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# Culinary trails in popularizing ethnic cuisines



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## Abstract

The aim of the article is to advance knowledge regarding the significant role played by culinary trail projects in promoting foods from ethnic groups residing in Podkarpackie, Poland's southeastern region. Podkarpackie's culinary heritage, cultural identities, and the specificity of its cuisine that contribute to the region's touristic potential are presented. Traditional and regional dishes of Podkarpackie are characterized by their originality and rich flavors, variety, and simplicity of preparation. They contribute to the region's tourist attractions. Many restaurants in Southeast Poland offer regional dishes, such as *kwaśnica*, *fuczki*, and *pierogi* with various fillings or stuffed cabbage rolls. Culinary trails can be a critical factor in promoting not only the region's ethnic food but its related culture and art as well.

**Keywords:** Ethnic groups, Culinary heritage, Regional product, Regional cuisine

## Introduction

The Podkarpackie region, located in southeastern Poland, includes areas historically inhabited by various ethnic groups [1–5]. The influence of the indigenous inhabitants, mainly Boykos and Lemkos, is not only of historical significance, but still persists in various areas. The Boyko (Boykos), being the largest ethnic group of the Rus' highlanders, occupied lands at the junction of the current three countries, namely Poland, Ukraine, and Slovakia. To the west, they bordered the Lemkos, while to the east, the Hutsuls. According to Ossendowski [6], they were poor, simple, hardworking, self-sufficient people, who supplemented their daily diet with products from the forest. They also worked in logging, sawmills, charcoal burning, and salt transportation using carts. They traded, mainly in food, between Hungary and Lviv. One can still admire the preserved wooden religious buildings, which are the most important cultural achievement of this community. The wooden Orthodox churches in the Bieszczady Mountains attract attention with their beautiful and original architecture. Lemkos, on the other hand, as

Reinfuss describes [7], are an ethnographic group that evolved through a long historical process, absorbing and assimilating various ethnic elements. They produced an original folk culture, being the result of the intermingling of Eastern and Western traditions. The hut, known as a *khyzha*, housed the living, household, and livestock chambers. The most characteristic element of the Lemko landscape is the Orthodox churches. They created their own style of church's construction. The classical Orthodox church consisted of a tower and an oblong body, covered with broken finials, and enriched with baroque octagonal helmets [7]. The preservation of the intangible heritage of Lemko culture is taken care of by private individuals and museums. Workshops of traditional crafts, open-air art workshops are organized, and traditional songs are protected from going into oblivion. The region's multiculturalism is also evidenced by culinary art that reflects the food preferences of various ethnic groups. This region is characterized by, among others, the highest number of registered regional and traditional dishes in Poland [8]. Podkarpackie continues to boast of traditional ways of preparing dishes, based on old recipes for various occasions. The local culinary tradition is promoted through the organization of cyclical culinary festivals and outdoor events [9]. There has been, in recent years, increased interests in gastronomic tourism in Podkarpackie, since recipes characterized by cultural

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distinctiveness passed from generation to generation have continued to gain interests from residents of inhabitants of other parts of Poland and Europe. The region's cultural distinctiveness that reflects its historical past is observable in the local dishes [10].

The Podkarpackie cuisine is undoubtedly one of the greatest treasures of its cultural heritage. The emergence of this cuisine was influenced by the specific location of the region as well as the intersection of the north–south trade routes, thus resulting in the melting pot of ethnic groups, cultures, including culinary traditions. The various ethnic groups included peasant and pastoral Wallachians, Hungarians, Austrians, Jewish, and Armenians cuisine were present in this area. It is important that these cuisines functioned in parallel, interpenetrating one other [4, 9, 11]. The prepared dishes were based on the availability of seasonal produce, the abundance of pantry items at different times of the year, and the livestock. These lands were poor, and thus only less demanding crops could be grown. Additionally, the harsh mountain climate meant that their yields were quite low, so the inhabitants were eager to use whatever they could find in meadows or forests to prepare meals. Therefore, mushrooms, hazelnuts, berries, and even nettle often appeared in the menus of Lemkos or Boykos, thanks to which it was possible to get through the most difficult periods. However, among the basic raw materials from which dishes were made was grain, mainly oats, which were even used to bake bread or make porridge. Kolberg [12], in describing the menu of the Bieszczady Lemko-Bohemian borderland, emphasizes the role that oats played here. Additionally, milk was obtained from raised animals, from which cheese and butter were made [4]. The meat was little eaten, hosted on the tables of only the richest farmers, mainly during holidays. This also applied to poultry, as the chickens were kept for eggs, destined mainly for sale.

