *Sjениčki sudžuk* is a horseshoe-shaped fermented beef sausage in a natural beef casing. The name comes from the Turkish language and means sausage, but not any, though sausage is made of 80% of beef meat and 20% of beef fat. The total weight of beef meat may optionally be replaced with up to 30% of ovine meat. *Sjениčki sudžuk* is prepared by adding only table sea salt, garlic, and a small addition of red allspice. (Tehnologija hrane, 2017) Some of the products are formally recognized in the Sector for Distinguishing Groups for Design and Geographical Indications, while others such as Milk cream from Zlatibor (*Zlatiborski kajmak*), cheese from Zlatar (*Zlatarski sir*), fermented sausage from Sjenica (*Sjениčki sudžuk*) and buckwheat products are not recognized but still they reflect authentic food from this region. Buckwheat products have been

selected as authentic from this area, given their growing presence among consumers. The reason for this may lie in the fact that buckwheat products are perceived as healthy. Buckwheat, a pseudo-cereal, is high in protein, dietary fiber, resistant starch, rutin, D-chiro-inositol, vitamins, and minerals, among other things. (Wijngaard et al., 2006). It has a huge amount of potential as a food ingredient, particularly in the functional food sector. It is most often used in the form of buckwheat flour, for the preparation of various food products.

According to the research question, the idea was to determine to which extent tourists recognize and connect a product with the geographical indication of origin with the region of Western Serbia. The results of the research showed that traditional food products such Zlatiborski kajmak and raspberry from Arilje have the highest level of identification. According to the results, they have a higher level of recognition and link with the region of Western Serbia compared with the other observed products. One possible explanation for these findings is that, unlike the other products in this study, the two best-rated products are already very well-positioned in markets outside of Serbia. Ariljska malina, for example, is one of the goods that is frequently highlighted in the public as having a significant export potential that adds to the domestic GDP. For instance, according to the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (2022) report, the income from raspberry exports was over 230 million euros in the first eight months of 2022. Therefore, the local public is considerably more familiar with the significance of this product compared to other products that do not receive such media exposure. Additional items from this study are most easily identified when travelers are already in a tourism region or a tourism destination inside the region. This indicates that their reach in terms of broader identification with this tourism region is restricted for the time being and that tourists will have different associations with this place than with these food products. Another cause is undoubtedly the rising availability of commercial items in the tourism sector, which further limits the potential of these products. Again, we can point to the stronger power of the two best-rated food products as independent brands in this region. A lengthy heritage of preparation, availability in the tourist destination, and broader media exposure of indigenous products may all

contribute to a better step toward the development and reinforcement of local brands that can become the tourism destination's hallmark.

Traditional food has a very important role in creating the identity and brand of the local community, enabling the development of agricultural activities, and strengthening the economy of the local population, especially through facilitating the connection of tourists and destinations. (Andersson et al., 2017).

Bearing in mind that traditional gastronomic products in tourism are delivered to tourists in different ways - through local sales networks and local markets, gastronomic events, exhibitions, local restaurants, and wineries (Gordin et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2008), local producers and local tourism companies need to consider all available distribution channels, which will enable them to meet the needs of their tourists while making a profit. Observing modern tourists and their patterns of behavior, it can be expected that in addition to traditional media (which have a special focus on gastronomy), new technologies will dominate, from websites, through the development of mobile and gamification applications, incentives through social media, cooperation with travel or fashion bloggers, participation in fairs, etc. and all this to better position traditional gastronomic products, as well as their development and promotion of brands (Fan et al., 2019). Local food and beverage vary across countries and cultures and are important souvenirs for many tourist destinations. (Suhartanto et al., 2018)

Previous research shows that tourist destinations achieve recognition and branding through gastronomic events, but also through street food and restaurants. Bearing in mind that after arriving at the destination, tourists have the first contact with the accommodation services host, hotels, private accommodation and other forms of accommodation will have a special role in gastronomic branding (Björk et al., 2014). At the same time, the role of DMO in organizing and connecting with retailers and local food producers to provide unique and locally symbolic food souvenirs is important. If successful, perhaps the DMO and retailers could engage in joint programs to help promote the special local food as a meaningful souvenir. (Suhartanto et al., 2018)

The raspberry from Arilje has the highest recognizability of items with a protected geographical origin, according to the study's findings. Given the fact that the majority of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 39, i.e., generation Y, it can be assumed that this product's popularity among tourists is mostly attributable to its growing media presence over the previous 15 years, and therefore it represents one of the most important export potentials of Serbia. Moreover, despite the positive nutritional values, it is evident, and this is confirmed by research results, that buckwheat, i.e., buckwheat products, are still not sufficiently recognized and valorized, and that probably the time has not yet come for it to enter the procedure of protection of geographical origin.

