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ATTITUDES OF GASTRONOMY TOURISTS TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF GASTRONOMY TOURISM - A CASE STUDY FROM BANJA LUKA

Summary: *Gastronomic offer can have positive effects on the development of a tourist destination. Accurate analysis and proper understanding of the differences between tourists will help tourism managers to create greater customer satisfaction and increase business income. The purpose of this research is to examine the attitudes of gastronomic tourists and their opinion on the development of gastronomic tourism in the city of Banja Luka, the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. 296 respondents, visitors to Banja Luka restaurants, participated in the research. Differences were tested by t-test for independent samples. The obtained results showed that there are differences in the attitudes of tourists, between male and female gender, age and level of education, but not in monthly income or earnings. The results of this research can be useful to the local sector, which has responsibilities for the promotion or marketing of the city, tourist organizations and restaurants in the Banja Luka area. The software program SPSS version 26.00 was used for data analysis.*

Key words: *gastronomic offer, gastronomy, tourism, Banja Luka, tourists attitudes*

JEL classification: *M31, D40, D20*

INTRODUCTION

Foreign and domestic tourists are important strategic groups for tourism development in tourist destinations. The success of a tourist product and destination is heavily reliant on their perception (Vuksanovic et al. 2018). Tourists from different cultural backgrounds think and act differently (Li He and Qiao 2021). Thus, precisely capturing and correctly understanding cultural differences will assist tourism managers in increasing customer satisfaction and business revenue (Jia 2020). Tourists of various categories may have different perceptions of a restaurant offer, which has a direct impact on the popularity of the hospitality sector as well as the overall development of the tourist destination. Banja Luka is the second-largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina with rich history and tourist attractions including heritage, landmarks, vegetation and water bodies, and many gastronomic offerings. However, little attention is given to gastronomic tourism and the perception of both local and foreign tourists about these offerings and their potential to improve tourism

development in Banja Luka. Research in this area is dominated by environmental concerns, the development of local gastronomy as a marketing tool for promoting tourism, and the influence of the resident's attitudes on the consumption of food products (Vuksanović et al. 2017a; 2017b; 2016), leaving the important element of perception of tourists about restaurant offerings with minimal attention in tourism and hospitality development discourse. As a result, the primary focus of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of foreign and domestic tourists regarding the restaurant offerings in Banja Luka. Because tourist perception is so important in the development of gastronomic tourism, this paper sought to identify tourist perception and the significance of restaurant offers in Banja Luka. It also looked at how tourists' perceptions differed based on their socio-demographic characteristics. This study is one of the first to investigate tourists' perceptions of restaurant offerings in Banja Luka, and it thus contributes to the literature on tourism and hospitality in the country by reflecting tourists' perceptions of restaurant offerings. Setting the standard for research into tourists' perceptions of restaurants and other hospitality services. This study's model is similar to Vuksanović and colleagues' 2018 study on tourists' perceptions in Serbia Sremski Karlovci territory. The remainder of the paper will concentrate on the literature review, the methodology used, the study's results, and its conclusions.

The concept of the research method can be seen in the following diagram (Figure 1).

