

Suitcase full of Kaymak¹ – Gastronomy Tourism and Cultural landscape

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Abstract

The issue of travelers' authentic experience has been shifting the boundaries of touristic programs over the last years. The synthesis of cultural and creative tourism in combination with adventure concept also incorporates gastronomy as an irreplaceable component of contemporary tourism. This kind of approach needs to be placed in an appropriate context which inevitably leads to the integration of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, into cultural landscape in order to create an authentic tourism product. What seems to be an ideal relationship between heritage and tourism at first glance is actually a common field of conflict of interest and lack of understanding of the needs of all parties involved in the creation of tourism products.

In order to explore and promote tangible and intangible heritage of Serbia, Artis Center has started *The Gourmet Tales of Serbia* project in 2013. This multidisciplinary project is based on the idea of exploring authentic gastronomy tradition and life style within authentic cultural landscape that includes cooking and dining in ordinary people homes, famous restaurants, monasteries, villages, museums and World Heritage Sites. The experiences gained from the preparation and implementation of *The Gourmet Tales of Serbia* project with special emphasis on (re)shaping of cultural landscape within a creative tourism and misunderstandings between tourism and heritage stakeholders are the main points discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *intangible heritage, creative tourism, gastronomy, gastroheritology, cultural landscape, museum, communication*

By connecting people around the world through shared information and experiences, the electronic media and social networks have most directly affected not only our awareness and familiarity with various destinations and cultures, but also the transformation of

¹ Kaymak, dairy product in the form of a thick tasteful cream, is an authentic intangible heritage of Serbia.

collective perception, and consequently, the needs and expectations of modern people. If our parents in the second half of the 20th century regarded vacations as a harmonious combination of the 4S principle (sun, sand, sea and sex) (Hobson, J.S.P., Dietrich and U.C. 1994, p 21-38) most of the new millennium travelers have far more complex expectations. Modern tourists seek, above all, active vacations offering a variety of content. They are interested in seeing a lot of things, but equally want to participate in the creation of a unique experience based on the offer of a particular destination they have chosen. The pressure on tourism stakeholders who create a tourist product is even higher when one takes into account that travelers globally share experiences through social networks, specialized websites and personal blogs as the communication of the new age puts consumers of tourist offers in the position of arbiters and promoters as never before. All these elements most directly influence the creation of a modern tourist offer as a unique synthesis of cultural and creative tourism in which the elements of adventure and thematic programs do play an extremely important role. Gastronomy, in this context, is an "extra spice" that adds a special quality to the fullness of the experience. Although still a small percentage of travelers opt for gastronomy as the only reason to travel (Rabotić 2003, p 476), gastronomy has undoubtedly become the most important secondary thing in the global tourism experience. Among passionate travelers it is a reflection of elitism which includes specialized knowledge, refined taste and the sense of finesse.

All these findings have motivated Artis Center team to create a number of programs focused on gastronomy as one of the key elements of intangible heritage within gastroheritology research related to the history of gastronomy and the culture of dining on the territory of Serbia. Thus, we started with a series of reconstructions of historical banquets in cooperation with our partners from the School of Cooking Il Primo in Belgrade and study trips in which the gastronomic heritage was an exclusive supplement to history and art history content. Finally, in 2013, we started the project "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" that was realized in 2014 and 2015 in cooperation with the Turorama travel agency of Belgrade. It was preceded by a program conducted in cooperation with Belgrade travel agency – Globe Metropolitan Tours as a kind of promotional content for British journalists, the guests of the Tourist Organization of Serbia in 2012 (Gwilt 2013). Artis Center experts acted also as consultants to Fog Travel Club travel agency with respect to culinary topography of Serbia, food, restaurants and similar facilities to be included in the receptive tourism programs. In fact, scientific studies of gastronomic heritage and the culture of dining in Serbia have been scarce and sporadic both in the past and recently. When gastronomic tourism emerged as a worldwide trend, most of the Serbian travel agencies

focused on receptive tourism due to the lack of specialist knowledge, sticking to kaymak, ayvar² and plum brandy as a “Holy Trinity” of the Serbian gastronomy, thus creating a sort of gastronomic forgery. Namely, at the request of a considerable number of travel agencies certain local restaurants were preparing and serving menus that were supposed to represent the showcase of the so-called “national cuisine”. Thanks to this trend, a serious disagreement has arisen between the agencies in receptive tourism and few experts in the field of gastronomy heritage i.e. a gap between entrepreneurship and science, profit and heritage.



