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**TOURISM  
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of  
the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries



**THEMATIC  
PROCEEDINGS**

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**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC  
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT  
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



# GASTRONOMY TOURISM AS A COMPETITIVENESS FACTOR OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS - MODEL OF LESKOVAC

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## **Abstract**

*Gastronomic tourism is an extremely important factor in creating a local brand that makes it one of the inevitable factors of competitiveness of tourist destinations. Food and drinks typical for an area may be an important differentiating toll used for evaluating the value of tourist destination. The paper deals with gastronomic events and products of Leskovac, which would be sufficiently distinctive to differentiate this city from other gastronomy tourism destinations. In order for selection and manner of presentation of authentic gastronomy products, it was performed a survey of employees in restaurants in the mentioned area. The processed data are used as a predictor for the model of gastronomic identity of Leskovac.*

*Keywords: gastronomy identity, competitiveness factor of tourist destination, city of Leskovac*

## **Introduction**

Gastronomy is one of the basic factors of tourist destination attractiveness. Local gastronomy represents one of characteristics of destination that increases tourists' intension to come back and visit it again. Specific gastronomy experience is the base of marketing mix of destination, because it provides different variety identification such as: gastronomic products, art and custom of preparing and consuming food, sensory elements (appearance, smell, taste...), source of food (organic food, national cuisine, food of local producers...), methods of preparing food, ways of serving food, its harmonization with local drinks,

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environment that food and drinks are served (catering facilities, markets...) and other. Sensory experience during consumption local drinks and food is the essence of touristic experience because it provides activity and fun (Kim et al., 2009). During their travel, tourists spend about 40% of their money on the food. As part of transformation, food and drinks are of essential support for tourism (tourists necessary have need for food) because they have grown in to main reason for visiting some of destinations (Mitchell, 2003; Hall, 2003).

### **Gastronomic tourism as a factor of competitiveness of a tourist destination**

At its beginning, gastronomic tourism has grown more and more every year. Number of consumers for this kind of tourism has grown thanks to the big number of culinary shows on the TV. Although big number of people claims that one of the pleasures on these trips are searching and tasting different kinds of food is essential, the reality is much different. Massive market and popular destinations bring to saturation some of the diet and after a short period of time people are asking for certitude from local and familiar food. Until recently the food has just been part of tourist offer, although the food has much bigger role. Nowadays, the food has got attention that it needs. Today, food represents status symbol, identity, life style, and the matter of taste, freshness and quality are known as leading element in catering services. In certain moments, when it comes to food, tourists can search for experiences that are not familiar to them. Searching for new and unfamiliar experiences can also refer to food. Tourism is offering new chances for tasting food. New experience with food can be dully: new ingredients and flavors that tourists didn't try before or new ways of preparing familiar food. Making that top feeling consuming food makes gastronomic tourism.

Branding destination means making a picture of place that tourist will remember and it will separate it from other places. By opinion of many management organizations, local gastronomy is important part of branding (Okumus et al., 2013). For the purpose of branding, there are taken many security measures because of geographic, cultural and climate factors (Carraa et al., 2015).

Gastronomy and gastronomic tourism can be the potential reason for visiting a tourist destination (Sirše, 2015). Local cuisine and gastronomic products are second in the series of factors of tourist destination (Enright

& Newton, 2005). The food is physiological need, but also sociological and cultural activity. When consuming food, tourist doesn't just satisfy his hunger, but also experiences local culture. Requests of tourists for food are manifesting in different intensity across 2 motives: some tourist are traveling because of gastronomic experience, while others perceive local gastronomy as part of cultural experience.