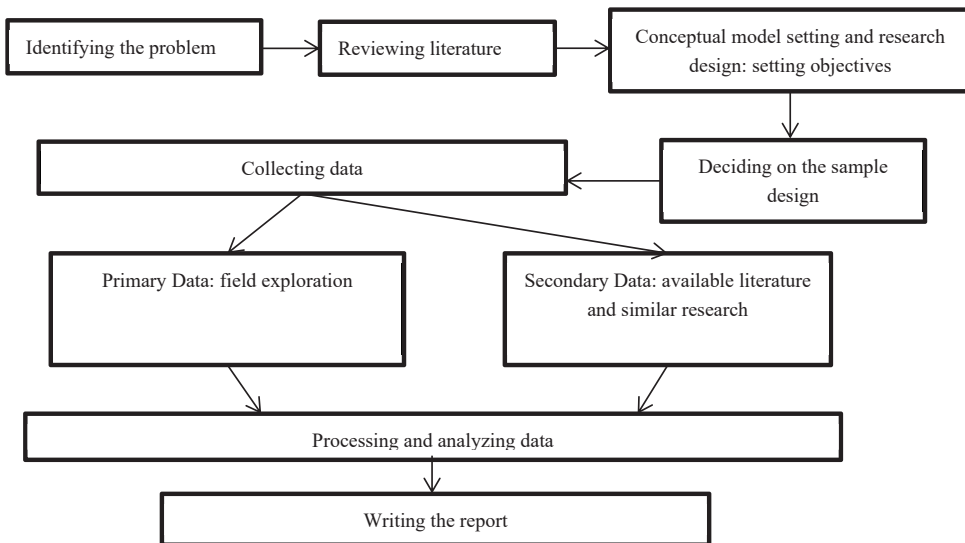


Figure 1. Diagram of research methodology concept (Authors)

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourists from different cultural backgrounds think and act differently. Precisely capturing and correctly understanding cultural differences will assist tourism managers in generating greater customer satisfaction and increased business revenue. Additionally, food and tourism have always been highly integrated to attract tourists and generate revenue in a synergistic manner (Jia 2020). A growing number of researchers (Chang et al. 2010; Stewart et al. 2008; Vuksanović et al. 2018) have emphasized the importance of researching tourist interest and food preferences in a destination from the perspective of hospitality and tourism (Gajić et al. 2021a; Gajić et al. 2023; Vukolić et al. 2023). The restaurant offer (food or dining experience) is an important factor that influences tourist

perception of a destination (Vuksanovic et al. 2018; Vukolić 2020; Gajić et al. 2021a). Food is emphasized as the fourth factor contributing to the perception of attractiveness of a destination in contemporary literature, implying that the image or attractiveness of the destination should be measured by attributes including food and holistically evaluated (Echtner et al. 1993; Hu et al. 1993; Vuksanovi et al. 2018; Gajić et al. 2022).

Restaurants strive to improve tourist customer satisfaction as food suppliers in city tourist attractions, because satisfaction leads to positive word-of-mouth and increased sales (Han and Ryu 2009; Liu and Jang 2009). However, due to the complicated interplay of food, environment, service, interpersonal interaction, and diner motivation, detecting and understanding restaurant customer satisfaction has been difficult (Ha and Jang 2010; Ryu Lee, and Kim 2012; Wu and Liang 2009). Authors Ryu et al., for example, discovered that the combination of food and service influences restaurant customer satisfaction (Ryu et al. 2012). Authors Wu and Liang discovered that the interaction of restaurant customers with service employees, other consumers, and environmental factors has a significant impact on satisfaction (Wu and Liang 2009). When choosing a restaurant, aroma and taste are universal criteria for guests, although individuals have their preferences in terms of taste based on their lived experiences and culture (Clark and Wood 1999). In addition to individual preferences, another factor that can influence the decision of the tourists on whether food is delicious or not is the unfamiliar taste and texture of food (Chang 2007). Also, the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of tourists influence their preferences towards local food (Kim et al. 2009; Khan 1981; Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Mitchell Hall 2003; Gajić et al. 2022c). It is, therefore, important to identify the restaurant offers and understand how these attributes influence the perception of tourists in gastronomic tourism (Vuksanović et al. 2018). The variety of dishes, local food and beverages, cuisine innovation, and other characteristics of cuisine are attributes that have proved important in other popular research (Chang et al. 2010; Jalis et al. 2009).

Socio-demographic characteristics have been identified as significant variables in explaining variations in food consumption in various contexts in various studies related to food consumption (Choe and Kim 2018; Kraus et al. 2017; Nyangasa et al. 2019; Knežević and Ivković 2022). Tourism development is significantly more conditioned by the quality of the environment than other activities, such that the degree of preservation and attractiveness of the environment directly reflects the possibilities for tourism development in an area, propelled by natural and cultural values (Cvijanovi et al. 2018; Knežević et al. 2022). Tourism development in the context of gastronomy must be sustainable, which requires equal attention to the relationship between tourism and the environment (Gajić et al. 2021, Gajić and Vukolić 2021). In the conditions of affirmation of selective forms of tourism, this fact is recognized and incorporated into the business policies of tourism businesses in the market. The vast majority of owners or managers of catering facilities believe that increasing the supply of traditional dishes can lead to an increase in the number of tourists and guests patronage (Vukolić 2020).

