

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL FOOD QUALITY IN TOURISM

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Abstract

This study provides an approach to the relationship between gastronomy and tourism, with an emphasis on the quality of traditional foods. The study explains to what extent gastronomy and traditional food are indispensable for the development of tourism and why we must offer tourists unique, traditional, high-quality meals. The study highlights the importance of traditional foods in creating overall tourism experiences, considering tradition, culture and food simultaneously.

Tourists don't just eat to feed themselves, they also want to understand a region or a country. From food, they can get information about a population and its civilization.

The purpose of the study is to assess whether travelers just want to visit or want to feel a different experience, including regional cuisine and specialties. The authors want to convey the fact that the preservation of traditional gastronomy, as part of the national culture, is very important for the development of the cultural tourist attraction. There are eight trends that could encourage gastronomy as a cultural tourism attraction, namely trade, multiculturalism, media communication, demography and household change, community involvement, globalization (globalization with local flavor), product quality and ecological product.

In addition, we need to protect against the diversity of local food and improve the image of food. Thus, communities should be given knowledge about the quality of food in the surrounding areas and the implementation of "go green" agribusiness, from farm to fork.

Accordingly, interested parties must conduct research; development, preservation and dissemination to communities of gastronomic and culinary tourism, through collaboration and strategic partnership with established organizations.

Keywords: Traditional food, cuisine, gastronomy, cultural tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

Food awakens all our senses. It's not just about the taste - it's also about the fragrance that intoxicates us while we smell the food; it's about how the food is decorated to make our eyes sparkle; it's about the feeling we have on our fingertips when we touch it, and last but not least, it's about the crunchy sound we hear when we bite or nibble the food. The human senses of smell and taste are inseparable and both recognize biochemical components when consuming food, which confirms that these two senses work closely together. To achieve the sensation of aroma, the senses of smell and taste must work closely together (Sims, 2009).

Therefore, some tourists like to bring specific spices or drinks with them because they help bring back pleasant memories and feelings. If it is not possible to bring some ingredients, tourists may decide to eat food that is similar to their traditional food, whether their visit to another country is for business or pleasure. Traditional food can be defined in many ways, but the simplest explanation is that it refers to

dishes/foods that are passed down from one generation to another (Hotz and Gibson, 2007).

In almost all countries, this preserves the traditional food heritage, which is the inseparable ingredient of each country's unique tradition. Traditional food is also a major component that marks people's eating habits (Hsu, 2015).

In terms of tourism, authentic traditional foods help countries to be well positioned on the tourist map and recognized as preferred destinations (Bertella, 2011). Food can boost destination status as it includes elements of lifestyle, local creativity and traditions (Tsai and Wang, 2017), but also contributes to the economic growth of the destination (Henderson, 2009). Along with beverages, traditional foods can be produced as homemade products by restaurants, small catering companies and large but local producers, or simply created in-house. Some traditional foods have geographical indications or are traditional specialties in the EU (European Union) designation scheme,

indicating that they have a protected designation of origin (Sims, 2009).

All these elements contribute to increasing prosperity and keeping a cultural heritage alive with local food. Through many different cultural events, traditional food (very often cheeses or wines) as a unique offering from a certain destination is very often offered to both local and foreign visitors. Gastronomy, including traditional food, as a valuable cultural element, can attract the attention of tourists, in addition to other cultural attractions such as museums, festivals and fairs (Correia et al., 2008). Food fairs and wine tours are some of the many ways to help visitors explore tourist destinations, allowing them to discover something specific while visiting culinary destinations. Authentic traditional foods have their charm as one of the key elements that contribute to the development of the tourism industry (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013).

On the other hand, if tourists' expectations are not met when consuming local dishes, the individual's opinion can negatively affect local tourism (Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2012).

Food events positively affect local tourism by helping people maintain their jobs in the hospitality and food industries (Richards, 2014). The concept of unique food facilitates the presentation of a country, its distinct culture and distinct history. Home-cooked food can be an incredible asset for tourists exploring a destination's culture, meaning that local foods are linked to the visitor's adventure (Lepp and Gibson, 2003).