The list of traditional products generated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [8] includes products that are part of the cultural heritage of the region, produced using traditional methods that have been in use for at least 25 years. There are already more than 1,200 traditional products registered in Poland. These dishes are presented annually in Warsaw during the Regionalia Fair, where one can taste dishes and products from different regions of Poland, not excluding other countries. Due to its rich culinary heritage, Podkarpackie Voivodeship is the leader in the number of registered traditional products listed on the national register. The list of registered products is dominated by meat products, bakery products, and ready-made meals [13–16].

Several authors have asserted [14, 17–20] that ethnic food is chosen not only by tourists, but also by people

open to other cultures, young, professionally fulfilled as well as those who pay attention to the taste and appearance of dishes. According to Ting et al. [21], ethnic migration, trade, and the rapid development of tourism may contribute to the increased consumption of ethnic foods. These foods, due to the quality of the raw materials used and the way they are prepared, are often perceived as health-promoting [17]. The use of local raw materials contributes to the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of the environment, while at the same time being an important element of socioeconomic development. Indigenous animal breeds and crop varieties have great potential in terms of sustainability, namely food security, and ecological balance. Environmental protection, through proper agricultural use, including protection of animal health and welfare should, among other things, contribute to resilient agricultural systems and food security [22]. As Garanti and Berberoglu [23] point out that traditional food plays an important role in economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Loyalty to traditional food is a key factor in ensuring all these aspects, especially among young consumers, actively involved in creating change in the food market. In a research conducted by Babicz-Zielińska and Jeżewska-Zychowicz [24], it was shown that knowledge concerning ethnic food among Poles was low, while the lack of food neophobia and acceptance of local cuisines characteristic of other nations was declared by about 30% of respondents. The popularity of regional products is due to their uniqueness, as they are distinguished by their unique taste qualities compared with mass-produced food. Additionally, they are associated with the tradition and culture of the region, which can affect its appeal [25]. In Poland, as in the entire European Union, agri-food products are protected under the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographic Indication (PGI), and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TCG) systems. At the same time, it should be emphasized that there is great potential in the kinds of ethnic dishes from south-eastern Poland, the wide promotion of which is essential.

The aim of the study is to present a dedicated culinary trail, promoting the food of ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

### **The culinary trails of Southeast Poland**

Learning about the culture of different regions through the prism of culinary specificity has gained popularity in recent years. An increasing number of people want to, not only, taste regional dishes, but also learn about their preparation. Hence, the heightened interest in culinary workshops. Various projects organized by local action groups [26] are a response to this growing demand. The Podkarpackie Flavours is the largest initiative of its kind

in Poland [11]. The associated catering facilities offer a variety of dishes identifiable with traditions of the varied ethnic groups that inhabited the area in the past as well as those resulting from their mutual interpenetration. The project, which promotes regional cuisine and gastronomic establishments, also popularizes events and monuments of the region [27]. The Podkarpackie Flavours Culinary Trail initiative was launched in 2013, initially bringing together 39 catering facilities from the Podkarpackie Province. The trail participants include, among others, inns, restaurants, and accommodation facilities. They each offer at least three regional or traditional dishes on the menu. Facilities are also subject to a certification process. The Route promotes the sightseeing of the region through its rich culinary tradition built on the mingling of influences of several ethnic groups. One can, in the catering facilities, order both simple traditional dishes that form the basis of everyday meals, as well as those that were prepared especially for holidays or important celebrations.

Podkarpackie Culinary Trail includes three routes, each of which allows one to discover the flavors of a different area of Podkarpackie. Both the Bieszczady, Beskidzko-Pogórzanska and Północna Trails are based on dishes of ethnic groups inhabiting these areas.

### **The ethnic origin of the dishes offered on the Bieszczady trail**

The traditional regional cuisine of the Bieszczady Mountains is based on the cuisine of the historically connected inhabitants of these regions, Boykos and Lemkos (Fig. 1).

The culture and traditions of these ethnic groups are derived from the pastoral traditions of the Wallachians. This was a unique ethnic group that functioned within a clan-based tribal structure. The Wallachians engaged in a nomadic lifestyle, traveling with their animal herds to successive pastures. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, numerous groups of Wallachians settled on Polish lands, mainly in Red Ruthenia, Podolia, and Lublin Provinces. The process of the assimilation of the Ruthenian population with Wallachian herders gave rise to the tribes of Lemkos, Boykos, and Hutsuls. Wallachian shepherds founded new settlements or added to existing ones [4, 28, 29].