Gastronomic tourism is defined as the visit of tourists of primary or secondary food producers, food festivals, catering facilities for food production and service, and certain destinations for tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of regional specialties, where food is the primary motive for travel (Hall and Mitchell 2006; Vujović and Jovanović 2012; Vukolić 2020). Culinary tourism or food tourism is considered as the search for a special experience in eating and drinking, which is remembered for a long time. The term gastronomic tourism means to travel to those destinations where local food and drinks are the main motives for attracting tourists or guests (Gajić et al. 2021; Vukolić et al. 2022b). The factor on which the further development of tourism depends the most is the investment in the development of the tourist offer. This area of stimulating investment in supply should be subordinated by eliminating the resulting disproportion and limitations - raising the quality level offers and raising the reproductive capacity of the tourism industry (Vukolić 2020; Gajić 2021).

Aside from the appealing and authentic offer that the catering facility places on the market by giving authentic, national, and sentimental names to the dishes, it also has an impact on the preservation and promotion of the region's gastronomic culture and traditions (Vukolić 2019; Gajić and Vukolić 2021). Authors Gajić et al. research is significant in the tourism industry because it considers greater opportunities for the development of gastronomy, which will affect the development of tourism in various ways (Gajić et al. 2021a; Gajić et al. 2021b).

The City of Banja Luka has a valid Tourism Development Strategy for the period 2013-2020, and in preparation is also the Action Plan for the development of tourism in the City 2018-2022. In 2016, Banja Luka was, the leading tourist destination in terms of the number of tourist arrivals (both domestic and foreign). In the total number of overnight stays, Banja Luka is in second place behind Teslić. Banja Luka had the most realized overnight stays of foreign tourists, but if we look at overnight stays realized by domestic tourists, as well as the total number of overnight stays, the leading destination is Teslić.

Table 1. Data on the number of tourists - arrivals and nights in 2019.year (Tourist organization Banja Luka)

Period	Arrivals			Nights		
	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	In total	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	In total
January	2.110	2.555	4.665	3.061	4.445	7.506
February	2.897	2.713	5.610	4.183	4.650	8.833
March	3.764	4.023	7.787	5.815	7.918	13.733
April	3.361	4.060	7.421	4.795	6.900	11.695
May	3.224	5.565	8.789	4.575	8.989	13.564
June	2.771	4.704	7.475	4.237	7.749	11.986
July	2.366	3.688	6.054	3.180	6.413	9.593
August	1.996	3.810	5.806	2.807	5.618	8.425
September	3.418	4.742	8.160	4.610	7.642	12.252
October	4.433	5.349	9.782	6.117	8.538	14.655
November	3.678	4.312	7.990	5.179	6.984	12.163
December	4.522	4.042	8.564	5.859	6.432	12.291
In total	38.540	49.563	88.103	54.418	82.278	136.696

That is understandable, having since Teslić is a well-known destination for spas, where especially domestic tourists stay longer (about 5 days on average) due to the use of health and spa services (Development strategy 2018). According to the data of the Tourism Organization of Banja Luka, in 2019, 54.418 domestic and 82.278 foreign tourists, in total 136.696 visited (overnight stays) in this city (Table 1).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the area of Banja Luka, The Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from March to July 2022 in 13 A la carte restaurants. A quantitative approach was used and a survey was used to collect data from foreign and domestic tourists whose arrivals are registered in the territory of Banja Luka in the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The survey was conducted in 2022 with tourists who visited restaurants with adapted measurement items from authors (Jalis et al. 2009) and authors (Vuksanović et al. 2018). A total of 10 attributes (question items) were identified, which were further used in the scale for examining tourists' perceptions of restaurants' offers. The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part

of the questionnaire is the respondent's consent to fill out the questionnaire. Filling out a questionnaire is anonymous. The second part refers to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, level of education, and monthly income. The third part of the questionnaire refers to the examination of tourists' perception of restaurants' offers (Table 6), which contains 10 items. Answers to the questionnaire were measured based on the Likert scale, 1- strongly disagree, 2 - mostly disagree, 3-neutral, 4 - generally agree, and 5 - absolutely agree.

