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North Macedonia as Food Tourism Destination – Trends and Perspectives

Abstract: In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the Balkan countries among tourists. These trends owe their popularity to, among others, favorable climatic conditions, interesting tourist attraction and folklore. One of the countries that attracts a large number of tourists is North Macedonia. The local population is increasingly taking actions to attract the attention of foreigners, also by means of promoting national cuisine. Macedonian dishes perfectly reflect the spirit of the Balkans and fresh fruit and vegetables testify to the high quality of food products. Data pertaining to the popularity of Macedonian cuisine among tourists and locals were collected using a survey. The group of respondents includes 130 visitors and 31 residents of North Macedonia. The results of the study showed that the local dishes are still identified with the entire Balkan area and their origin is often confused. Traditional Macedonian dishes, however, thanks to good promotion and advertising have the potential to become a strong factor attracting foreign tourists.

Keywords: North Macedonia, food tourism, traditional dishes, culinary festivals

1. Introduction

Culinary tourism is currently one of the most dynamically developing phenomena in tourism. It is practiced in both rural and urban areas. Culinary tourists travel to different places all around the world, willingly go to the posh restaurants of famous chefs, visit market with local products and look for small restaurants frequented by the locals, who make these places seem more reliable and authentic. Rural areas, on the other hand, are usually visited because of traditional agricultural products that are grown there or out of the urge to learn about local culinary traditions (Durydiwka, 2013). It is also associated with learning about other cultures and making stronger connection with local inhabitants.

In recent years there has been steady development in relation to tourists' interest in the growing range of cultural products. Admiring beautiful landscapes or visiting museums is more and more often enriched with additional, more sophisticated and tailored leisure activities. Travelers want to explore new places with

all their senses. Culinary tourism proves to be an ideal solution for people who look for new experiences. With this form of leisure they can enjoy new flavors in beautiful natural circumstances. Perfect example of that is Ohrid – a city in North Macedonia, where tourists can become acquainted with Balkan cuisine on the shores of Lake Ohrid. There is also a considerable advantage in that trips inspired by culinary delights accommodate all age groups of tourists and it is possible to enjoy in culinary specialties regardless of the time of year.

Food and drink events and festivals, organized not only in large cities but also in rural areas, demonstrate that culinary art is growing in popularity. Their number increases every year. Many examples of this may be provided, and one of the most representative events of this kind is surely the vine festival – Martinovanje in Slovenia. This event is celebrated on the 11th of November across the country. Participants have the opportunity to taste traditional and authentic wines on the streets,

squares and markets. Saint Martin's Day is most celebrated in local wineries (Vine festival – Martinovanje in Slovenia: www.slovenia.info/sl/zgodbe/martinovanje-veselje-ob-novi-letini-vina). Another example is Belgrade Beer Fest in Serbia. The festival features numerous concerts paired with beer tasting, where people may try both local and foreign beverages (Belgrade Beer Fest: <http://www.belgradebeerfest.com/>). Every year, the Greek island of Sifnos hosts a festival dedicated to traditional Greek cuisine – the Festival of Cycladic Gastronomy 'Nikolaos Tselementes'. This event is organized in honor of Nikolaos Tselementes, a Greek chef and author of cookbooks. It takes place at the beginning of September and allows the visitors to taste local delicacies and attend a variety of concerts (Symposio: <https://www.symposio.gr/cycladic-gastronomy-festival/>). During culinary festivals, participants may try new dishes, familiarize themselves with the process of their preparation, and often have the opportunity to purchase local products. This is a good opportunity to promote and develop the brand of both the municipality and the region.

Culinary tourism, particularly when paired with agritourism, can be highlighted as important means of improving and developing the sociocultural and economic status of rural communities. Agricultural revenues are not high, because rural communities have been facing underpriced commodities and economic decline, making it difficult to earn money on farming. Agritourism allows rural residents to sell goods independently, which translates into much higher profits. „Farm-based tourism, as an important element of rural restructuring and revitalization, may play a crucial role when small farms have to adjust to depressed agricultural prices and increased competition” (Hall, 2004). Agritourism has many economic, social and ecological positive outcomes, including sustainable agriculture, improvement of farmers' quality of life and giving direct access to markets (Kim et al., 2019).

Today's culinary tourists are looking for authenticity and high-quality products. Moreover, they are willing to pay extra for traditionally-made items. In the post-Yugoslavia area, Slovenia can serve as a good example of a country that puts great efforts in the promotion of tourism in rural areas. Despite its small size, the

country offers a large number of agritourism and ecological farms. There are also over 3,000 objects in which tourists not only have the opportunity to taste and buy traditional products, but also to participate in their preparation. In addition, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology in Slovenia undertakes many activities to promote villages and local cuisine. New scenarios for tourist events are being prepared, which may help strengthen the recognition of Slovenian cuisine (Borowska and Gadzińska, 2014). In recent years, Serbia has also taken steps to promote its rural heritage and local food products. Its rural areas are characterized by beautiful natural landscapes and traditional hospitality of the inhabitants. To encourage tourists to visit those places, the rural population organizes numerous festivals and events that give them the opportunity to present their products to visitors (Cvijanović et al., 2017). Greece is another country that promotes its traditional cuisine. The local population and local authorities are aware of the importance of branding local products and making them available to tourists. It is worth noting, however, that in the past this country was in a better political situation than today's Balkan states. Greece did not experience socialist economy, which should be considered the main factor that enabled the country to develop modern tourist services much earlier. An additional factor that had a positive impact on tourism in Greece was the accession to the European Union in 1981. At that point tourism became one of the most important branches of the economy (Rettinger and Rozmus, 2010). Food related tourism in Albania has the potential to offer quality and value experience for visitors, although this important item has been thus far ignored as a tourism attraction (Brokaj, 2014).