The Carpathian region was characterized by a harsh climate and poor soils, which is why Lemkos and Boykos served dishes based on raw materials that were consumable in a given season of the year. These were both crops from home gardens and fields, as well as mushrooms and fruits from local forests. The prevailing natural conditions significantly limited the possibility of developing animal husbandry, so meat appeared on the tables only

at significant events. Milk and milk products were used much more frequently in cooking.

The cuisine and meals were based on basic raw materials such as cow, goat, and sheep's milk, which was also used to make cheese and butter. These raw materials served as the base for preparing various meals and mixing them with cereals. The main cereal, especially in the mountains was until the twentieth-century oats, which were used for baking bread and making groats. While describing the dishes of the Bieszczady region, where Lemkos and Boykos inhabited, the ethnographer Kolberg [12] often mentions the importance of oats, referring to the area "the land of oats." Cabbage and cucumbers were commonly pickled and then consumed for many months, while sour cabbage was used to cook soups. Mushrooms and forest fruits were eaten not only in summer and autumn, but dried for use throughout the year [12]. With potatoes becoming popular in this area in the eighteenth century, they became a permanent part of the menu, often becoming the main ingredient of meals.

### **Boykos and Lemkos dishes**

The food of the Boyko people was very simple, since their living conditions made them also eat modestly. The working day started early, around 4:00–5:00 in the morning, and the first hours were worked on an empty stomach. Only children working with animals were given a piece of bread, *oscypek*, or leftover dinner from the previous day before leaving for farm work. Two or three meals a day were eaten: breakfast (*obid*) around 9:00 a.m., lunch (*połudенок*) around 2:00 p.m. and dinner (*wieczeria*) around 8:00 p.m. Dinner was usually modest and often consisted of only a slice of bread. All food was eaten from one bowl with wooden spoons. The culinary traditions of the Boykos and Lemkos are still present in the cuisine of the people of southeastern Poland. It is a simple but tasty cuisine based on potatoes, cabbage, groats, bread, and dairy products. A popular dish was pierogi with various fillings [<https://www.facebook.com/carpathanboykocuisine/>]. A close look at the cuisine of the inhabitants of the region would reveal that the Boykos' dishes are still prepared in similar ways. In the Boykos' kitchen, sweet and sour milk, oat cakes, and other simple flour-based dishes are usually consumed. Typical dishes were: *czyr* made from oat flour; *zamiszka* made from barley or rye flour; *kiselycia* from juice from fermented cabbage, oat flour, and potato with garlic; *warjanka* (sour cabbage with beets and flour) and *kwasówka* (boiled cabbage sour); rye borscht; sour rye soup made from oat or rye flour with milk; baked or boiled potatoes with cabbage, and fried potato pancakes (*terczaniki*). Christmas food consisted of potato dumplings with *maczanka* (milk with flour and the addition of butter or melted *bryndza*)



Fig. 1 Ethnic groups inhabiting the region of Southeast Poland (own elaboration)

or macza (cream with cheese), ścieranka (mash with milk or on water), potato dumplings with cabbage, pecan with milk, stulnyky (dumplings baked from the dough), bulwanki (dumplings from dough with potato or, less often, cabbage filling occasionally), and hołbci (cabbage leaf stuffed with cabbage rolls made from barley groats). In addition to cabbage and potatoes, broad beans (an important source of protein) were eaten in various forms [4]. Bread was usually baked with oat flour, often without leavening (oszczipok). Milk obtained from cows was used to obtain cream and butter in buttermilk churns (bodeki). Simple cheeses were also made here: sheep, cow, and sheep–cow bryndza. Bryndza and milk were

used as ointments, while linseed or hemp oil was used for religious fasts. The meat was eaten almost exclusively on holidays [12]. Traditional festive dishes in this region included borscht, zrazy (pieces of meat fried with flour and onion), krupy with milk, but also korowaj (wedding cake) [4].