Gastronomy which is a characteristic for some region, determinates the specific touristic destination. Competitiveness stands out as a critical impact on tourist destination in the competitive world market (Enright & Newton, 2005). People are more interested to be directly present when food is preparing then to consume industrial products. According to Kim (2009) there are nine enogastronomic (wine and food) motivational factors: exciting experience, escape from routine, health care, authentic experience, sense of community... These factors are variable depending on the demographic factors (gender, age and education) and psychological factors (Jackson, 2009). Wine and food tourist doesn't visit destination just for getting education, but also to experience wine culture and to feel another emotion (Vigano, 2003). Many people who live in big cities would rather choose more rural destination, just because of beauty of the nature. The possibility to combine food chain, from the very beginning to the end result brings full experience (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2016). The development of gastronomy in certain destination brings to the full experience that guests have. Gastronomy tourists especially visit some places to taste local specialties. Gastronomic tourism is becoming very significant. In some contexts it is the same as see or mountain. Advantages of gastronomic tourism are: creating completely high-quality product, development off the season, development of rural areas, motivation for management, employment and self-employment, cherish the culture and tradition... But still, this potential isn't fully used. Food and drinks aren't just gastronomic products but they are also brands of some places, and they need to be emphasized with marketing assets. People need to have consciousness about attributes that certain destination has. The goal in gastronomic industry are local and foreign tourists of all ages, with high or medium-high spending power and experienced travelers (Williams et al., 2014).

Basic characteristics of gastronomic tourism:

- Gastronomic tourism is seasonally adjusted, it can be performed throughout whole year (Sahin, 2015);

- Gastronomic tourism is a new form of a positive trend, where tourists can stay at short period of time – usually for the weekend;
- Gastronomy contributes to the context of traditional vacation;
- Gastronomic tourists want high-quality product which indicate on high-quality relation with caterer;
- Gastronomic tourists look for connection between gastronomic product and local history, tradition and culture. They are interested on every occasion that helps them to get to know the destination they are in.

Gastronomic experience is very important part of marketing mix of a destination because it allows tourists to feel and get to know the place. In today's tourism business where competitiveness of marketing already exists, marketing is a complex phenomenon. Aggravating circumstances during the formation of marketing mix of one destination is different purpose of visiting (Uner, 2014). Current efforts are focused on opening ranking lists to see quality of the product. For the purpose of branding there are taken many security measures of geographic, cultural and climate factors (Carraa et al., 2015).

### **Model of gastronomic identity of Leskovac**

Concept of gastronomic identity is built on the influence of environment (geographic, climate factors and local products), sociological characteristics (economic and social factors and legal regulations) and culture (history, tradition, religious affiliation, ethical affiliation...) (Figure 1).

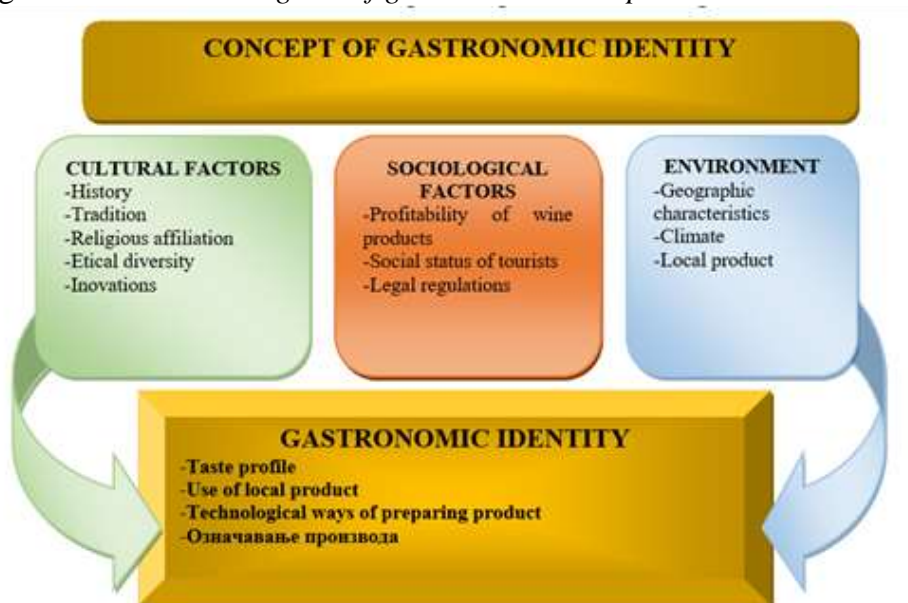
Leskovacka kotlina is a part of macro region of Serbia. Leskovacka kotlina alone represents micro regions in South Serbia. It extends in behalf of Rodopski system (Serbian-Macedonian mass), in the central part of the flow of Southern Morava, between Vranjske, on south and Niske kotline on north of the country. Leskovacka kotlina is on central part of Balkan Peninsula. It is one of the biggest in Serbia. Main streams in Leskovacka kotlina is South Morava, in which are 4 more rivers flowing in: Veternica, Pusta reka, Jablanica and Vlasina, as well as smaller number of streams. Because of that Leskovacka kotlina is divided on smaller regions: Leskovacko polje (central part of kotlina), Porecje, Jablanica, Pusta reka etc... Toward south Leskovacka kotlina is surrounded by mountains Goljak, Kukavica and Ostrozuba.