The aim of the paper is to determine whether Macedonian cuisine may prove to be one of the factors attracting tourists to the North Macedonia. In addition, the paper attempts to draw a socio-demographic profile of a food tourist visiting this country. It was also surveyed how Macedonian cuisine is perceived by visitors and by the local population.

The article sets out to present basic information pertaining to North Macedonia. Particular attention is paid to the climate and agriculture

of the country, because these factors largely determine the high quality of Macedonian food. In the subsequent part of the work, the

authors focus on the characteristics of Macedonian dishes and culinary festivals. The paper ends with an analysis of survey results.

2. Research methods

The authors conducted surveys in order to obtain answers to questions pertaining to the profile of food tourists visiting Ohrid in North Macedonia and the popularity of Macedonian cuisine among tourists. The total number of foreign tourists who took part in this study was 130. Also, 31 residents of Macedonia agreed to answer the survey questions. The study sample was selected based on non-probability sampling. Most respondents were surveyed in the center of Ohrid and at the Sileks Hotel located in the city. Survey was conducted in English and Macedonian. Most of the responses were

written by the respondents in North Macedonia between May and September 2019, while the rest of survey responses were collected online. Questions that appeared in the questionnaire, apart from those involving basic socio-demographic information, concerned the knowledge of Macedonian cuisine, including main dishes and products that are available there.

For more information, the author used texts from travel guides, gastronomy books and numerous articles about cultural tourism that were found in the university library and on the Internet.

3. North Macedonia – geographical characteristics

North Macedonia is a country located in Southern Europe on the Balkan Peninsula, formed after the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991 (Perović et al., 2017). Until recently, the official name was the Republic of Macedonia, but this changed on 12th February 2019, when the parliament passed an amendment to the Constitution and announced the change of name to the Republic of North Macedonia. The area of the country is 25,713 km² and it is inhabited by over 2 million people (Populationof.net: www.populationof.net/pl/tfyr-macedonia/). Many ethnic minorities live in the country, the most numerous of which are Albanians (25.17%). This makes Islam the second most important religion next to Orthodoxy (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020).

North Macedonia demonstrates upland and mountainous landscape. The western part of the country is extremely mountainous, whereas its central part features numerous mountain massifs, which are characterized by gentle slopes. North Macedonia has no access to the sea. Its largest water reservoir is Lake Ohrid, which, together with the surrounding region, is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1979. It is the oldest lake created as a result of tectonic movements in Europe. There are

over 200 endemic species, including the famous *Salmo Letnica* trout, which is currently under protection (World Lakes Website: <http://www.worldlakes.org/lakedetails.asp?lakeid=8770>).

North Macedonia is located in the subtropical climate zone. Mountain areas demonstrate a temperate climate. The country is characterized by very variable weather. July and August have the highest number of sunny hours. The average temperature in the summer months is around 24°C. Compared to spring, autumn is a longer and warmer season. Winters in Macedonia are usually mild, with average temperatures in January ranging from 0 to 2°C. The shortest sunshine duration occurs in December. The weather in the winter months can be stormy with strong winds and snowfall or sunny and warm (Martyn, 1992). Rainfall in North Macedonia is quite diverse. The least precipitation occurs in the East (max. 500 mm), and the most in mountainous areas (1500 mm) (Martyn, 1992).

The subtropical climate that prevails in Macedonia undeniably favors local agriculture and the production of food. A large part of the country's area is intended for arable land, predominantly for cereals, such as wheat, corn and rice are grown there. Large number of sunshine

hours are conducive to the ripening of vegetables and fruits. Apples, pears and peaches are harvested in orchards, and vineyards are often established on the Southern slopes of the valleys. Agriculture in Macedonia accounted for 11% of gross domestic product in 2010, while in 2018 the share of agriculture in North Macedonia's GDP was 7.24% (Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/510285/share-of-economic-sectors-in-the-gdp-in-macedonia/>). Farmlands cover 1.12 million ha of the country's area, of which 45% are arable land and 55% pastures. Animal husbandry provides a steady income for the inhabitants of small villages and inhibits migration to urban areas. Farms produce, among others, cheese, oil, milk and meat (Kratovalieva and Milcevska, 2013). The most important processed products in Macedonia

which are exported to other European countries include peppers – both sweet and chili. In addition, relishes such as ajvar, canned peppers, and tomatoes are also exported. Agricultural products account for about 17% of exported goods, the main sales market in 2019 were Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy and Serbia (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020a).

The Macedonian rural areas are still undiscovered and underestimated. Foreign tourists usually visit larger cities such as Skopje and Ohrid. Rural areas are not sufficiently promoted among tourists. It is worth paying attention to small towns and advertising them as attractive holiday destinations. Taking into consideration their attractive potential, small villages can be a real paradise for tourists.

4. Macedonian cuisine – characteristics

Macedonian cuisine is typical Balkan Peninsula cuisine, where cheese, meat and bread dominate. Dishes considered traditional for North Macedonia are very often the result of changes that have been made over the years in recipes under the influence of neighboring countries, most notably Turkey, Greece, Serbia or Bulgaria. This is the result of the turbulent history of this country, cultural influences from the empires that formerly ruled these lands, and its belonging to former Yugoslavia.

The shared history has led to the fact that to this day these countries interact with one another, and their traditions are intertwined and combined. This can be compared to the 21st century globalization, which crosses certain boundaries and eliminates or blurs diversity. In spite of the emerging differences, the elements of other Balkan countries may still be found in Macedonian culture and cuisine is a very good example of that. Many dishes of North Macedonia cuisine, which are considered traditional, differ from the original just by some ingredients, the method of serving and very often only by name.

