

## **INFLUENCE OF KAJMAK AS A CULTURAL ASSET ON THE GROWTH OF THE TOURIST OFFER OF WESTERN SERBIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Kajmak as a Serbian traditional dairy product, suitable for mass consumption and prepared in a traditional way has a special flavor and as such is an essential factor not only in traditional dining but also in restaurants based on national gastronomy. The main goal of the research is to determine how by registering on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Serbia and preserving the craft of traditional production and with popularization of domestic products, kajmak can have a significant impact on the growth of the tourist offer of Western Serbia as an important autochthonous gastronomic product.*

**Key Words:** *tourist offer, Western Serbia, culinary tourism, kajmak, tourism development*

**JEL classification:** *L66, Q1, Z32*

### **Introduction**

Western Serbia as a tourist region with idyllic natural attractions, welcoming hosts and recognizable hospitality of its Mačva, Kolubara, Zlatibor and Morava regions might easily become an ideal holiday destination. Along with the benefits of mountain, rural and spa tourism, its well-known delicious gourmet cuisine could be used to support the development of culinary tourism as well.

The research is divided into several phases. First, we assess the economic impact of food tourism sector by rating Western Serbia on the

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gastronomic world map, and also deal with the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of Serbia.

Then, we explore traditional and contemporary methods of kajmak production, manufacturing premises, preservation of traditional craftsmanship practice in order to determine the impact of registering kajmak as an autochthonous gastronomic product on tourism development and inbound tourism industry.

### **Current trends and gastronomic scene of national cuisine**

Some predictions are that by 2025 there will be around 350 million jobs in tourism industry. Over the past decades tourism has also shown enormous resilience to all ups and downs in other fields of economy and no matter what is going on, this industry is constantly growing (Bejatović & Bugarčić, 2018).

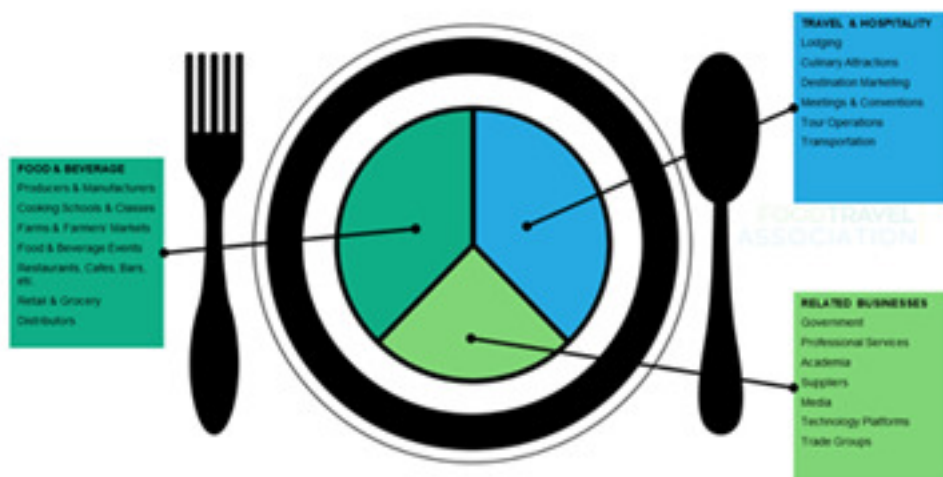
Since food is the most delicious part of travelling itself, culinary tourism provides a memorable and unique food and drink experience. When it comes to Millennials and their ever increasing influence on food and tourism industry, and the fact that they will be a leading products and services customer of the global tourism market, it is obvious that extensive use of national cuisines and traditional products marketing offer an immense potential for culinary tourism development. Of course, it goes without saying that the above mentioned generation is obsessed with documenting their life on social media, because of the phrase *Pics or It Didn't Happen*. Therefore, Millennials might come in handy for enhancing tourism industry, i.e. the more overnight visitors, the higher revenues.

