



GAME MEAT AS PART OF THE GASTRONOMIC OFFER IN THE MAČVA AND POCERINA REGIONS

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Abstract:

Game meat is a high-quality food product. Despite its increasing presence in modern gastronomy, consumption remains limited due to high prices, low availability, and underdeveloped culinary practices. Game meat is recognized as a healthier and more sustainable alternative to conventional meat. This paper is motivated by the fact that the Mačva and Pocerina regions, with a well-established network of hunting associations, have significant potential to enhance the local gastronomic offer by incorporating game meat. The primary aim is to analyze the presence of game-based specialties in hospitality establishments. The research includes an overview of the local restaurant offer, identification of game meat types used, and the share of game dishes in the overall food offer. Special emphasis is placed on the role of such dishes in shaping regional identity and their potential to attract specific target groups interested in authentic gastronomic experiences. A disproportion has been observed between the available resources and the actual presence of game meat in the hospitality offer. Greater promotion and education could contribute to expanding use of game meat in local and regional gastronomy.

Keywords:

Game meat, gastronomic offer, regional identity, hospitality industry, Mačva and Pocerina.

INTRODUCTION

Many tourist destinations and catering establishments have recognized the importance of gastronomy for the development of tourism, and have begun to promote dishes that best represent their culture and traditions. In this way, restaurants are increasingly emphasizing authentic cuisine (Grubor *et al.*, 2022). Food has been increasingly seen as an integral part of the tourist experience, and the culinary tradition and heritage of a destination play an important role in creating and promoting the tourist offer. Sensory elements, such as taste and smell, remain in the memory of visitors and contribute to a memorable culinary experience (Park *et al.*, 2023). In order to enrich the menu and attract tourists, one of the proposals is to include game dishes in the catering offer, so that unusual, new experiences can be discovered (Senchik *et al.*, 2020; Rebello *et al.*, 2022). Consumers who take care of their diet increasingly prefer products with a favorable nutritional composition, lower fat content, but at the same time seek new, authentic flavors. These trends have stimulated the growth of interest in alternative sources of meat that can be used as a substitute

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for traditional livestock products. Thanks to these properties, game meat has the potential to respond to modern consumer demands and occupy a more significant place in the diet and gastronomic offer (Tomasevic *et al.*, 2018). Game meat represents an important segment of consumption among certain groups of consumers, particularly in Europe, with restaurants playing a key role in meeting this demand. However, the growing trend of anti-hunting activism may jeopardize the stability of supply chains, thereby affecting the sustainability of certain sectors of the hospitality industry engaged in this market (Schulp *et al.*, 2014). One of the main obstacles to the consumption of game meat is the perception that it constitutes a primary source of pathogenic microorganisms. Nevertheless, numerous authors argue that such concerns are largely unfounded, as game meat is, in many respects, safer than livestock meat, especially in countries with strict veterinary regulations. Beyond health and safety considerations, barriers to consumption include high prices, limited accessibility and availability, specific sensory attributes such as taste and odor, and a lack of representation within established dietary habits (Czarnecka-Skubina *et al.*, 2022). According to Czarnecka-Skubina *et al.* (2022), game meat is most frequently consumed and prepared by hunters, their families, and close acquaintances.

The quality and taste of game meat are influenced by multiple factors, including species, age, sex, diet, hunting methods, and culinary preparation. The most commonly consumed species are wild boar, deer, and hare, with traditional preparation methods including stewing, roasting, boiling, and smoking. The specific knowledge required for proper preparation may also represent a limiting factor for broader use (Neethling *et al.*, 2016; Tomasevic *et al.*, 2018; Niewiadomska *et al.*, 2020; Czarnecka-Skubina *et al.*, 2022).

Tourism in the Mačva and Pocerina districts has been developing largely due to the pronounced rural characteristics of the region. Visitors are offered the opportunity to enjoy traditional food, natural surroundings, as well as activities such as hunting and fishing. Direct interaction with animals further enhances the authenticity of the rural experience. These features position Mačva as an attractive destination for rural tourism (Vasić Popović, A., *et al.*, 2023).

This study stems from the recognition that the Mačva and Pocerina regions, with their well-developed network of hunting grounds and active hunting associations, possess significant potential to integrate game meat into both gastronomic and tourism development. Game meat specialties can contribute to the preservation of local identity, the valorization of tourism offer, and the strengthening of the destination's competitiveness. The central research question concerns the extent to which these potentials have been utilized and the degree to which game meat dishes are represented in the offerings of hospitality establishments and in the dietary practices of the local population.

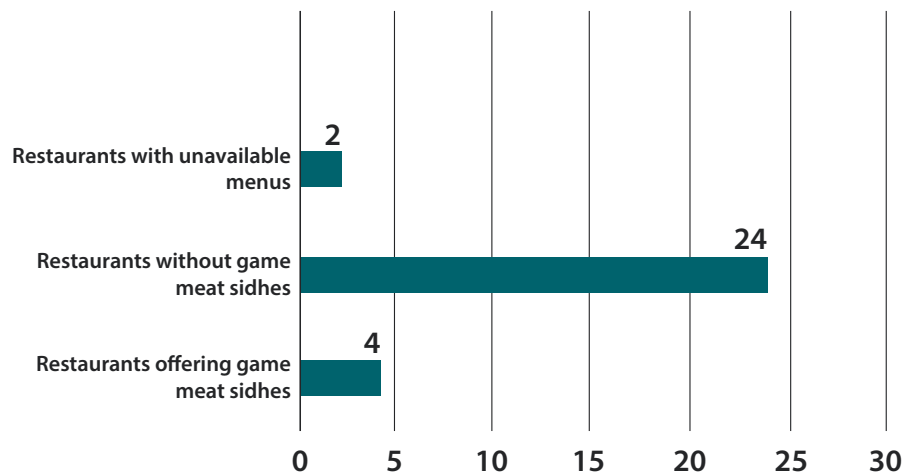
The primary aim of the research is to analyze, alongside a review of existing literature, the presence of game meat specialties in hospitality establishments. To achieve this, a survey of local restaurants was conducted, with a focus on identifying the types of game meat used and determining the share of game dishes within the overall gastronomic offer. Particular attention was given to the role of these dishes in shaping regional identity, as well as their potential to attract specific target groups of tourists interested in authentic gastronomic experiences.