Burek (Fig. 1A) is a popular dish in the Balkans (another name is banica, biurek). It is prepared from thin filo dough and filled with stuffing – cheese or meat. It is usually eaten at breakfast time with natural yoghurt. Inhabi-

tants of the Balkan Peninsula eagerly eat meat dishes. Most often they prepare them on the grill, for example kebapi – minced meat formed into small sausages (Fig. 1D). A lot of vegetables are eaten in the Balkans, which explains the popularity of salads, the most famous among them being Shopska. It consists of cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, peppers and cheese, all topped with sunflower or olive oil (Iliev, 2014). The Turks, who learned cheese production from the Arab peoples, also introduced it to the Balkan lands. Kaymak, Manur and Siraz can be examples (Bomertówna, 2005). The most popular Balkan dessert is baklava (Fig. 1H). It is a cake layered with sweet filling, which includes nuts, sugar or honey. The whole is baked and topped with sugar syrup, water and lemon juice (Hösükoğlu, 1995).

Macedonians have two favorite ways to prepare dishes. The first is grill, called skara. Grilled dishes can be ordered in restaurants or bought at street stalls. Their preparation is quick and easy, which is why they are often referred to as fast food. An example of such dishes can be the previously mentioned kebapi or pljeskavica (minced meat with onions and spices). Another way of preparing dishes is slow cooking, which often takes place outdoors. This traditional method is called "pečenje pod vršnik" (vršnik). This is a time-consuming but also more effective way. Coal is placed

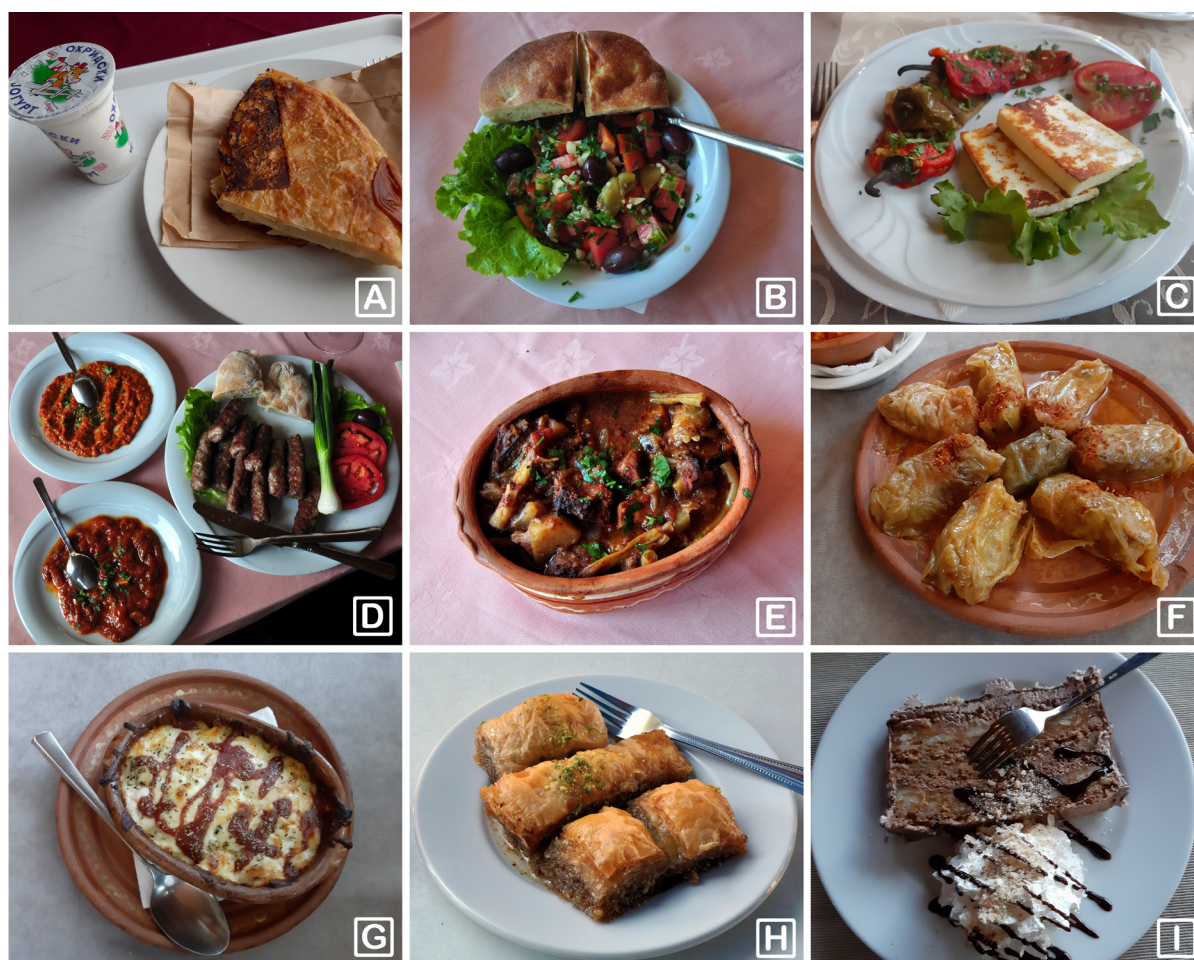


Figure 1. Typical North Macedonian dishes: burek and natural yoghurt (A), Macedonian salad (B), grilled cheese and vegetables (C), kebapi, ajvar, pindjur (D), turli tava (E), sarma (F), topeno sirenje (G), baklava (H), ohrid cake (I) (photos by Paulina Śmigelska, Przemysław Charzyński)

not only under the grill but also on the lid, which allows for better heat distribution. This method is used to prepare meat, fish, cakes and bread (Journey Macedonia: https://journeymacedonia.com/cultural_historical/traditional-baking-pod-vrshnik/). Most traditional dishes in Macedonian cuisine are served in clay pots (tava).