Culinary tourism involves several sectors of the regional economy that frequently have little interaction: farmers/ranchers, retail establishments, restaurants, and processors. This organization may require new markets and institutions to build and maintain the supply of and demand for local foods in the region. Markets for local foods and beverages must be supported and developed (Green & Dougherty, 2008). Innovations are the most important drivers in contemporary economies and much of the efforts policy makers and many stakeholders aim to support innovation (Zakić et al., 2017).

Making a travel budget might not include the admissions to museums, but a certain percentage of the total vacation budget is inevitably spent on food and drinks (everyone must eat and drink). Travelers can now be considered food travelers. Nowadays, most travelers want to experience the excitement of wine tours, chocolate factories or small, traditional meat producers. Therefore, why shouldn't we ensure that the Western Serbia region reaches its full potential of the visitor economy? In other words – *kajmak*, as an intangible cultural heritage, should be one of the key factors for tourism development.

Food consumption in tourism is not a simple repeat of the daily eating habits and routines. Even in the daily life, variety and change are necessary complements to the routines and habits. Thus, in tourism itself a form of change from the daily routine, quest for various foods is one of appealing experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Picture 1: *The 20 Interrelated sectors of the food and beverage tourism industry*



Source: <https://www.worldfoodtravel.org/cpages/about>

The tourism sector recorded the highest growth in the world economy, and is strongly supported by the new possibilities. The effect of the revolution continues to change the nature of contemporary tourism on a day-to-day base (Perišić et al., 2017). According to the Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia in October 2018, in accommodation facilities in the Republic of Serbia, 302673 tourist arrivals were registered, which is an increase by 7,5% when compared to the same period 2017. In relation

to October 2017, the number of foreign tourists' arrivals increased by 12,1%, while the number of domestic tourists arrivals increased by 3,2%. In October 2018, the number of 749318 tourist overnight stays was recorded, of which 58.5% were made by domestic tourists, and 41.5% were made by foreign tourists (Monthly statistical bulletin 2018).

Compared to October 2017, the number of overnight stays increased by 8,6%. In relation to the same period 2017, in October 2018 the number of overnight stays made by foreign tourists increased by 10,3%, while the number of overnight stays made by domestic tourists increased by 7,5%.

Picture 2: *Number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays by types of tourist resorts*

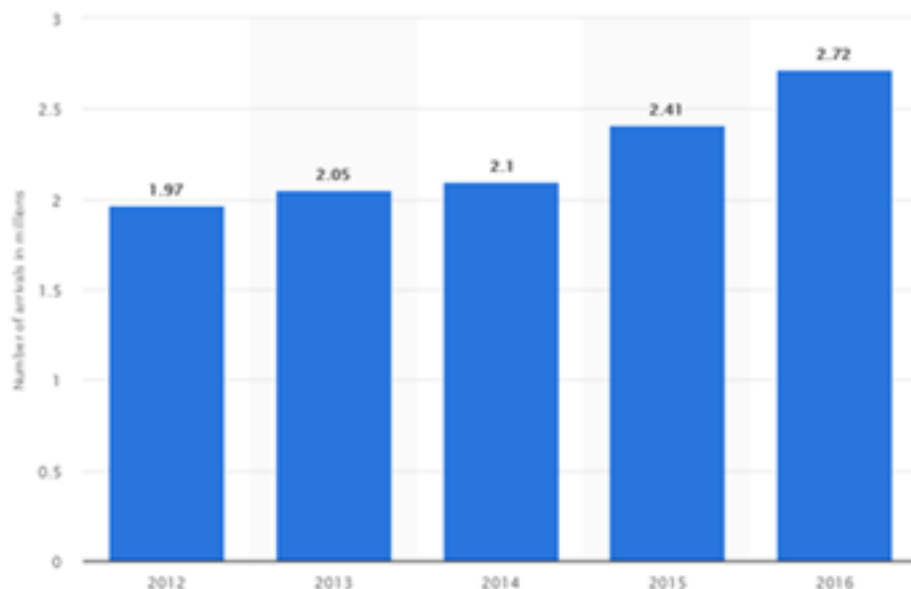
	Površina Crne Gore / Republic of Serbia									
	Arrivals					Nights				
	Urban administrative centers	Spa resorts	Mountain resorts	Other tourist resorts	Other resorts	Urban administrative centers	Spa resorts	Mountain resorts	Other tourist resorts	Other resorts
2017										
X	119,1	39,7	42,7	70,3	9,8	240,4	179,9	122,0	124,6	22,9
XI	84,3	23,3	28,6	46,9	7,9	174,7	111,3	86,8	91,6	18,2
XII	91,0	28,6	45,3	48,3	8,3	182,3	90,3	161,0	86,4	18,6
2018										
I	57,2	24,3	56,0	33,4	5,8	128,8	90,1	249,4	67,8	13,7
II	63,7	23,6	59,2	34,1	6,0	137,4	87,6	271,1	73,9	13,6
III	86,1	32,3	46,3	47,8	8,2	184,0	115,9	181,9	93,2	18,2
IV	106,9	46,0	50,4	68,2	11,9	216,7	182,4	161,6	126,3	27,8
V	133,5	60,4	62,9	100,2	14,8	272,1	243,5	203,4	170,5	34,1
VI	118,1	66,6	51,5	77,1	15,2	248,4	286,7	198,6	155,4	34,5
VII	141,1	83,3	49,1	78,5	18,6	286,4	372,5	206,2	183,6	43,3
VIII	143,4	103,1	57,2	83,3	34,3	300,8	486,1	222,3	186,0	91,1
IX	133,4	51,8	42,3	70,7	15,8	258,1	278,1	114,3	140,7	33,1
X	128,9	44,2	43,6	74,9	11,1	263,9	198,2	120,1	142,5	24,6
I-X 2018	111,5	111,4	107,5	109,4	122,6	116,0	114,4	105,4	111,5	126,3
I-X 2017										