The survey was conducted through trained interviewers, where each visitor who attended the event was a member of a set of random samples. The task of interviewers was to personally interview visitors. Since the interview was conducted through paper and pencil interviewing (PAPI) (Lavrakas 2008), the ability of the interviewers to explain the questions in the survey form, if it is required by the respondents, was essential. The sampling method is a simple random sample method. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed and 296 useful questionnaires were received generating a response rate of 98.7%.

In order to check the differences in tourists' perception of restaurants offer between foreign and domestic tourists, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. The dependent variable (tourists' perception) was measured against the socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, education, and salary) of tourists. The next section of the paper presents the results of the study.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study covered 296 respondents in the area of Banja Luka, The Republic of Srpska Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of the total number of respondents, 33.1% were male and 66.9% female (Table 2).

Table 2. Gender structure of the sample (Authors)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	98	33.1	33.1	100.0
	female	198	66.9	66.9	66.9
	Total	296	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the age structure of the sample in a tourist destination. The number of respondents in the age category between 18 and 30 years is 99 (33.4%). The next category consists of respondents aged between 31 and 60 years has 126 (42,6%) respondents while the smallest number of respondents were in the category over 60 years of age 71 (24%) who visited Banja Luka.

Table 3. Age structure of the sample (Authors)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-30	99	33.4	33.4	33.4
	31-60	126	42.6	42.6	76.0
	61	71	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	296	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the sample structure by the level of education. The largest number of respondents have completed secondary school (N=104) and college/bachelor (N=100). A slightly lower number of respondents have completed master / doctoral studies (N=82), and the smallest number of respondents have a primary school education (N=10).

Table 4. Sample structure by level of education Author's research

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	primary school	10	3.4	3.4	3.4
	high school	104	35.1	35.1	38.5
	college or university degree	100	33.8	33.8	72.3
	master or PhD	82	27.7	27.7	100.0

Table 5 shows the sample structure in terms of the average monthly income of respondents who visited Banja Luka. Most respondents (N=118) estimated that they had average household income, while slightly fewer respondents estimated their incomes as above average (N=126). The smallest number of respondents estimated that they have below-average household income (N=52).

Table 5. Sample structure according to monthly household income (Authors)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	low average salary (<400€)	52	17.6	17.6	17.6
	medium average salary (400-700€)	118	39.9	39.9	57.4
	high average salary (700-1500€)	94	31.8	31.8	89.2
	extremely high average salary (>1500€)	32	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	296	100.0	100.0	

In Table 6, answers to questions related to tourists' perception of restaurants' offer are shown in terms of means and standard deviations of each item. Most respondents agreed that restaurants present an atmosphere that left much to be desired ($m=3,70$; $sd=1,238$). However, the restaurant offer attracted their attention ($m=4,47$; $sd=,722$). It is not surprising that they enjoyed dishes that were offered in large quantities by the restaurants ($m=4,57$; $sd=,728$) and that they spent a lot of money ($m=4,15$; $sd=1,131$). The most disagreement or neutral attitude can be noticed on indicators which relate to enjoying dishes and beverages offered by the restaurants ($m=2,99$; $sd=1,349$) and the consumption of dishes that they knew from the past ($m=3,00$; $sd=1,278$). Tourists did not agree with the view that they just tried dishes from the offer. It can be noticed that visitors become interested in restaurants' offers during the visit. This could be as a result of restaurants offering mostly local food and beverage ($m=4,22$; $sd=,842$). Respondents stated that they enjoyed in traditionality of the restaurant offers ($m=4,76$; $sd=,436$), and therefore, have gained positive experience in several traditional methods of preparing food ($m=4,66$; $sd=,691$). In addition, tourists to Banja Luka learn about the tradition and of the food culture of the city ($m=4,77$; $sd=,549$).