6. Conclusion

The fact that food is an element of intangible cultural heritage is one of the key factors in the development and recognition of tourist destinations. This was the motive to conduct this research and to come to significant conclusions. Kilibarda et al. (2018) emphasize the cult status that dairy products have in this part of Serbia. After all, the knowledge and skills of making kajmak have been recognized by the Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia, so it has been on the list of domestically protected intangible cultural heritage since 2016. (Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia, 2016). Such a potential can be utilized many times over to further popularize this tourist region. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that *kajmak* from Zlatibor has the highest level of recognition by the respondents, although it is not on the list of products with protected geographical origin among all other observed products identified by this research. *Zlatiborski kajmak* is very recognizable among tourists, who identify this dairy product with the tourist region of Western Serbia. Considering the importance of recognition of this product by the respondents, the question arises why *kajmak* from Zlatibor has not been registered on the list of products with a protected geographical origin so far. Keeping in mind that the strongest correlative link has been established with this tourist region and that this product does not have a protected geographical origin, it is concluded that there is a further need to initiate the process of protection and registration at the Intellectual Property Office. In order to initiate activities regarding the writing of elaborate and further procedures to protect geographical origin, additional efforts are needed to explain the importance and potential of association and protection of this intangible asset to the local population, through effective training and education programs. In addition, given the popularity of this product among tourists, there is a justified danger that this product will be recognized and protected by competing regions outside Serbia, especially given the fact that the heritage of making kajmak originates beyond the country, from the Dinara mountainous system, of which mountain Zlatibor is certainly a part. Also, the region of Western Serbia and Šumadija, according to the data of the Republic Statistical Office (2021), is the most visited tourist region in the country, both among domestic and foreign tourists. Having a seal of the protected geographical origin of *Zlatiborski kajmak* would be an additional boost for the local economy through the placement of this product, as a souvenir, among tourists.

Although buckwheat has good nutritional qualities, it is clear—and study findings support this—that its products are still not properly valued and recognized, and the moment has not yet come to start the process of protecting geographical origin. Nevertheless, it is an important product that represents the traditional local cuisine of this part of the country and as such is important in the further promotion of the tourist region and in raising the overall quality of the tourist offer of Western Serbia.

As previously mentioned, raspberry from Arilje is already well-known as a product, not only in the country and the region but also in Europe and worldwide. With its quality and recognisability, this product significantly affects the attractiveness of the tourist region of Western Serbia. Due to many different possibilities of its use (raw products, jams, juices, etc.) raspberry can be consumed in various ways and throughout the year. Considering everything mentioned above, it has been concluded that tourists identify raspberry from Arilje with the region of western Serbia, which is confirmed by the research results.

Traditional methods of production of these products significantly influence the attractiveness of the region of western Serbia, but also the preservation of the indigenous lifestyle of the local population significantly increases the potential for further development of rural tourism. Autochthony and uniqueness that can be experienced by tourists make this region attractive, and thus enables the local population economic prosperity and existence. Following modern trends in the tourism market, the implementation of the creative industry and synergies through food tourism in the form of designed creative content for tourists (interactive workshops, courses, exhibitions, etc.) would open issues of cooperation between creative industries and tourism industry (Radović et al., 2016) to better position this region.

Serbia faces a number of challenges as a country in transition. One of these difficulties is the valorization of one's values and authenticity for tourism purposes. Geographical origin labels may be a strong instrument in the process of improving sustainable rural development, contributing to job creation, lowering rural population outflow, and promoting rural tourism development. It may also be used as part of a marketing plan to promote the products of a particular nation or region, as well as the whole country. *Zlatiborski kajmak*, raspberry from Arilje, and other products from this and other Serbian regions could be a good place to start when it comes to building a positive attitude towards Serbia, just as *Gornooryahovski sudzhuk* or numerous wines from Bulgarian regions or wines from Bela Krajina and *Kraški med* do for Bulgaria and Slovenia. Geographical labels are a good way to turn competitive strength into competitive advantages. They are a significant factor in a tourism destination's competitiveness in comparison to others. This demonstrates the relevance of geographical origin labels as expressions of a country's authenticity and identity which affects the attractiveness as a tourist destination, and the concept of product and service quality is closely tied to the country's image.

The results of conducted research in this paper have opened new perspectives for future research that will be directed towards more precise targeting and attracting different generations of tourists, as well as further strengthening the position and recognisability of the region of Western Serbia in the tourism market.

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ⁱ The Republic of Serbia is divided into five statistical regions: Vojvodina region, Belgrade region, Western Serbia and Šumadija region, Southern and eastern Serbia region, and Kosovo and Metohija region. Source: Republic Statistical Office, 2021

ⁱⁱ The Republic Statistical Office has not had certain data for the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija since 1998, so they are not included in the coverage of data for the Republic of Serbia (total)., Source: Republic Statistical Office, 2021