Source: <http://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G20193001.pdf>

Agro-industrial sector plays an important role in the economy of Serbia. According to the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of Serbia for the period 2014-2024 (2014) in 2024, agriculture should be the sector whose development is based on knowledge, modern technologies and standards, domestic and demanding foreign markets offering innovative products and manufacturers provide a viable and stable income. Similarly, Strategy and policy development of the industry of the Republic of Serbia 2011-2020 (2011) predicts the growth of industrial production, investment, innovation and exports, as well as speeding up

the reform process. If we take into account environmental factors that have a strong influence on agriculture and food industry of Serbia, such as globalization, the rise of competition, the process of Serbia's European integration, technological changes, changes in the needs and preferences of customers, etc., as well as the projections of strategic documents, innovation is one of the keys of profitability and competitive advantage in the agro-industrial sector in Serbia (Zakić et al., 2017).

Picture 3: *Number of arrivals in tourist accommodation in Serbia from 2012 to 2016 (in millions)*



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/413276/number-of-arrivals-spent-in-short-stay-accommodation-in-serbia/>

### **Paper results and discussion**

It is difficult to determine with certainty the exact beginning of kajmak production in the regions of Western Serbia. However, based on findings, it can be concluded that the whole production process has existed for more than 200 years. A traditional production of kajmak began a long time ago in special dairy processing rooms within the households. Small auxiliary rooms, known as 'mlekari' (dairies), used to be built close to the central family house. The dairies were made of natural materials – stone, wood and metal (metal wedges) and the mixture of soil and water (mud). According to the research performed in a number of households in Čačak

municipality, Kraljevo, Lučani and Zlatibor, the following findings will explain whether and to what extent the traditional kajmak production has changed, and how the increased consumption led to the modernization of production, processing and distribution within mass production.

Production of kajmak is carried out as a homemade manufacture, based on the traditional manufacturing procedure. Traditionally-produced kajmak differs greatly from producer to producer and yields wide variation in product composition, characteristics and quality. The process comprises numerous steps that represent potential safety risks for consumption of kajmak as well as the remaining milk (Jokovic et al., 2008).

Traditional production of kajmak, as a homemade manufacture, is performed by family members and the traditional recipes are passed down through generations.