East side is also surrounded by mountains: Krusevica, Babicka gora and Selicevica. On west side there are Pasjace, Vidojevce, Arbanaske mountains and Radan Mountain. The climate is mild, moderate continental with average temperature about 11,10°C, rainfall 625.40mm and mild elevation 210-240 m, extremely suitable for life. Moderate continental climate with given latitude of 430, elevation 210-240m and land had perfect affect to create perfect life. Fruits, first of all juicy paprika, are the mark of this little city. On that, you can add tradition of baking barbecue and you have cuisine with “strong character”.

In terms of territorial affiliation Leskovacka kotlina includes bigger part of Jablanicki okrug and that: Lebane, Leskovac, Vlasotince, Medvedja and Bojnik. The biggest community is city of Leskovac, but not just in county, but also in the whole country.

Out of total number of population, on territory city of Leskovac, economic active population is 41,24%, out of which 26,53% renewed their interests, and 14,71% are unemployed. Percentage of economic inactive population is much bigger then economic active population. The biggest percentage are pensioners with 21,57%, on the second place are children less than 15 years old with 14,57% (ALER, 2013).

Figure 1: *Schematic diagram of gastronomic concept*



Source: *Authors*

By number of employed population the most common industries are: food industry, pharmaceutical industry, wood processing industry, chemical and textile industry. The largest number of employees works in the food industry, after that in pharmaceutical industry.

Within food industry, on territory city of Leskovac the most common is production of fruit, vegetables and meat. The total number of companies within this production is 116. And number of employees is total of 1088. Mesokombinat d.o.o. Leskovac is the modern and classical industry who works import and export of meat. It is located in village Turekovac, on about 10km away from Leskovac. There, on 8 hectares are objects-slaughterhouse and land who extends on 7000m<sup>2</sup>. On its own production, Meskombinat has all kinds of meat and over 60 smoked meat products. Special place is saved for Leskovacko grill meat, product with the longest tradition in preparing. Beside these activities, Meskombinat deals with import and export fresh meat (beef and pork).

Another firm is Jugprom d.o.o. Leskovac, already several years before is adapting 9000 tones of various fruit, which allows export of almost 7500 tones of frozen fruit on European market, which provides profit about 7000 000 € (ALER, 2013).

Out of 17083 employees on territory of Leskovac, 143 people are providing services of accommodation (Hotels “ABC”, “Hajat S”, “Gros”...) and restorants (“Cap-cap”, “Princ”, ”Zlatno bure”, “Dale 11”, “Koliba”, “Gurman”...).

Planning and implementation of gastronomic tourism is very complex, because the key of success is in harmony between producers and owners of hotel objects (Brunori & Rossi, 2000). Communication between hotel owners and producers takes place indirectly which additionally makes things harder to purchase wine in catering industry. Despite the fact that most destinations are visited by low-budget tourists, local food and wine are attracting different kind of people. Practical proof of this theory are many manifestations. On territory of Leskovac the most significant manifestation that represents city is “Leskovcka rostiljada”, which is held every year in September, for 20 years. It lasts 7 days and in that 7 days, it is visited by over 500 000 people, from all over the country and abroad. This manifestation is followed by series of events such as fireworks, preparing the biggest hamburger for Guinness book of records.

Picture 1: *Preparing the biggest hamburger for Guinness book of records.*



Source: [www.juznevesti.com](http://www.juznevesti.com).