The most popular Macedonian dish is tavče gravče. Translating into English, this name means beans in a frying pan. As the name suggests, the basic ingredient of the dish is beans. In addition, peppers and onions are used, seasoned with salt and pepper. After cooking, the dish goes to a clay pot, in which it is baked and then served. Tavče gravče can be ordered at many traditional Macedonian restaurants (Balkan Blend: <http://www.balkanblend.pl/2016/09/21/macedonskie-tavce-gravce-czyli-zapiekana-fasola/>).

Gjomleze is a dish originated in Southwestern Macedonia, whose popularity gave rise to the annual Gjomlezijada festival. Gjomleze

is a fluffy, large cake with a crispy crust. The method of preparing this dish has remained unchanged for many years and the traditional Macedonian vrshnik is still used. The dough consists of flour, water and salt, the dish is lubricated with oil and then a small amount of raw dough is applied to the surface. After baking, the next layer of dough is applied and the whole is baked again. This operation is repeated until the raw dough has been used completely. Finally, the whole is cut at an angle to create a plaid pattern (Macedonian Cuisine: <http://www.macedonianscuisine.com/2016/02/ohrid-gjomleze.html>). Pastrmajlija, or so-called Macedonian pizza from Strumica, also belongs to traditional Macedonian dishes. It is an oval bread dough with diced meat (Evans, 2009).

An example of a dish usually eaten at home rather than served in restaurants is jufki, which is traditional Macedonian pasta. It is usually prepared in summer and eaten in winter. The ingredients for pasta dough are eggs, flour,

milk, oil and salt. They are usually served with cheese (Slavorum: www.slavorum.org/jufki-macedonian-traditional-pasta/).

Various types of relishes are very popular in North Macedonia, similarly to other Balkan countries. The best known is ajvar (Fig. 1D) –

red pepper relish with the addition of eggplant and garlic. It goes very well with grilled meat and bread. A similar product is lutenica, which consists of peppers, chili peppers, onions, tomatoes, oil, sugar and salt or pindjur (Tasteatlas: www.tasteatlas.com/).

5. Culinary festivals in North Macedonia

Festivals that take place in North Macedonia are most often dedicated to music and dances. Culinary tourists who want to take part in food-related events have still very limited offer and have to look for information carefully on the Internet or ask the local people for help. Unfortunately, most festivals do not have their own websites, where tourists could learn about the date or place of the event. To obtain such information, tourists often have to search websites in Macedonian language, without the possibility of switching to English, which represents additional obstacle.

Gjomlezijada is a culinary festival that is entirely devoted to the traditional Macedonian dish. It takes place every year during the summer months in Skrebatno – a town near Ohrid. During this event, one of the oldest dishes of the region – Gjomleze – is being prepared. The festival takes place outdoors, everyone can watch the preparation of the dish and taste it (Metropol Lake Resort Ohrid: www.metropol-ohrid.com.mk/EN/area___activities/local_events_calendar/713/gjomlezijada_2012.aspx).

An important holiday in North Macedonia is the day of Saint Trifun, which is celebrated on February 14. Saint Trifun is the patron of wine, which is why most events take place in wineries on this day. It is a great opportunity to taste Macedonian wine, listen to traditional music and visit local vineyards (Paul Balke: www.paulbalke.com/sv-trifun-14-february-an-important-day-for-all-wine-lovers/).

Another event that is also dedicated to Macedonian wine is Skopje Wine Expo. This

is the largest event of this type in North Macedonia. In addition to wine tasting, participants may try local snacks and listen to live concerts. The festival takes place in September in the capital city – Skopje (Feel Love Feel Skopje: visitskopje.mk/).

In North Macedonia there are also many places associated with local products. One of them is the Pivnica Temov craft brewery in the center of Skopje. It is a place recommended for tourists, where they may try Macedonian beer brewed according to traditional recipes (Like a local: www.likealocalguide.com/skopje/pivnica-temov). Visitors may also wish to visit a small village in North Macedonia – Elsani. The people living in this area cook traditional dishes, produce their own food products at home and willingly share them with guests from abroad. Tourists may take part in Macedonian evenings, during which they have the opportunity to learn more about the culture of Macedonians, listen to traditional music and taste local dishes (Travel to Macedonia: <https://www.travel2macedonia.com.mk/tourist-attraction/elsani-village-ohrid>).

Kratovo is another place that invites visitors to enjoy in Macedonian culture. The so-called kcana sol (crushed salt) is produced there. Thirteen ingredients (dry vegetables and herbs) are needed to make this product. Everything is ground in special stone vessels. Currently, only three families in North Macedonia produce and deliver crushed salt to nearby restaurants. Tourists who stay with them for longer can actively participate in the making of this traditional product (Unterhofer and Kirovski, 2010).

6. Results

6.1. Survey conducted among tourists

Among 130 respondents, women predominated (68%). Respondents were mainly in the age from 36 to 49 years (43%). People from 27 to 35 years old represented the second largest group (30%). People aged 50 and above accounted for 6%. Respondents aged 18 or younger proved to be the smallest group (1%). Poles were the most numerous among the groups (65%, Fig. 2). This is the result of the fact that Macedonia is a very popular destination among Polish tourists. As statistics from years 2014-2018 show, Poles were the second largest group of tourists

(26%) in North Macedonia from Central and Eastern Europe (and amounted to nearly 5% of total number of foreign visitors). Bulgarians were the largest group (39%). Considering the entire European continent, the largest number of tourists in Macedonia were from Turkey (18%) and Serbia (9%) (Tourism Statistics: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/10.5555/unwtotfb0807071120142018201907>). Most of the respondents had higher education (71%), 27% secondary education and only 2% primary education.