The rooms for kajmak production in the Western Serbia regions are called by different names. One of the most common names is 'mlekar' or 'mekar' (a dairy, a milkhouse). The roots of both words have the same meaning – *milk*. It was the word that kept having numerous variations depending on geographic location and linguistic diversity.

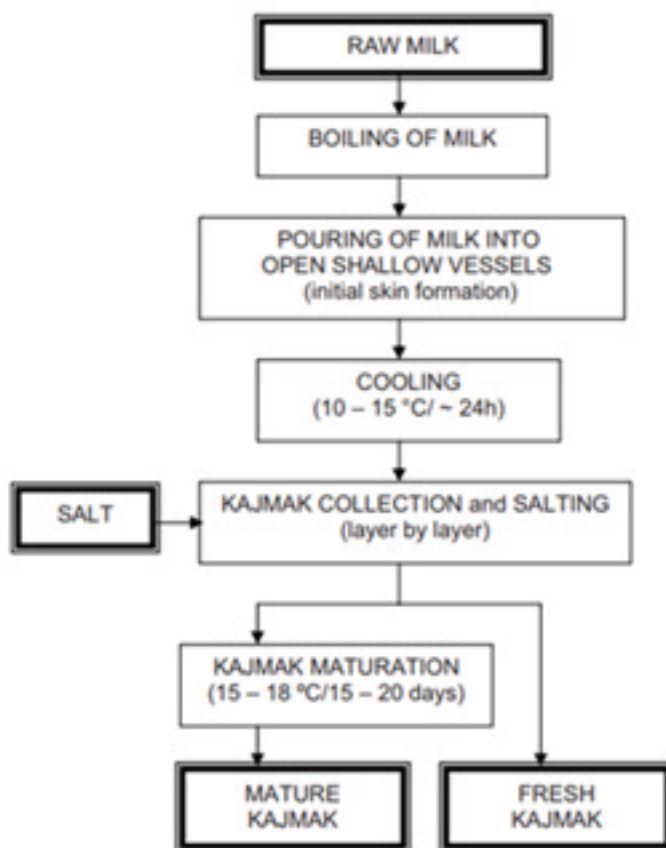
Since the landscape of Western Serbia is mostly hilly, with a predominantly mountainous climate, thus the mountainous style of these rooms. As already written, the most common construction materials were natural materials (stone, wood, soil, water...) since they were available, weather-resistant and durable. The foundations used to be made of stone, partially dug into the ground, bearing structure and walls were made of wooden boards and columns, and the roof structure was made of mixed materials such as wood shingles, stone slabs, hazelnut wood, tratch, mud, etc. It is important to point out that special care was taken to build walls. Since wood is a natural material, wood dissolution takes place over time and gaps are developed between the boards, it was of significant importance to use hardwood trees and, if possible – already dried wood, in order to prevent the presence of insects and rodents.

Industry development led to the application of different materials for building 'milk houses' (creameries, dairies). Stone and wood were replaced with building blocks and concrete, wood shingles were replaced with modern roof coverings, and ceramic tiles were used for floor

covering, instead of ground covering. In spite of obvious advantages of these changes in terms of production development, we cannot overlook their harmful effects as well – tradition and culture were drifting into oblivion.

Certain legal norms of the Republic of Serbia are against this traditional production method. The implementation of HACCP in a ‘milk house’ (creamery) cannot be realized until the milk house meets all of the requirements. While performing our research, we found out that none of our survey participants used traditional premises for kajmak production within their households. This is understandable since the production itself is significantly facilitated. No more worries about dissolved wooden walls, pots on earthen floor, insects and rodents, weather conditions. These premises enable almost totally controlled production conditions – air temperature, humidity, products storage as well as raw milk storage.

Picture 4: *The procedure od traditional kajmak production*



Source: <https://www.dairyjournal.org/articles/dst/pdf/2008/02/dst0743.pdf>

Consumers are now asking for better services. They are more specific with regards to content and the details of the arrangement. They are more cost conscious and often tend to make comparisons between two products (Perišić et al., 2017).