Food is an important part of the tourism industry because traditional food is one of the attributes of a destination that can be used to promote tourism. It is certain that selling traditional food to tourists is very important for the destination. Increasing the supply of traditional food and local food products in catering establishments is very encouraging for the sustainable growth of tourism and according to the research of Sims (2009), traditional food can play an important role in connecting tourists with local culture.

Kim and Eves (2012) investigated the reasons why tourists tend to experiment with traditional gastronomic specialties and reached the following conclusions:

1. getting familiar with a new culture and acquiring new knowledge and experiences,
2. developing interpersonal relationships and creating the opportunity to make new acquaintances,
3. excitement and escape from routine,
4. sensory pleasures: they find the taste and aroma attractive,
5. health care: whether they avoid or try local food, people who have a developed awareness and highly value health are guided by this principle.

Variations in the types and types of traditional local cuisine are very diverse, depending on the culture and customs of the local community. The ingredients used do not reflect the status of low socio-economic communities, but local customs and local wisdom in using the natural state of harmony.

To build the character of gastronomy and traditional food as a tourist attraction, we must analyze the factors that lead to it. In this paper, the author wants to convey that the preservation of traditional gastronomy, as part of the national culture, is very important for the development of the cultural tourist attraction. The study focused on traditional food as cultural heritage, the relationship between food and the environment, and gastronomic tourism itself.

The national cuisine is marked by its composition, the methods of preparing the meal and the culture of pleasure. In general, tourists find it easier to accept differences in foods that are not common in their daily diet.

Also, not all nationalities are equally open to trying new specialties. Torres (2002) agreed with this, saying that the tendency to try traditional foods definitely depends on nationality and felt that most people do not want to try local specialties. According to Fields (2002), in addition to nationality, there are other personal characteristics that influence whether a tourist will try traditional food. Some people are motivated to try local food to complement their experience of local culture, while others experience the enjoyment of local specialties as prestigious. Middle-class intellectuals seem most likely to try local specialties, as Heldke (2003) explains.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The research was carried out between March 2024 and September 2024 in different regions of Bihor county: Oradea area, Beiuș area, Aleșd area, Marghita area, Valea lui Mihai area, Salonta area.

The questionnaire contains 16 questions, 13 statements in the form of a Likert scale (7 points, where 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means totally agree) and 3 socio-demographic questions. In order to better determine the respondents' attitudes and explain the results, the average scores obtained by the Likert scale were classified into three categories: scores from 1 to 2.5 indicate a negative attitude; from 2.5 to 5 indicates a neutral attitude, while scores from 5 to 7 indicate a positive attitude. The population sample consisted of 94 respondents, aged between 18-60 years. Male respondents (66%) dominated females (34%). Employment status among respondents: employed (43.21), unemployed (39.9%), students (16.89%). The methods used in this study were: content analysis; data classification; data and information processing; online survey research. Descriptive statistics were obtained using SPSS.

Întrebările chestionarului sunt :

- * *The history behind each type of traditional food is reflected in it*
- * *Homemade food is well identified*
- * *The quality of homemade food is influenced by the season*
- * *We can eat traditional food every day*
- * *Traditional food does not exist without good local recipes*
- * *Authentic traditional food is about tastes*
- * *To enjoy the real traditional dishes, local ingredients are mandatory*
- * *The best traditional food is cooked by grandma*
- * *Traditional food has a unique production technique*
- * *For a successful production of traditional foods, the food must be produced in the local area*
- * *The association with traditional food is natural, organic*
- * *An authentic traditional food should have a story behind it*
- * *Traditional food is about special moments*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The consumer opinion survey on traditional foods (Table 1) indicated interesting data/opinions regarding local traditional dishes and their consumption.