RESULTS

The research encompassed 30 restaurants located within municipalities of the Mačva and Pocerina regions. The selection focused on establishments whose names included references to hunting, those situated in proximity to hunting areas, and restaurants operating within hunting associations. The findings indicate that only 4 restaurants (13.3%) included some form of game meat dishes in their menus, while in the remaining 24 (80%) there was a complete absence of such offerings. Additionally, in 2 restaurants (6.7%) operating under hunting associations, game meat dishes were prepared, but the menus were not publicly available, preventing a clear identification of their specific offerings. Figure 1 presents the numerical distribution of game meat dishes within the overall gastronomic offer in the Mačva and Pocerina regions, while Figure 2 illustrates the proportional representation of game meat dishes in the total offer.

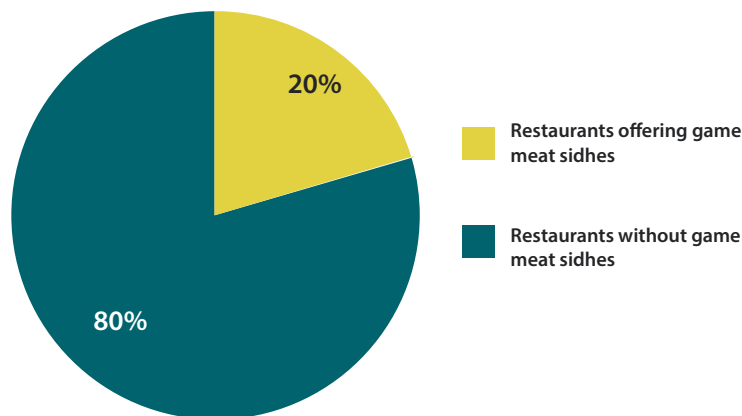


Figure 1. Total number of game meat dishes offered



Source: Author's Analysis

Figure 2. Percentage of game meat dishes in the total offering



Source: Author's Analysis

DISCUSSION

In the establishments where the presence of certain game meat dishes was recorded, the most frequently offered items were mixed game goulash and stuffed venison fillet, while other traditional hunting specialties were not identified in the analyzed menus of the surveyed restaurants. Such restaurants typically include a clear association with hunting in their names, signaling their thematic orientation. In some establishments whose ambience reflects hunting or fishing traditions, the gastronomic offer was more strongly oriented towards fish dishes, with game entirely absent. Furthermore, it was found that within the territory of the city of Šabac, there is only one specialized store offering cured meat products made from game. The results of the conducted research point to an extremely low representation of game meat dishes in the gastronomic offer of the Mačva and Pocerina regions. Although this area is rich in hunting grounds and has a well-developed network of hunting associations, only 6 restaurants (20%) included game meat dishes in their menus. This finding confirms a pronounced discrepancy between available resources and the actual use of game meat in the hospitality sector. The existence of dishes such as game goulash, stuffed venison fillet, and cured game meat products indicates a degree of consumer interest in traditional hunting specialties; however, their availability remains restricted to a small number of restaurants or establishments operating within hunting associations, whose menus are not publicly accessible, further reducing their visibility in the gastronomic market. The menu analysis also revealed that game meat dishes are positioned within a higher price category compared to other dishes. Additionally, the research established that fresh game meat can be obtained through local hunting associations.



CONCLUSION

The research indicates that the representation of game meat dishes in the gastronomic offer of the Mačva and Pocerina regions is highly limited. Despite the abundance of natural resources and the well-developed network of hunting associations in these areas, game meat has not been significantly integrated into the local gastronomic offer. The findings point to an underutilized potential that could contribute to the development of gastronomic tourism and enhance the overall attractiveness of the region. The restricted availability of game meat dishes can be attributed to several factors, including high prices and limited accessibility of game meat, its distinctive flavor profile that may not appeal to all consumers, as well as insufficient promotion and lack of awareness among hospitality professionals and potential consumers regarding the advantages of these gastronomic products. In certain restaurants with a thematic association to hunting, the focus has been placed primarily on fish and fishing-related gastronomy, indicating a redirection of the offer towards alternative culinary options. To improve the gastronomic landscape of the Mačva and Pocerina regions, it is necessary to reconfigure restaurant menus and incorporate a wider selection of game dishes. In this context, increasing the visibility of game meat in restaurants and fostering stronger cooperation with local hunting associations are essential steps. Such measures could not only enrich the gastronomic offer but also contribute to the preservation of local identity and the positioning of the region as a distinctive gastronomic destination.

The limitations of this study arise from the restricted availability of game dishes in restaurant offers, which consequently reduced the scope of the dataset. Therefore, future research should expand the sample and include fieldwork aimed at engaging both creators and consumers of the offer, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers that limit the preparation and consumption of game meat.

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