Based on the performed research, we can conclude that milk products, including kajmak, are made in a dairy. However, dairies are not to be considered the first and only places where kajmak is produced. The process of making kajmak involves other production sectors as well. The first and very important segment of kajmak production is a farm itself – animal breeder. Based on the findings of our research, performed within registered agricultural households that produce and sell kajmak, among other things, we concluded that throughout the regions of Western Serbia kajmak is traditionally made from cow's milk only. The breeds of dairy cows, which ensure top quality milk production, do not come from our regions, but mostly from Austria and Germany. They are imported under the name of the Simmental cattle. Regular and controlled feeding of this cattle breed ensures the increased quantity of milk of higher quality, in comparison to other cattle breeds. In smaller households, cows are milked twice of three times a day and milking is performed by hand, unlike robotic milking (automated milking) that is done in bigger households. Milking frequency depends on the age of dairy cows, which also affects the quality of milk itself – fat contents of milk. Younger cows are milked three times a day and their milk has lower fat content, whereas older cows are milked two times a day and their milk is higher in density and richer in fat content, which is suitable for kajmak production. Since most producers have both young and older cows on their farms, it is important to point that as soon as the milking and milk filtration have finished, the collected milk is mixed in order to achieve optimal quality and balanced milk fat percentage - which is required for kajmak production.

All surveyed producers stick to the food heritage – the kajmak production methods have been passed down from generation to generation. From the earliest period to the present time this process has been performed by women in families (housewives). As mentioned before, the kajmak production starts on the farm (stables). The first step is milking. Fresh collected milk is filtrated in special rooms for further processing in order to remove dirt and particles (physical removal of contaminants). Filtered milk is set in adequate pots and gradually heated to the boiling point. Thermal processing is carried out at moderate temperature for 10 to 15 minutes, including occasional milk fouling. Thermally processed milk is



then removed from the heat, poured into wide-bottomed pots, capacity of 5 to 7 liters, and kept in cold and dark rooms until the next day, in order to form a crust on top of the milk, the so-called 'creaming'. During the creaming, fats from milk rise to the surface to form cream layers. This is the result of gradual cooling. The creaming method is crucial for a proper kajmak production. After the crust has formed from the milk fats on the surface, a kitchen knife is used in order to make delicate cuts along the edge of the pot. In this way, kajmak is separated from the edges. This is very important step. If skipped, the surface layer shrinks and causes cracks across the surface. The separated surface layer is carefully removed, manually or using the French sauce spoon, and put in an adequate dish in which kajmak will be stored. Until a few years ago, the dishes for storing used to be 'karlica' (wooden bowls) or 'čabar' (wooden buckets), made of special type of wood. Modern times replaced those traditional wooden dishes with metal or plastic ones. Kajmak salting is one of the production methods that the surveyed households apply in their own way. It is a matter of individual choice that depends on personal preferences. Kajmak salting starts before the first crust layer of kajmak is placed in a bowl – a bit of salt is put on the bottom of the bowl, then kajmak is placed, and between every new layer the crusts are salted. Based on storage time (maturity), kajmak is classified into two types – young and old. There are several types of young kajmak: a day old kajmak, two-day-old kajmak, three-day-old and a week old kajmak. If storage time exceeds seven days, kajmak will turn into old kajmak. The production of old kajmak is basically not different from young kajmak production. The main difference is the period after the surface layers of kajmak are removed from top of milk – young kajmak is instantly put into wooden bowls, or metal dishes nowadays, and every single day a new layer of kajmak is added to the previous one, making sure that there is no air between the kajmak layers. Once the desired quantity is reached, a small amount of young kajmak is heated and kajmak reaches the heat-induced aggregation and pours over the surface of the dish. The dish covered with kajmak is closed and stored in a dark and cold room where maturation occurs and young kajmak turns into old kajmak. Old kajmak reaches its highest quality after the storage period of 6 months.

The previously described kajmak production method faces numerous obstacles when it comes to quality control. It is obvious that this kajmak has a specific and delicious aroma and quality. However, it also has certain flaws. Based on the survey results obtained from small

manufacturers, we came to the conclusion that the main problem we came across is the concept of quality standardization.