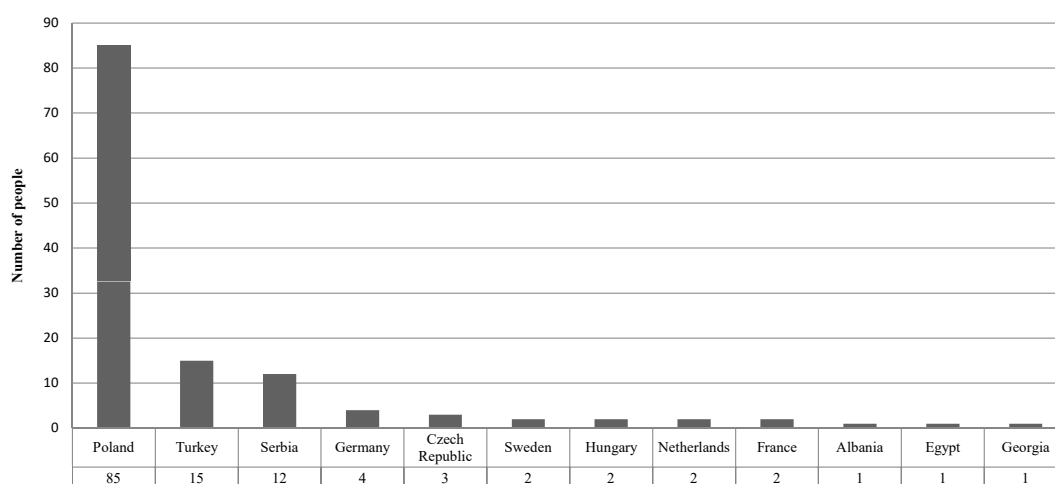


Figure 2. Country of origin and share of survey respondents (source: prepared based on own research) (n=130)

When asked about the main purpose of the visit, respondents most often answered that it was sightseeing (32%) and relaxation (29%). Many people visited North Macedonia because of their desire to explore the country’s nature (25%). Some respondents also traveled for business purposes (4%). Ten percent of tourists came to North Macedonia for other purposes (Fig. 3), for example they found themselves in this country to meet new people, visit family or friends. Some respondents came in North Macedonia for educational purposes. Several tourists went on a trip to North Mace-

donia for active tourism. These were primarily trips to the mountains or diving in the Ohrid Lake. Some were motivated by the cuisine of that country and alcoholic beverages, including wine (Fig. 3). When asked if they had ever heard the term ‘food tourism’, the majority of tourists answered in the affirmative (81%), while those who did not know the term were 19%. When asked if they tried North Macedonian dishes, the vast majority (98%) gave a positive answer, only 2% of people admitted that they did not.

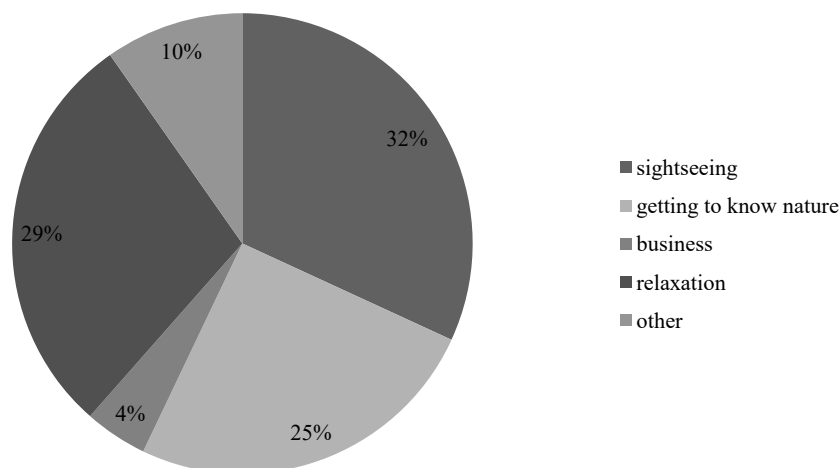


Figure 3. The main purpose of the visit (source: prepared based on own research) (n=130)

The respondents mentioned many dishes that they had the opportunity to taste during their stay in North Macedonia, which they considered to be typically traditional for this country. Most often it was *tavce gravce*, *shopska salad*, *kebapi* and *pljeskavica*. There were also answers related to alcoholic beverages – wine and *rakija* were most popular ones. Cheeses, relishes such as *ajvar*, *ohrid trout*, *macedonian salad* (Fig. 1B), meat dishes such as *turli tava* (Fig. 1E), soups as well as fruit and vegetables

in various forms are also very popular among tourists. Furthermore, the respondents tried the famous Balkan desserts such as *trilece cake*, *baklava*, *halvah* and *ohrid cake* (Fig. 1I). It is surprising that only one person tried traditional Macedonian *gjomleze*. Analyzing the answers, it may be concluded that most of the dishes that tourists mentioned and consider to be typically Macedonian, are in fact whole Balkan dishes, for example *musaka* or *czorba* (soup).