Table 6. Descriptive indicators of the scale for examining tourists' perception on restaurants offer (Authors)

Indicators	% in agreement	m	sd
The atmosphere in the restaurant is very well	8.92	3.70	1.238
Restaurant offer has attracted my attention	13.55	4.47	.722
I enjoyed dishes and beverages from the restaurant offers	7.02	2.99	1.349
I consumed dishes that I knew from the past	10.11	3.00	1.278
In a restaurant, offer are mostly traditional food and beverage	8.82	4.22	.842
I enjoyed in traditionality of the restaurant offers	8.64	4.76	.436
I enjoyed eating dishes in large quantities	7.03	4.57	.728

I experienced several traditional methods of preparing food	11.88	4.66	.691
I have mostly learned about the tradition and of a food culture	9.93	4.77	.549
I spent a lot of money on dishes from restaurant offer	14.01	4.15	1.131

*m=mean; sd=standard deviation

Table 7 shows the descriptive analysis of the applied scale. Based on the values of multivariate skewness and kurtosis, it can be concluded that the answers of the respondents to the scale of the tourists’ perception on restaurants offer do not deviate considerably from a normal distribution. In this survey, the reliability coefficients expressed in terms of Cronbach's Alpha is .895 (Table 7).

Table 7. Reliability Statistics (Authors)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.887	10

T-test for independent samples was applied with factors: gender and tourists’ perception. The results show that there is a statistically significant difference between genders ($t=2.21$; $p<0.03$). These results show that men are significantly different from women when it comes to the perception of restaurants’ offer, in the sense that the offer varies in terms of the quality of food and the experience at the destination. The results of the ANOVA test for independent samples show that there is a statistically minimal significant difference between age groups. The results show that the answer is very similar for all groups which can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Tourist perception of restaurant offer / ANOVA for age groups (Author’s research)

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	
31-40	35		3.52
41-50	38		3.56
18-30	204		3.61
Over 60 year	19		3.61
Sig.			.804

In order to check the differences in the education among respondents in spent a lot of money on dishes from restaurant offer, the ANOVA test for independent samples was applied with factors: education and tourists’ perception of restaurants offer, the results show that there is a statistically significant difference between the education groups. Different answers are noticed among the respondents of different educational status as can be seen in the table 9.

Table 9. Tourist perception of restaurant offer / ANOVA for education (Author’s research)

Education	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	
Primary school	22		2.54
College/bachelor diplom	173		4.18
Secondary school	82		3.60
MSc or PhD	19		4.77
Sig.			.592

The ANOVA test results for independent samples show that there is no statistically significant difference between groups of monthly incomes in tourist perception as can be seen in the table 10.

Table 10. Tourist perception of restaurant offer / ANOVA for income (Author's research)

Income	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	
Above average	101		3.53
Average	132		3.60
Below average	63		3.66
Sig.			.135

CONCLUSION

According to the research findings, there are differences in the restaurant's offer between different groups of tourists. The obtained results show that there are differences between the variables gender, age, and level of education, but not monthly income. According to the findings, men differ significantly from women in their perceptions of restaurant offerings, and there is also a difference in the age variable in their perceptions of restaurant offerings. Older tourists have a more positive perception of restaurant offerings in terms of variety and quality of food, as well as a complete experience at the destination. Possible differences in visitor groups in the variable of education, where visitors with a higher level of education have a more positive evaluation of restaurant offers, can be explained by the fact that they were more willing to try more dishes than other groups of respondents. Based on the findings and discussion, it is concluded that it is critical for future research on the restaurant's offer to respect the differences between groups in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and the perception of foreign and domestic tourists. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no similar studies have been conducted in Banja Luka or the Republic of Srpska. Because this paper gives a new insight into the importance of tourist perception on restaurants offer, as part of gastronomic tourism and how to improve acceptability among visitors which aims to develop gastronomic tourism in Banja Luka and the Republic of Srpska. The obtained results indicate that tourists mostly positively assessed their experience regarding the restaurant's offer, that is, they enjoyed the variety of dishes, local specialties which was the case in similar studies in countries in the region. When it comes to planning the gastronomic development of a destination, the hospitality sector should pay attention to the perception of tourists in relation to the restaurant's offer, because it can significantly affect the development of the destination. The obtained results can be useful for the local sector, which has the competence of experts for marketing, tourist organizations, and restaurants in the area of Banja Luka and also in the Republic of Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to develop gastronomic tourism and give a chance to the development of new forms of tourism. Certain limitations emerged during the research. The main limitation was the examination of foreign tourists because their number was smaller in the current period. This is related to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which may be a topic for some future research.

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