When it comes to a product quality assessment (kajmak assessment), small manufacturers usually apply food sensory analysis (use of human senses of touch, taste and smell in order to evaluate the quality of kajmak), hence a potential threat that industrial production of kajmak might establish primacy in the market.

There are only few industrial manufacturers in Western Serbia and we managed to have a conversation with one of them. The results were thoroughly analyzed.

The industrial method of kajmak production is completely the same as the one performed by small, family-run manufacturing. The homemade production has been passed down from generation to generation. The owner of the dairy claims that the production procedure has been carried out for more than 130 years (the recipe came from his grandmother, who passed it down to his mother, etc.) and it has never been changed. From the very first production that occurred more than 130 years ago, the method has been the same, except for slight modifications in terms of production process upgrading, in accordance with the market requirements. Since the kajmak production requires a lot of time, effort and hard work, and current market demands have been increasing, it is necessary to implement modern milk processing equipment under controlled conditions.

The beginning of the industrial production in this dairy was the moment when the old family house was renovated and repurposed – it was turned into ‘a dairy – milk rooms.’ Traditional dairies used to be very small, up to 10 square meters. The renovated house was turned into this 70 square meter dairy, due to the increased production. Therefore, in accordance with the regulatory requirements, the owner decided to implement the HACCP management system to ensure manufacturing competitiveness and legalization. The moment the implementation of these HACCP standards has been completed, all wooden bowls and metal pots sank into oblivion. Instead, the entire production involves small inventories made of stainless steel. Consumers’ satisfaction with the quality of kajmak increased the product demands on a monthly basis. However, traditional production process could have been neither modified nor streamlined. The analysis of the potential for production upgrading led to the conclusion that the quantity of milk thermal processing has been

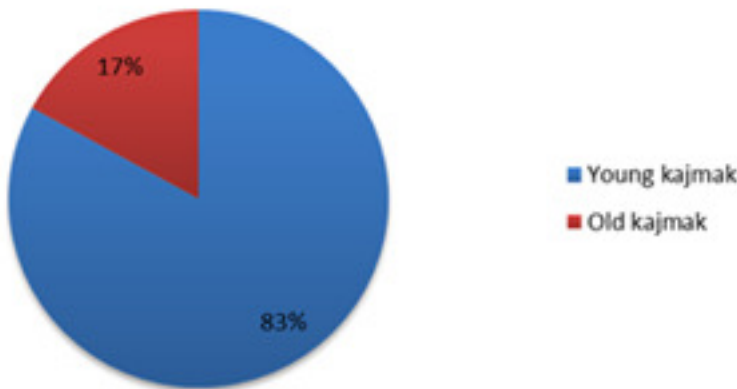
increasing, and, since current electric appliances for thermal processing were not able to meet the demands, the production was upgraded by milk pasteurization equipment, capacity of 5000l, which means that thermal processing takes a little bit more than two hours. Thermal processing does not affect the quality of milk, since the controlled conditions ensure maximal use and milk quality. Traditional copper pot and open fireplace gave way to modern technology and equipment, and cold mountainous air in wooden dairies was replaced with kajmak storage chambers that prevent temperature oscillation.

Having conducted the survey with the registered agricultural households regarding their kajmak production, we concluded that sales are mostly done at the markets in the nearest cities and towns (Čačak, Guča, Zlatibor,...). Based on the data analysis, we came to the conclusion that local market sales are rather 'safe and reliable', since qualified food inspection service collects kajmak samples on a daily basis in order to perform a phytosanitary control and ensures food safety.

Statistics on small manufacturers in the registered agricultural households of Western Serbia reveal that the average kajmak production on a weekly basis is 20kg. In contrast, the statistics on the industrial kajmak manufacturer, whose kajmak is sold in only few grocery stores, reveal that about 200 kg of kajmak is sold on a daily basis, which clearly shows that a commercialized dairy that applies the traditional production method, inherited from family ancestors but upgraded with technological innovations, produces 70 times more kajmak on a daily basis than a small manufacturer who adheres to traditional methods. The mentioned facts represent the statistical average for kajmak production on a weekly or daily basis, expressed in kilograms in accordance with their usual needs for product placement (embedded marketing). These values are significantly increased in both cases prior to important religious holidays, such as Orthodox Christmas, Easter, '*Slava*', etc.