After classifying the Likert scale scores, the respondents did not express a negative attitude towards any of the statements, which is a good indicator because with appropriate measures and activities, neutral attitudes can be transformed into positive attitudes. (Da Cunha, 2021).

An interesting result obtained from the research is that the respondents showed a neutral attitude regarding the nature of the product – whether the traditional food is natural, organic and whether it is produced in the local area. Considering that organic food production most often requires traditional, conventional production methods (Thøgersen et al., 2017), a question that should be further explored in future research is whether and to what extent people in Romania are familiar with with the concept of organic food.

Regional and local cuisines are the key to differentiation from other cuisines in a highly competitive environment. Tourists have recognized the importance of local and regional gastronomy because it is, above all, a reminder of the history and tradition of the area, and local cuisine helps tourists familiarize themselves with the destination. This was confirmed by our study, as traditional food provided respondents with a connection to history.

Traditional, local food can play a key role in creating the identity and brand of the local community, facilitating the connection between tourists and destinations, enabling the development of agricultural activities, entrepreneurship and job creation, which directly contributes to strengthening the economy of a local community (Du Rand et al., 2003). Local food can be an attraction for a destination and can be used to promote tourism.

Each studied region has several specific, traditional culinary products passed down from generation to generation.

Thus, the Oradea area has many influences from the old Jewish cuisine: Solent, Egg with onion, Fish meatballs, Meat soup with dumplings made from wheat flour (Matza knodel).

The Salonta and Valea lui Mihai area (Diosig, Sacuieni) has strong Hungarian

influences: Gulyasleves and Babgulyas, Meggyleves (Cherry soup), Csirkepapricas (Chicken paprikash with dumplings).

The Alesd area (Sinteu) has a strong Slovak influence: Potato stew (Polesniak), Slovak mushroom soup (Hribovica), Dumplings with cheese and bacon (Brinzove Halusky).

The Beius area is notable for a wide variety of pies: Briheni-style pie, on a shovel, with cheese and potatoes, "Cocoroaza" pie.

Table 1

Consumer perceptions, indicated by average Likert scale scores, related to traditional food products in Oradea (OR), Salonta (S), Beiuș(B), Marghita (M), Aleșd(A) and Valea lui Mihai (VM)

STATEMENT	OR	S	M	VM	B	Average across	
						<i>all cities</i>	
The history behind each type of traditional food is reflected in	5,73	5.48	5.75	6.89	6.17	6.00	6.00
Homemade food is well identified	5.62	5.40	5.50	5.77	5.79	5.91	5.66
The quality of homemade food is influenced by the season	5.40	5.98	5.61	5.30	5.42	5.56	5.54
We can eat traditional food every day	5.12	5.49	5.33	4.79	4.90	5.57	5.20
Traditional food does not exist without traditional food recipes	5.16	5.38	5.72	5.32	5.81	5.67	5.51
Authentic traditional food is about tastes	4.98	5.47	5.67	5.15	5.62	5.74	5.43
To enjoy to real traditional dishes, local ingredients are mandatory	4.90	5.36	5.49	5.45	5.78	5.50	5.41
The best traditional food cooked by grandma	4.85	5.39	5.26	5.38	5.89	5.59	5.39
Traditional food has a unique production technik	4.50	5.06	5.58	4.89	5.64	5.36	5.17
To have successful production of traditional food, food must be produced in the local area	4.64	5.31	5.34	4.25	4.82	5.38	4.95
The association with traditional food is natural, organic	4.34	4.93	4.72	4.56	4.78	5.20	4.75
An authentic traditional food should have a story behind it	3.98	4.89	5.39	4.53	6.08	5.41	5.04

Traditional food is about special moments	4.01	4.69	4.87	5.20	5.55	4.57	4.81
Average by cities	4.86	5.29	5.40	5.19	5.55	5.49	

In addition, the analyzed regions are known or the development of rural tourism, where learning to prepare traditional dishes is one of the practiced tourist activities. As they stated (Taylor & Rostron 2018.), organized events, in which various rural associations participate, play an important role in tourism, which is important because in the villages, people still consume a lot of traditional food and feed the national cuisine. in simple and complex ways.