Of all existing manifestations on territory of the city we should also mention manifestations who take places in rural areas, such as:

- “PIHTIJADA” in village Grabovnica, taking place in January;
- “DANI JAGODE” (Days of strawberries) in village Dusanovo, taking place in Jun;
- “DANI VISNJE” (Days of cherries) in village Lipovica, taking place in July;
- “DANI KRUSKE” (Days of pears) in Vucije, taking place in August;
- “DANI PAPRIKE” (Days of paprika) in village Lakosnica, taking place in September;
- “DANI POVRTARA” (Days of farmers) in village Nomanica, taking place also in September;
- “IZLOZBA KRAVA I JUNICA” (Exhibition of cows and heifers) in Leskovac, taking place in September;
- “DANI MEDA” (Days of honey) in Leskovac, taking place in October;
- “KROMPIRIJADA” (Days of potato) in village Pecenjevac, taking place also in October.

Picture 2: *(Days of paprika) in village Lakosnica.*



Source: [www.rominfomedia.rs/rm/category/leskovac/page/31](http://www.rominfomedia.rs/rm/category/leskovac/page/31).

Based on the census of agriculture from 2012, in Leskovac region there are 1459,72 hectare with vine variety. More over 10863 producers own vineyards. Production of the wine is characterized with small quantity, but large number of producers. Produced wine is usually for family use or local market, and producers are usually placed in Vlasotince and Leskovac. Some of more famous vinery's are "Filipajac" from Vlasotince, "Vinarija Cirkovic" from Kozare, but they are only producing wine for local market (Jaksic, 2015).

### **Methodology**

The sample contained 52 examinees, who are working in different facilities in Leskovac. The questionnaire was send to examinees by mail, after a conversation with managers from catering objects. The largest number of examinees were males, from 31 to 40 years old. Also, the largest number of examines were with finished High school and 89,4% have finished hospitality and tourism school. The biggest number of examinees have 6 to 10 years of experience.

Table 1: *Sociodemographic characteristics of examinees*

Gender: Male 68,3% Female 31,7%	Hospitality and tourism school: Yes 89,4% No 10,6%
Age: ≤20 1,9% 21-30 28,8% 31-40 37,5% 40-50 23,1% 51-60 6,7% ≥61 1,9%	Working experience  ≤5years 16,3% 6-10 35,6% 11-15 20,2% 16-20 27,9%
Level of education: High school 30,8% Higher school 52,9% Master studies 10,6% PHD 5,8%	

Source: *Authors*

In this questionnaire there were questions necessary for differentiation of gastronomic products that examinees consider indispensable for making gastronomic brand. Groceries were divided into groups: meat, fruit, sweets and drinks. The rest of questioner was referring on ways how to prepare food on traditional or modern way.

### Results of work and discussion

One of the goals of this research was to establish perception of technique preparing food and drinks, from local products to national brand. Dominant opinion of 42,2% of examines is that they prefer preparing food according to technical conditions.

Table 2: *Perception of examines about technique of preparing food*

Technique of preparing and presentation food	%
Specifically modern	10,6%
Traditional preparing, but modern presentation	11,5%
Some traditional- Some modern	26,9%
Preparing by traditional technique and traditional presentation	46,2%
Specifically traditional	4,8%

Source: *Authors*

The attitude by majority examinees is that they prefer preparing food on traditional way, but they like presentation on modern way. Also, this

attitude is qualified by minimal investment in training staff. After that, examinees were asked about local products on territory of Leskovac, but also which product can go into menus in local restaurants.

Table 3: *Traditional gastronomic products in city of Leskovac*

Type of fruit that you consider traditional for Leskovac?	What drink would you suggest to be part of national meal in Leskovac?
Berries 27,9% Apple 5,8% Quince 65,4%	Rakija 61,5% Wine 24% Juice 2,9% Water 11,6
Which product from meat or fish you consider product of Leskovac?	Which type of meat you consider necessary for meal in Leskovac?
Bacon 44,2% Roast beef 21,2% Pork 20,2% Sausage 10,6% Smoked trout 3,8%	Pork meat 36,5% Veal meat 6,7% Lamb 10,6% Beef 46,2%
From suggested sweets pick one you would like to national meal in Leskovac?	
Pumpkin pie 33,7% Mus with raspberries 4,8% Racalj 43,3% Tufahije 18,3%	