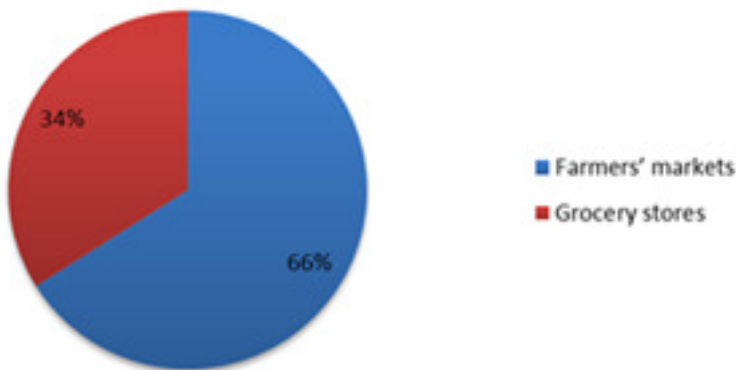
In order to fulfill one of the objectives of this study, we conducted a survey with the final consumers who provided us with consumers' insights for habits regarding consumption, purchase, quality and selection of kajmak. The examinees are adults aged 18- 65. The poll was available until we acquired answers from 100 examinees.

Picture 5: *Kajmak preferences*



Source: *Research conducted by us*

Picture 6: *Where are you buying kajmak*



Source: *Research conducted by us*

Based on the statistical chart, it is obvious that there is a great difference in preferences: 83% of the surveyed consumers prefer young kajmak, and only 17% of them would rather consume old kajmak. This was somehow expected since the survey was conducted in Western Serbia, whose population has been eating young kajmak for decades. Also, according to the data obtained from the surveyed food manufacturers, we concluded that the kajmak production in the mentioned region radically decreased, due to extremely low market demands.

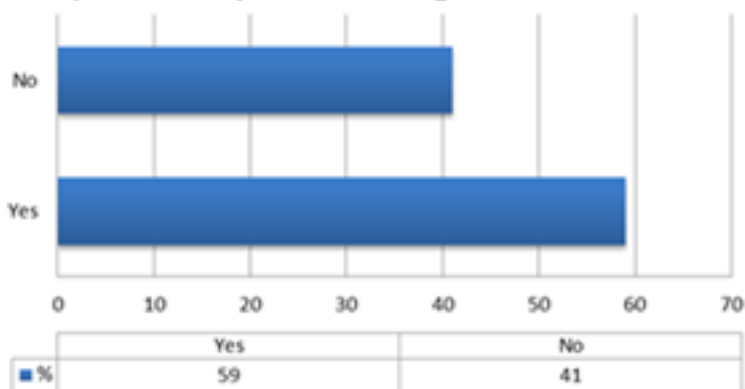
The old kajmak consumption prevails in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where people prefer the production and consumption of old kajmak, unlike the inhabitants of Serbia.

When it comes to buying kajmak, the presented survey shows that 66% of the surveyed consumers usually buy kajmak at farmers' markets, and 34% of the surveyed consumers prefer buying it in grocery stores.

Going to farmers' markets in order to buy kajmak is one of the traditional customs that have been practiced for decades in this region. Some consumers even have their 'own' seller at farmers' markets, and furthermore – there are those who pass down this habit from generation to generation because they avoid changes and different flavors of other producers. Most of small manufactures sell their dairy products in specialized facilities within the farmers' markets throughout the country. However, a small number of the surveyed consumers who buy their kajmak in grocery stores can be attributed to a rather limited choice in these stores. Most grocery stores offer a great variety of items and food products and yet, they do not sell kajmak. On the other hand, the sellers who do have kajmak in their grocery stores, offer one type of kajmak or one producer only.