The basis of Lemkos’ cuisine was flour, rye and oat (whole grain), flaxseed, linseed oil, buckwheat groats, legumes, cabbage, potatoes, onions, and seasonal fruits. Mushrooms, as well as herbs and berries, were often used. Eggs and dairy products (butter, milk, cream, cottage cheese, bryndza) were, in wealthier homes, used somewhat more often in the kitchen. Meat, poultry,

beef, or mutton was traditionally eaten only on holidays. Lemkos often served *varianka* soup (a kind of broth with dumplings) or *kysileyca* (sour rye soup). The desserts were *homilky* (dried balls of curd with mint), *opalanok* (potato pancake on a cabbage leaf), and *tertianyky*. The basic raw materials in Lemkos' cuisine were mostly homegrown vegetables, rarely animals. Types of flours used included oats, spelts, or rye, and groats. The seeds of leguminous plants were commonly consumed. While herbs were grown in home gardens, wild plants were collected from bushes. Dairy products that were very important in Lemkos' cuisine included sweet milk, sour milk, buttermilk, and whey cheese. They often baked and ate oat pancakes instead of bread. Lemkos' influence has, similarly, been strongly marked in the culture and tradition of the region for centuries, which is why the recipes of these dishes have survived among housewives until modern times [9, 15, 28]. One example, in particular, is *pierogi* with a stuffing based on buckwheat groats, cottage cheese, potatoes, and onions. Another specialty of Lemkos' cuisine is potato-stuffed cabbage rolls, in which the traditional stuffing is replaced with mashed potatoes. Lemkos liked using scalded cabbage leaves, kept for several days in a pot with sauerkraut to wrap the stuffed cabbage, and mushroom sauce was a traditional accompaniment.

### Importance of culinary trails

The main reason for creating culinary trails was the need to preserve traditional dishes, based on the cuisine of ethnic groups inhabiting the region, as well as to meet the expectations of many people interested in learning about the region's history through the prism of cuisine [30, 31]. The dishes offered reflect the dietary habits of the locals and their ability to prepare tasty and nutritious dishes from products obtained in an environmentally friendly way. Regional distinctiveness in respect of food depends primarily on the geographic location of the region, methods of farming, as well as the natural resources. Regional products owe their special characteristics primarily to their methods of production, historically established in a given region, the ingredients used in the preparation, as well as environmental factors that often have a fundamental impact on the quality of regional products. Such assumptions may also change the common community perception of eating as a physiological process. Consequently, it can be viewed as a cultural process that respects historical values and the environment. The preservation of culinary heritage is undoubtedly dependent on the attention of the consumer [13, 21, 30, 32], so a properly constructed gastronomic offer can be an important stimulus in the development of tourism in the region, thus impacting the economic situation of local

producers. 85% of active tourists, according to studies by Gonera study [30], declared interest in regional cuisine. Ethnic food is increasingly seen as an opportunity for exploration and learning, while undertaking trips [33]. The tourist's origin is equally important, as the motivation may be the desire to get acquainted with completely unknown cultures, or to explore areas of their ancestral homes [34].

The culinary offerings on the Bieszczady trail include many dishes of ethnic origin, the most popular being: *fuczki*—pancake batter with sauerkraut in the shape of pancakes with sour cream, *hreczanyki*—minced meat with buckwheat groats fried in the shape of schnitzel, *stolniki* (stuffed cabbage rolls with grated potatoes or buckwheat and potatoes), *zalewajka* (sour buttermilk soup), potato dumplings with buttermilk, *kysileyca* (sour rye soup) or *varianka* soup (Figs. 2, 3, 4). They are offered, among others, in *Karczma Karpacka*, *Oberza Zakapior*, *Zagroda Magija*, as well as in many guesthouses run by enthusiasts of the cuisine of the ancestry inhabitants of these areas. Although the offers do change due to consumers' preferences or products' availability, they are united by the origin. A key advantage of the dishes offered is also the fact that they fit the current trend of less waste. These are simple dishes, based on local raw materials and currently available fruits or mushrooms. It should be emphasized that the Lemko and Boykos' cuisine is characterized by simplicity and the use of basic ingredients such as potatoes, cabbage, flour, and dairy products.



**Fig. 2** *Fuczki*. A traditional dish in the form of pancakes fried in oil on both sides until golden brown. A batter was prepared from flour and eggs, which was then mixed with boiled sauerkraut, adding salt and pepper



**Fig. 3** Holubci stuffed with potato before baking. Semolina groat, egg, fried onions, salt, and pepper is added to the raw grated potatoes. The mixed stuffing is wrapped in white cabbage leaves. Having been arranged in a pot, water is poured in and boiled or baked. It is often served with mushroom sauce



**Fig. 4** Bulwanki—wholemeal dumplings with barley filling. A dish made of whole-meal flour (also spelt flour), stuffed with cooked buckwheat groats, prepared in shapes similar to dumplings, and cooked in salted water

The ties forged between local producers of raw materials, manufacturers, local authorities, organizations involved in the tourism promotion in a given region, and even scientific institutions are crucial to the functioning of culinary tourism. This further enables the introduction

of branded products into the tourism services market. According to Ting et al. [21], in a study on Malaysian ethnic food choices, health considerations and sensory appeal were the deciding factors for consumers. However, the authors emphasized that to develop this market segment, it is necessary to promote ethnic food.