Table 1. Dishes tasted by tourists (based on the Authors' own study) (n=114)

Percent	Dish
14.0%	<i>Tavce gravce</i>
11.8%	Alcoholic drinks
8.6%	<i>Shopska salad</i>
8.1%	<i>Kebapi</i>
7.6%	<i>Pljeskavica</i>
6.1%	<i>Ajvar</i> , cheese
5.1%	<i>Burek</i>
4.7%	<i>Ohrid trout</i>
2.2–1.0%	<i>Sarma</i> , <i>trilece cake</i> , meat, <i>baklava</i> , stuffed vegetables, fruit and vegetables, <i>turli tava</i> , <i>pindzur</i> , <i>kajmak</i> , grilled vegetables, <i>pastrmajlija</i>
0.7%–0.2%	<i>Makalo</i> , <i>czorba</i> , <i>musaka</i> , <i>macedonian salad</i> , <i>tarator</i> , <i>topeno sirenje</i> , <i>selsko meso</i> , fish soup, <i>kashkaval</i> , yoghurt, <i>ohrid cake</i> , <i>zelnik</i> , <i>tulumba</i> , <i>tripe chorba</i> , <i>turkish coffee</i> , <i>lutenica</i> , <i>halvah</i> , <i>jufki</i> , chestnut honey, <i>szisz kebab</i> , <i>malidzano</i> , <i>simit pogacha</i> , <i>kulen</i> , <i>pomfrit so sirenje</i> , <i>gjomleze</i>

According to the survey, tourists in most cases consciously and intentionally choose North Macedonian dishes from the menu cards, but 14% admitted that this was not the case. Before arriving in Macedonia, 72% of people

were looking for information about the cuisine of this country; 28% did not. When asked where they most often sought tips for Macedonian food, most of them pointed to websites and tourist blogs. Among the answers were also

those regarding tourist guides and social media. A large number of people used other sources of

information, often family, friends and YouTube videos (Fig. 4).

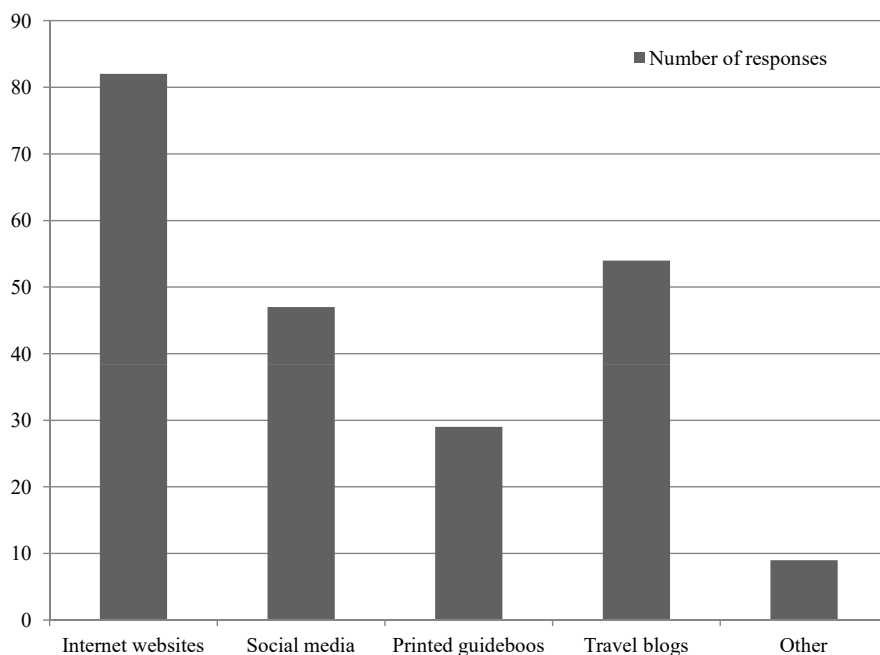


Figure 4. Main sources of information (source: prepared based on own research) (n=130)

The survey also asked about culinary festivals in North Macedonia in which tourists took part. Most of the respondents did not participate in any events of this type and did not visit regions that could be associated with the cuisine (78%), while only 22% answered affirmatively to this question. Most often tourists went to wine areas to visit Tikves or Popova Kula Winery. Several people mentioned in their answers Kratovo, where kcana sol is made. One of the respondents indicated a local market where they could buy local and traditional products.

Most tourists would recommend Macedonian cuisine to others (96%). When asked

about products and dishes most associated with Macedonia, most often they mentioned vegetables (grilled, stuffed, raw), cheese (Fig. 1C), meat and alcoholic beverages. Some answers to this question coincide with those that appeared in the question pertaining to the dishes that respondents had the opportunity to try. In addition, a large proportion of respondents drew attention to the fact that North Macedonian cuisine is distinguished by well-seasoned dishes, fresh products and a beautiful, unforgettable aroma (Table 2).

Table 2. What is associated with Macedonian cuisine (based on the Author’s own study) (n = 104)

Percent	What is associated with Macedonian cuisine
10%	Vegetables
9%	Pepper, cheese, meat
8%	Wine, ajvar
6%	Tavce gravce, shopska salad
3%	Burek
2%	Ohrid trout, kebapi, fish, makalo, rakija, pljeskavica, kćana sol, well seasoned
1%	Simit-pogoca, quality, fresh products, pastrmajlija, fat dishes, bukovec spice, prilepski sirden, ohrid cake, ckembe corba, zelnik, kajmak, dishes baked in clay dishes, aroma of smoked paprika, goos taste of dishes, skara, freshness and taste, herbs, grilled dishes, halvah, kashkaval, amazing taste and aroma, pomfrit so sirenje, fish soup, large soup, baklava, no preservatives

6.2. Survey conducted among locals

Another survey, translated into Macedonian, was completed by the inhabitants of North Macedonia. In total, 31 people participated in survey. Over half of the respondents were women (58%). The dominant age category was those between 36 and 49 years (35%). People aged 18 to 26 and 50 and over accounted for 23% each. The group of respondents aged 27 to 35 amounted to 19%, whereas people aged 18 or less did not take part in the survey. Sixty eight percent of respondents were Ohrid residents, because research was conducted there. Several people came from Skopje (19%) and Struga (13%). Most people had higher education (61%), while 39% had secondary education.