Figure 1: Gourmet Tales of Serbia manual cover © Artis Center

Thus, the "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" have resulted out of efforts to make an original program in gastronomy tourism based on comprehensive research. Its nucleus lies in culinary tourism placed in an appropriate cultural landscape (wild mushroom collecting and outdoor cooking on Mount Golija, raspberry picking and raspberry cake baking at Zlakusa village, preparing monastic meals and beverages at Končul Monastery, etc.). In addition to the culinary aspect, this program includes the appropriate elements of cultural tourism such as visits to selected museums, archaeological sites and monumental complexes of

² Roasted red pepper relish typical for South Serbia region

importance for understanding food pathways and the culture of dining on the territory of Serbia (Ethnographic Museum, The Museum of Gugelhups and Cakes *Gea* at Sremski Karlovci, the Museum of Bread *Jeremija* at Pećinci, the *Staro selo* (Old Village) Open-air museum at Sirogojno, Maglič Fortress, the Monasteries of Studenica and Gradac, etc.) and creative tourism (traditional pottery making at Zlakusa village, wine glasses painting in medieval style, etc.). It also incorporates the elements of conventional gastronomy tasting (visits to famous restaurants and pastry shops such as the Three Hats, the Question Mark, Čakmara at Raška, the Time Machine in Novi Sad, the Moscow Hotel pastry shop in Belgrade), wine tourism (Aleksandrović winery at Oplenac), encounters with renowned food producers (Aćim at Mušvet on Mt. Zlatibor) and the experimental reconstruction of the Serbian historical banquets (Serbian Medieval feast).



Figure 2: Cooking class in Čakmara restaurant in Raška (Gourmet Tales of Serbia 2015) © Artis Center

Field studies preceding the realization of the "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" suggested the most direct dependence of gastronomy on cultural landscape as an authentic context in which a particular gastronomy practice occurs (Skeledžija 2015, p 14). Since Serbia is primarily a country of rural communities, characterized by late development of towns both in the Middle Ages and in the modern period (Ognjević 2014, p 28), most of the Serbian cuisine remains rural in character. The origin of certain foods and the way of their preparation can be traced back to the Middle Ages, but certain patterns observed especially in the Serbian Orthodox monasteries are more than thousand years old (Ognjević 2013). With subsistence farming in mountain regions, almost forgotten techniques of cooking, religious and ethnic beliefs related to food, cookware production, dining etiquette and a range of ethnological and anthropological determinants, an authentic picture of the dominant gastronomy heritage

of Serbia thus becomes complete. It is the kind of intangible heritage that still has its active protagonists, typically housed in the towns and villages in the vicinity of some of the most significant cultural monuments on the territory of Serbia, mainly consisting of famous medieval churches and fortified towns located in rural regions. In the border areas, such as of the Southwest Serbia or urban centers of Vojvodina and Belgrade itself, gastronomy is a unique synthesis of the influences of local, Oriental, Central European, German and even Italian origins which pervaded this region in the first half of the 18th century (Popovic 2011, 24-25). For all these reasons it is extremely difficult to answer the question: What is the national food, or what is an authentic Serbian dish? The concept of national gastronomy created in France in the second half of the 19th century, in the epoch know as the period of creation of the Europe of nations (Parkhurst Ferguson 2004, p 4-8), caused local persistence in the creation of the national cuisine at any cost, which opened the door to a variety of myths and forgeries.

The "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" project, attended by Japanese tourists for two years in a row, proved to be quite appealing to modern tourists as a concept combining authentic gastronomic heritage with cooking classes in appropriate setting of private houses, monasteries, museums, specialized restaurants, along with the production of original cookware and tableware. The fact that the program takes place in the authentic cultural landscapes where a certain gastronomy pattern appears conditional upon both human and natural factors, is recognized as an additional value. Thus, the process of production and consumption of kaymak on Mt. Golija in a rural household that depends on micro-production of cheese and kaymak, along with fruit products (preserves, jam, juices) and honey, incorporates several important educational and attractive elements that a top quality product in modern tourism should be based on - the originality and authenticity of the offer, attractiveness, interaction and finally, the overall fullness of the experience.



Figure 3: Monastic beverage preparation in Končul Monastery (Gourmet Tales of Serbia 2015) © Artis Center

The programs like "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" are complex and demanding because they require knowledge of gastronomy topography, animation of local communities, restoration teams, craftsmen, artists, and eventually specialized guides. All these elements entail serious research and investment, especially when one takes into account that Serbia's gastronomy, although extremely interesting and appealing, is not yet well known worldwide. Random unexpected guests are, in most cases, overwhelmed by local food because it is natural and locally produced, in the first place, and then because it is very tasty. In addition to short-term, moderate *ad hoc* initiatives of the Tourist Organization of Serbia and a number of studies and projects such as this conducted by Artis Center, there is no planned approach to this issue, although it would be useful in the process of creating an original tourist offer.

The programs such as the "Gourmet Tales of Serbia" are costly for local agencies because they are intended for small groups, conditional upon seasons as they focus on seasonal agricultural products, and require incorporation of authentic cultural landscapes, the engagement of experts and significant investments in marketing – all that tourist agencies in Serbia are reluctant to do. Hence, the advertising and promotion of such programs depends on the good will and engagement of enthusiastic individuals as we are. The decision of the Japanese tourists to come to Serbia twice to cook and taste dishes from this area, as well as to promote what they have learned in Serbia at specially organized Serbian dinners and cooking classes in Japan, clearly indicates that appropriate national strategy in the field of gastronomic tourism has yielded favourable results. In the lack of such an initiative, tourist agencies in Serbia opt for simple solutions like "a suitcase full of kaymak" which makes most of the offers in receptive tourism look alike – the same destinations, the same restaurants, the same wineries. Thus, we are on the road to making Serbia as a destination uninteresting in a short time, and gastronomic heritage of this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional area unknown to local and world tourists alike.

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