When asked, "Do you order kajmak in catering establishments?", 59 % of the surveyed consumers responded affirmatively and 41% of them gave a negative answer. Formulating the research question in this way is the continuation of the previous one, since we came to the conclusion that most kajmak producers rely on their own constant customers. It is therefore expected that 41% of the surveyed participants do not consume kajmak in catering establishments because they are not familiar with the quality and taste of the offered product.

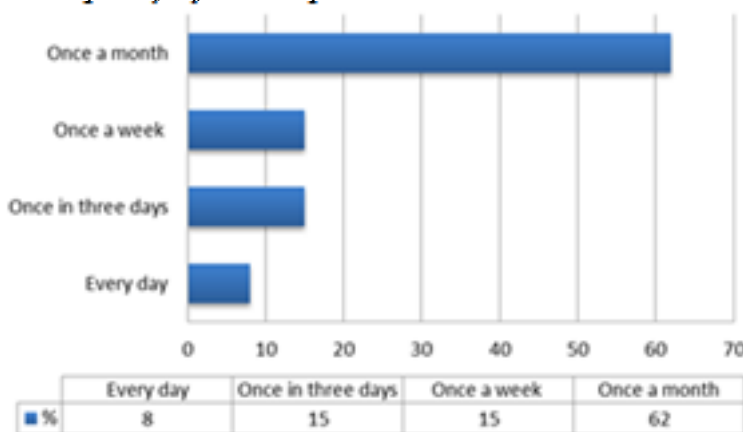
Picture 7: *Do you order kajmak in catering establishments*



Source: *Research conducted by us*

As for the frequency, 8% of the participants consume kajmak every day, 15% of them consume it once in three days, 15% of the participants consume it once a week and 62% of the surveyed consumers eat it once a month. These statistical indicators can be interpreted in different ways. If we take into account the recommendation provided by the World Health Organization – *the intake of high-fat food should be minimal*, it is expected that 62% of the surveyed participants eat kajmak rarely. Also, when it comes to an average Serbian customer and their tight monthly budget, the obtained results are understandable, knowing that certain types of kajmak are rather pricey.

Picture 8: *Frequency of consumption*



Source: *Research conducted by us*

## Conclusion

The rural participants' knowledge of traditional food is more locally oriented, unlike the people in urban areas - capital city, who knew only about the traditional products available on the market (both green/open market and supermarkets). This could also indicate the level of traditional food recognition on the national market. Only products with sufficient supply for the large market segments are recognized. Therefore, local producers should be supported to establish cooperatives to strengthen their market position and promote their food products while simultaneously contributing to the promotion of tourist offer of their regions (Stojanović et al., 2010).

Based on the performed research, we can conclude that the value of kajmak in the Western Serbia region is not only based on financial value

of the product, agricultural development and cattle breeding potentials or workforce recruitment. Kajmak is a significant element that influences the growth and development of culinary tourism. Most domestic and foreign tourists, regardless of the purpose of their travel, have to eat some food while staying in a certain country. Also, majority of tourists are aware of the significance of autochthonous gastronomic tradition and tasting new kinds of food in order to awake all their senses and experience something new and unique. Distinctive taste and aroma of kajmak can satisfy the most sophisticated palates and most demanding gourmands.

We came to the conclusion that regardless of the production place – either a small agricultural household or a modern dairy, kajmak is the product of crucial importance for the growth and development of culinary tourism, thus contributing also to the economic balance of the country.

A great variety of gastronomic specialties, such as the Karadorde Steak, 'Zlatibor Komplet lepinja' (flat bread bun filled with kajmak, eggs and meat gravy) or Serbian appetizers, contain young or old kajmak. However, a great number of other popular gastronomic specialties can be additionally refined by adding kajmak. Also, mass industrial production along with the preservation of traditional values and craftsmanship may lead to the kajmak production that meets all gastronomic and food law requirements. Such food product could be available in both grocery stores and restaurants of the European countries. If so, why shouldn't we make sure that *kajmak* gradually becomes the gastronomic symbol of our country? Once it happens, we can 'skin the cream off the milk' and reap the fruits of our labor.

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