The survey tried to identify if the local inhabitants are familiar with the term ‘culi-

nary/food/wine tourism’. Most people replied that they had heard this term in the past, but 19% had never heard of it. Another question addressed to the inhabitants of North Macedonia was: ‘do you think North Macedonian cuisine may attract foreign tourists?’ The vast majority, i.e. 97% of respondents, said that local dishes may be a factor attracting tourists, while only 3% denied it. In the next question, the respondents were asked to list dishes that should be offered to tourists. As it may be seen in Fig. 5, the most frequent answers were sarma (Fig. 1F) and tavce gravce. Gjomleze, baklava, zelnik and ajvar were also mentioned very often. Other dishes were: shopska salad, fish, musaka, burek, makalo, paprika and pastrmajlija.

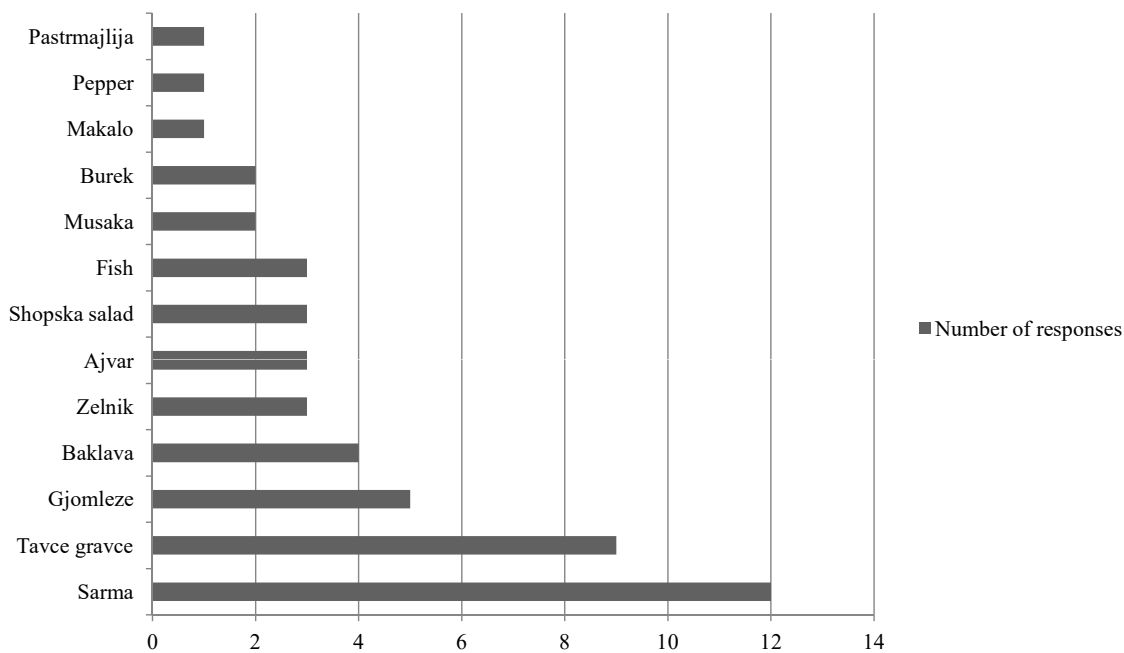


Figure 5. What dishes should be offered to tourists (source: prepared based on own research) (n=31)

The inhabitants of North Macedonia were also asked to name dishes that in their opinion distinguish their traditional cuisine from other Balkan countries. Ajvar, sarma and tavce gravce

most often appeared in the answers. Other dishes and products were: cheese, wine, pepper, makalo, beans, gjomleze and burek (Fig. 6).

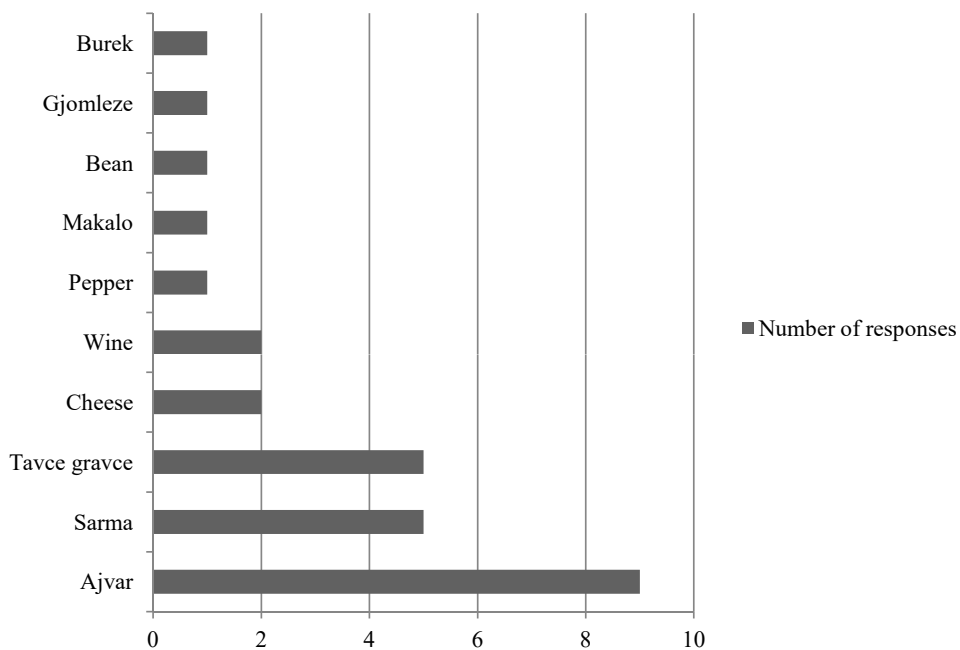


Figure 6. What dishes distinguish Macedonian cuisine from other Balkan countries (source: prepared based on own research) (n=26)

The question about culinary festivals in North Macedonia caused some problem for the inhabitants of this country. Only 33% of respondents indicated that they had heard about such events in their country, and only 23% were able to name some of them. Almost all the festivals that appeared in the respondents’ answers were related to wine making, they were: Tikveshki Grozdober, Wine festival – St. Trifun, Wino Skopje and Skopje Wine Expo.