Source: *Authors*

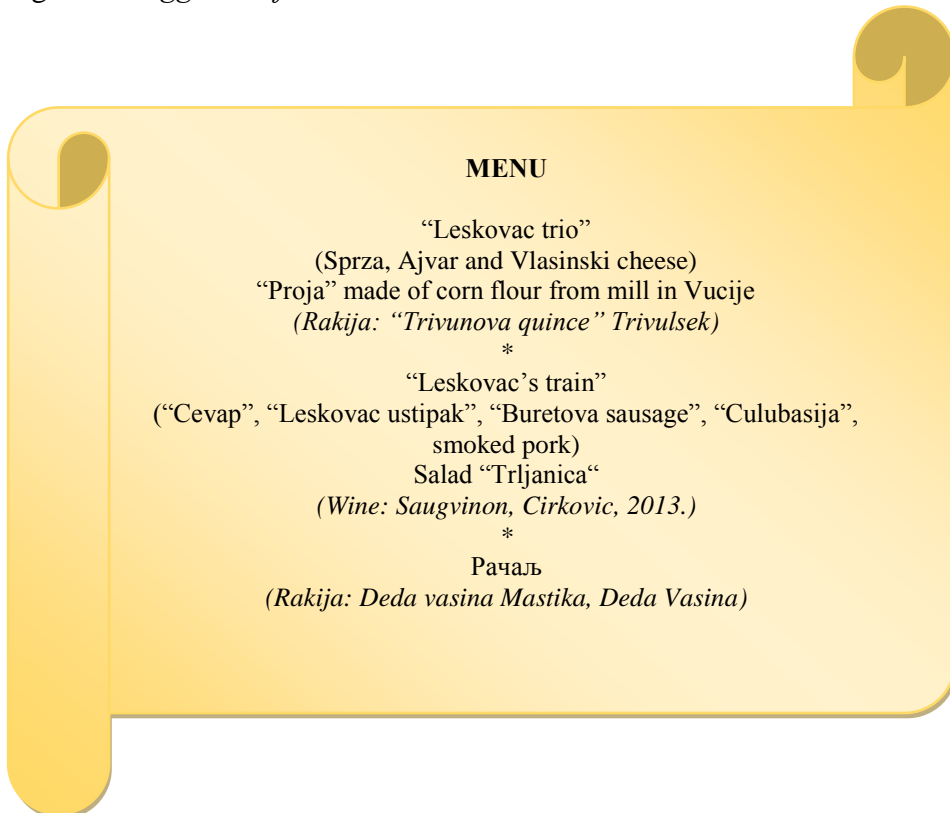
The results indicate that examinees consider that quince-fruit and pork-product of meat are the traditional meal in Leskovac. When it comes to drinks that they would suggest as part of national meal, the majority of people said rakija. Also majority thinks that beef is necessary for national meal in Leskovac. And as for sweets they seed racalj. The bacon as product of meat could represent a problem for use for some kind of people. Many people do not consume meat because of religious reasons.

### **Practical display of gastronomic model as a part of identity of Leskovac**

On behalf of research that is been done in Leskovac, as gastronomic and tourist destination, this city has one of a kind specialty that it goes perfectly with all drinks. Practical model has for purpose to present region through its food and drinks. Here is the menu that represents mix of

traditional diet of locals in Leskovac, innovative technique of preparing and presentation of food and its harmonization with local region.

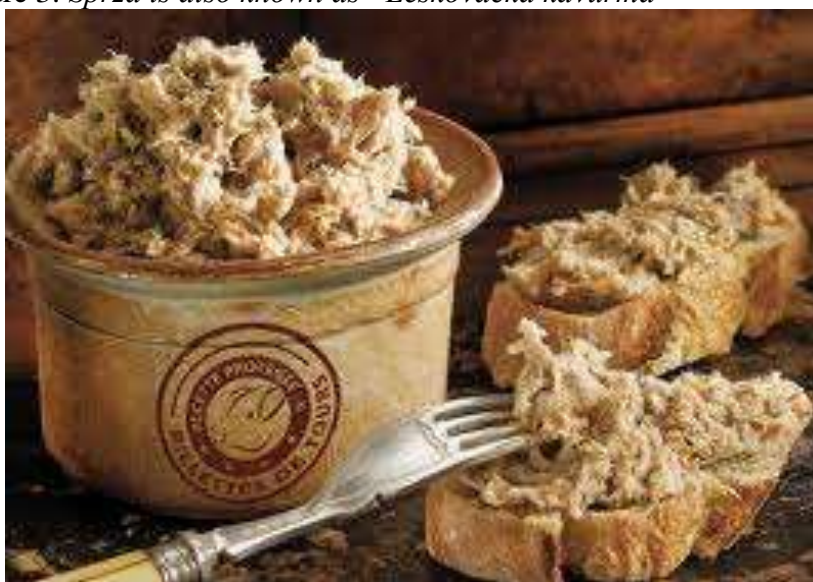
Figure 2: *Suggestion for menu in Leskovac's restaurants*