One of the factors that continue to play increasingly important roles in the consciously demanding consumer is the desire to consume dishes and beverages (e.g., sausages, hams, butter, fruits, vegetables, etc.), for which local raw materials have been used, minimally processed, and the production is carried out in small, local factories(.). Consumers are also increasingly attracted to the possibility of tasting typically regional products that are not available anywhere else. Consumer behavior in the sphere of food is a special, while being specific, type of activity often connected with their lifestyle. They are motivated not only by the feeling of basic needs, such as hunger, but also by eating patterns, conditions of the natural, economic, sociocultural environment, and elements of food marketing or attitude toward the environment [35]. In a study by Tey et al. [36], consumers identified “taste” as one of the most important characteristics of ethnic foods of Japanese origin. Ethnic foods occupy a special value position for consumers [37]. It is also important to note the diversity of ethnic cuisines and the distinctive features specific to them [13, 38, 39]. One problem in the perception of new foods, by the consumer, may be food neophobia, which is particularly important for the choice of new foods [35, 40, 41]. There is no doubt that food choices are primarily determined by personality traits and neophobia may limit one’s openness to cultural differences in the context of food acceptance [42]. Lai et al. [43] emphasize in their study of Chinese tourists in Australia that in order to develop culinary tourism, it is important to build a destination that considers the importance of the individual tourist characteristics in terms of his/her food-related acceptances. Mascarello et al. [42] found a survey conducted among Italian consumers that people who are open to different cultures will also be consumers of varied ethnic foods.

Polish consumers are consistently becoming more demanding and conscious customers, who recognize and appreciate the quality of the dishes served. They also pay attention to the origin of the raw materials used in their preparation and notice their simplicity and low level of processing. The observed dynamic development of the ethnic food segment is marked by an increased demand for food products that are closely related to a specific region. They are distinguished by their specific quality features and the traditional way of production that has its roots in history. Ethnic products have often become an attractive showcase of a

given region, generating tourist interest [13]. Therefore, regional cuisine as an obvious element of history, culture, and tradition is one of the simplest and most easily perceived elements by tourists who identify with the region, thus providing an impulse for tourists who wish to “taste” the climate of a given place and country [27]. Taking advantage of the need to seek new cultural and taste experiences, building marketing strategies for the growing ethnic food market provides opportunities for such initiatives to succeed. Jang and Kim [40] pointed out during a study on Korean food, offered to consumers in the US that greater familiarity with the traditions, culture, or music of a particular ethnic group increases the acceptance of foods associated with that group.

There are more than 20 culinary trails in Poland [27, 32], but food presentation and tasting during special outdoor events is the most effective channel of ethnic food advertising. Meanwhile, culinary trails can be a stable factor that promotes ethnic food and distinguishes the region, contributing to the activation of entrepreneurs and the protection of cultural heritage.

## Conclusions

Traditional food production is an opportunity for farms and small family businesses. The return to culinary roots has brought about a revival of ethnic cuisines, resulting in increasing significance and recognition. Many restaurants in Podkarpackie offer regional dishes, such as kwaśnica, fuczki, pierogi with various fillings, or stuffed cabbage rolls. These are environmentally friendly recipes and dishes, using raw materials sourced from local plant varieties and animal breeds. It might be worthwhile to pay attention to future research concerning ethnic foods from the context of waste minimalization trends as well as sustainable, low-processed diets.

In the absence of professional marketing of traditional food products, agricultural producers, food processing plant owners, and distributors should strive to create a recognizable brand for these products, not only on the local market, but also on the supraregional one. Meanwhile, culinary trails can be a reliable factor in promoting, first and foremost, ethnic food as well as culture and its related art.

## Author contributions

J.T., J.L., and W.K. contributed to conceptualization; J.T., J.L., J.K., and W.K. contributed to methodology; J.T. and J.L. contributed to software; J.T. and J.K. validated the study; W.K. performed formal analysis; J.K. and W.K. investigated the study; J.T. and J.L. contributed to resources; J.K. curated the data; J.T., J.L., and W.K. performed writing—original draft preparation; J.T. performed writing—review and editing; J.T. and W.K. visualized the study; J.K. supervised the study; project administration: J.T. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Declarations

### Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

### Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

### Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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