Only one event was devoted to food – Gjomlezejada. Regions which should be advertised and promoted as typical food tourism destinations involve mostly wine areas: Kavadarci, Tikvesh and Negotino. A place that may be associated more with traditional dishes than with wine is the region of Ohrid mentioned by Macedonians, which is famous for fish caught in the lake (Fig. 7).

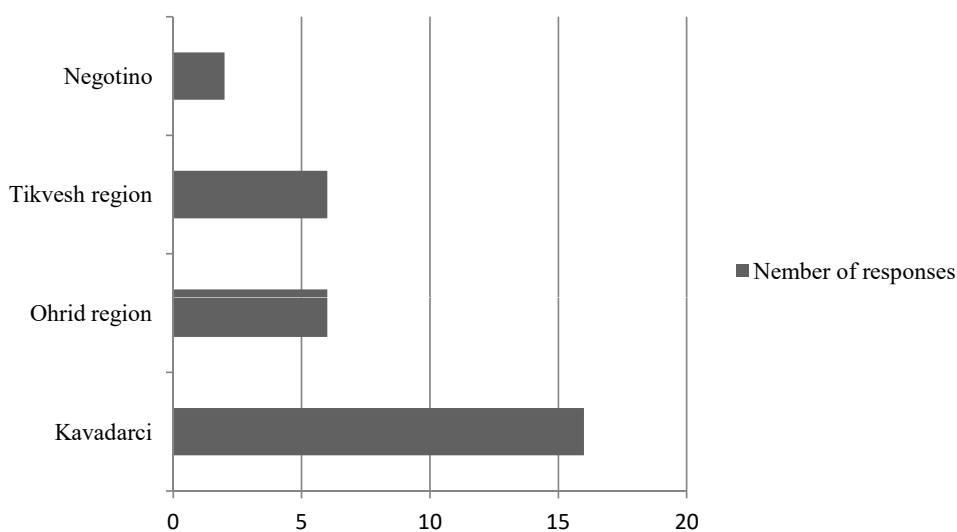


Figure 7. Which regions of North Macedonia should be promoted (source: prepared based on own research) (n=27)

7. Summary and Conclusions

North Macedonia has great tourist potential. From year to year, more and more tourists visit this country. In 2018 the number of foreign arrivals was 671,277 and in 2019 it was 716,966 people (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020b), while in 2008 it was only 255,000 (Indexmundi: www.indexmundi.com/facts/north-macedonia/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL). Tourists are eager to try local dishes and they are more and more interested in participating in local festivals and cultural events. As a Balkan country, North Macedonia may stand out due to low prices in relation to high quality products. According to the results of the research, tourists evaluate the local cuisine very well and recommend it to others. Unfortunately, most of the dishes that are associated with traditional Macedonian cuisine owe their origin to other Balkan, Arab and Mediterranean countries. Also, the local population does not have much knowledge about the origin of some dishes. A vivid example is sarma, repeatedly pointed out by Macedonians as their traditional specialty, which in fact is common throughout the Balkans. In order for North Macedonia to become the destination of culinary tourists, tourist organizations should focus on promoting their own products and dishes, such as gjomleze or jufki. Special attention should be drawn to the potential of culinary events, which are few today, and which are additionally poorly promoted. Most food events in North Macedonia do not have websites with even basic information. Bearing in mind the importance of media on tourist market, especially online media, it is necessary to improve significantly this segment in the future.

Preserving and promoting the region's gastronomy is very important. Traditional food plays a particularly important role in the development of rural tourism areas. Food tourism development is creating viable job opportunities, especially for young people, and helps keep rural areas alive. It is also a sustainable develop-

ment mechanism for small towns and villages, as tourist expenditure helps local businesses.

Eating is more than meeting the physical needs of tourists. It is an opportunity to meet new people, cultures and traditions. Many countries are aware of this and increasingly emphasize the promotion of their original products and branding its national cuisines. An example is Turkey, which is famous for many dishes that have long attracted culinary tourists. It is worth noting that some of them are on the UNESCO list of cultural heritage, for instance Mesir Macunu and Turkish coffee (Okumus and Cetin, 2018). Despite the progressing globalization, the Turks defend their tradition and do not allow it to be displaced and replaced by Western brands (Charzyński et al., 2015). It is also worth mentioning the neighbor of Macedonia – Serbia. The situation in this country is similar to that in North Macedonia. Serbian dishes are an example of Balkan cuisine, tourists visiting this country may therefore have problems finding a typical traditional Serbian food. For this reason, various activities are undertaken to promote traditional dishes from these regions (Ognjević, 2016). A good way of presenting traditional dishes is by featuring them in movie productions or TV series, for example Korean drama. Fans of Korean pop culture during their stay in South Korea often reach for local products that they had the opportunity to see in their favorite k-movies or k-dramas (Charzyński et al., 2016). According to M. Țuțui, North Macedonia, along with other Balkan countries, has two special features: excellent cuisine and the beginnings of a characteristic film culture (Grgić, 2014). Macedonians, like the Koreans, have good conditions to promote their country through the X Muse. With good branding strategy, smart advertising and organization, North Macedonia can become a very attractive destination for culinary tourism.

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