Source: *Authors, based on the questionnaire results*

The introductory dish “Leskovacki trio” is consisting of traditional sprza, ajvar and Vlasotinacki cheese followed by proja, made with white corn flour, from the famous mills in Vucije. Sprza is also known as “Leskovacka kavurma”, which is a real delicacy and it can be served as worm or cold appetizer. Accompanied by Leskovac’s brand ajvar, this dish is spicy and pleasant at the same time. Strong sense from “Leskovacki trio” can be diluted with proja from white corn flour. The indispensable part of this traditional dish is rakija, made from Leskovac’s quince, which it belongs to the best sort of quinces in the World.

Picture 3: *Sprza* is also known as “*Leskovacka kavurma*”



Source: [www.saveursdefrance.es](http://www.saveursdefrance.es)

“Leskovacki voz” is traditional way of serving barbecue in Leskovac. The segments of serving consists of uniform time intervals where the barbecue is served. “Leskovacki cevap” is delicacy from minced beef meat, shaped like mini sausage. “Leskovacki ustipak” is also delicacy that is made of minced meat with hard cheese, garlic and hot pepper. “Buretova kobasica” is the only delicacy from grill that you don’t especially use beef meat, but you can use combination of beef and pork meat. The best ratio for perfect sausage is 70% of pork meat and 30% of beef. Pork meat is ground to larger pieces while beef is ground on smaller ones, so that mixture would combine well. From spices you add salt, pepper, garlic and when the compound is good enough, you can start filling natural intestine. “Culbastija” is traditional steak from beef, thinned and grilled on barbecue. “Dimljena vesalica” is pork bacon, smoked and roasted on the grill. These specialties represent temperament of Leskovac’s cuisine, and these dishes are followed by salad “Trljanica”. In summer this salad is prepared with roasted paprika, garlic and sunflower oil, but in winter its prepared with dried paprika’s and just a little bit of onion. Spicy and temperamental taste of these dishes was awarded along with “Leskovacko vino” of production Cirkovic, Sovinjon, picked 2013. This will circularize the authentic experience of Leskovac’s gastronomic offer.

“Racalj” is famous dessert on South Serbia, and many of examinees considered that exactly this dessert should be the mark of this region. We must mention “Deda Vasina” rakija, made in distillery Deda Vasa from Leskovac. This rakija is the pride of our region, because it has very pleasant aroma and it’s only Mastika made in Serbia.

Picture 4: “Deda Vasina” rakija, made in distillery Deda Vasa from Leskovac.



Source: <http://www.agromedia.rs/agro-teme/prehrambena-industrija>

## Conclusion

Recent researches show that gastronomic tourists would rather spend their time to socialize with their friends, then to cook family meals. With this type of tourists it is necessary to wake up their interest that they could also spend time with friends on gastronomy trip. Tasting food and drinks can be also fun activity that can be done with a group of friends. Some tourists visit a destination because of sincere interest for different excitement, while others just tend to show their possibility of paying. For tourists who are searching for real gastronomic experience, tourist agencies can be helpful. That kind of tourists, beside catering facilities, can visit culinary schools and then have chance to prepare something on their own, as well as taste that and sell like traditional product of that region. Thus, this is excellent form of marketing.

The richness of Serbian cuisine comes from hers geographic, national and cultural diversity, which were created by mixing different populations for centuries. Influence on Serbian cuisine had Greek, Bulgarian, Turkish and Hungarian culture.

The city of Leskovac is synonym for the best barbecue in all of Serbia. In diet of that region in large scale is present paprika. From paprika you can make entrees, soup, main courses, salads such as: paprika in sour cream, stuffed paprika with cheese, Serbian soup, djuvec, papazjanija, salad from roasted paprika and pasteurized paprika.

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