For the question: The quality of homemade food depends on the season, respondents from all cities had, on average, a positive attitude, which to some extent could be expected. Considering the role of food safety, but also the importance of the sensory characteristics of traditional dishes, it is necessary to use fresh food to maintain food quality. The reason that speaks in favor of this is that local food can be an obstacle to the development of tourism, because not all tourists appreciate food that they consider new or unusual. Unlike standard activities in destinations where tourists are generally more willing to try and experience new things, it causes fear in many (Perito et al., 2020). Tourists may perceive new and different foods as potentially dangerous to their health. The risk of food poisoning at the destination is one of the biggest problems and fears of tourists. The most common problems faced by tourists are: diarrhea, stomach complications and diseases, dermatological diseases, respiratory diseases, infectious diseases. (Rosselló et al., 2017). The risk for tourists when it comes to foodborne illness is often the consumption of traditional foods, i.e. foods that the tourist has never come into contact with before (Yeung and Yee, 2020). The results of the current study indicate that special attention should be paid to the application of food safety standards in the producers, with support from local administration and scientific and professional bodies. Such cooperation should improve gastronomic tourism, thanks to the production

production of traditional cuisine in order to reduce among tourists the perceived risk of consuming traditional foods.

Traditional food is one of the most interesting aspects of tourism and often leaves the strongest impression, which is also the reason for many visitors to return. This speaks in favor of the fact that traditional food, among other things, must tell a story, i.e. contribute to the overall tourist experience.

Looking at the responses from the different cities, it can be concluded that respondents from all cities had a positive attitude towards traditional food.

Globalization and the connection of different national cuisines are causing significant changes in traditional and local gastronomy. Although globalization is often seen as a threat to local gastronomic identity, it can also benefit local gastronomy, as without global connectivity, some authentic foods from individual countries and destinations would still be completely anonymous. Globalization can also encourage the revitalization of some local gastronomic products. However, globalization and internationalization could diminish the authentic food market. Our job is to keep striving, improving and learning about new dishes and destinations, but at the same time maintaining the authenticity of traditional dishes and culture.

In rural areas or in tourist destinations, those involved in hospitality must always be prepared to meet the expectations of demanding tourists. In this sense, traditional foods, as part of the tourist offer and consumption, must be of uniform and high quality and produced respecting and respecting good hygiene practices that ensure the production of safe products. This can only be achieved through the cooperation of small producers, individual farms and local

of attractive traditional dishes that satisfy even the most demanding tourists in terms of quality in a broad sense.

CONCLUSION

The gastronomic offer of a tourist destination is an important element of the tourist experience, because the taste of the food consumed during the trip remains in the memory for a long time and is something that tourists, if satisfied, will seek again. Traditional food production is a combination of unique elements of the natural environment, local community knowledge and historical and cultural resources that are connected and form the unique character of the specific place.

Traditionally prepared food is an important factor in choosing a destination for some tourists, but special emphasis should be placed on food quality, especially considering the safety aspects of food preparation and consumption. Despite the current study involving only small-scale research, the findings are informative and relevant to tourism and hospitality employees as well as tourists.

The characteristics of traditional food that respondents considered most important were:

the history of traditional food, the quality of traditional food, and that this food is of high quality and safe, healthy and authentic. It is recommended that the quality and protection of the authenticity of traditional foods be improved by using safe food ingredients, be produced by local producers and be prepared in a safe way. To maintain culinary customs along with traditional foods and to promote a destination, those involved in the competitive tourism market should connect and work closely together. A limitation of this study is the small number of respondents, but this research could be a starting point for researching other factors that could influence tourists' attitudes when it comes to traditional food in a destination.

The results obtained will certainly contribute to the creation of an adequate tourism offer, but may also contribute to the development of local food production practices.

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