

PREMISES OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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Abstract

Since the competition among tourism destinations has risen, local culture has developed into a competitive advantage and a priceless resource of new products and services to attract and captivate tourists. Gastronomy plays a vital role in the process of attracting tourists because food has an important part in the tourist experience, plus gastronomy developed over the year's styles and tastes and become a critical source of establishing patterns in postmodern civilization.

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy has developed remarkably in the recent years; many researchers presented the progress of gastronomic styles and tastes over time. For instance, Mennell (1985) traces the development of eating in England and France since the Middle Ages, and Parsa (1998) has summarized the development of Western cuisine in America. Gastronomy is not only extremely difficult to characterize, but the term, just like 'culture', has become more heavily laden over time (Hjalager and Richards, 2000).

Since 2000, the Encyclopedia Britannica defines gastronomy as: 'the art of selecting, preparing, serving, and enjoying fine food'. Originally gastronomy was for aristocracy, but over time the term has also come to

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contain the “peasant food” specific of regional and local cuisine. In recent years, the serving and consumption of food has evolved into a global industry, of which tourism plays a vital role. Also, it is important to notice that in the cultural industry of gastronomy the chain is being lengthened to incorporate an expansive area of economic activities, many of which are directly associated with tourism.

2. Basics of Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomic tourism refers to vacations made to destinations where the local food and culture are the main reasons for travelling. It is also known as “food tourism”, “tasting tourism” or “culinary tourism”. According to the International Culinary Tourism Association, gastronomic tourism is perceived as “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences”. Therefore, there is a specific audience of individuals who are eager to travel all around the world in order to experience authentic international cuisines.

As Hewison (1987) and others scientists have noticed, nostalgia and heritage have supplied a few sources of signs of identify, especially in tourism. Food also plays a crucial role in the search of identity. Food is one of our basic needs, so it is logical that is one of the most extensive markers of identity. So, it is important to take into consideration that we are what we eat, not just in a physiological way, but also in a sociological sense.

Given the strong relationship between food and identity, it is not surprising that food has a vital role in tourism promotion. One of the most important reasons for this is the strong relationship between certain localities and some specific types of food. As Hughes (1995) points out there is a “notion of a natural relationship between a region’s land, its climatic conditions and the character of food it produces. It is geographical diversity which provides for the regional distinctiveness in culinary traditions and the evolution of characteristic heritage”. This connection between location and gastronomy played an important role in the development of regional tourism all around the world.

3. Marketing of Gastronomic Tourism

Destination image is one of the most fundamental “pull” factor in attracting tourists in visiting different locations. Usually, destination image is

linked to the relationship between image and motivation. Thus, destination marketers need to create an image in the mind of the prospective tourists before they buy the actual products because tourism products are intangible products that cannot be tasted and seen before the actual acquisition. Images are important in describing the destination, and marketers have to focus in pointing out the most relevant and complex attributes of that particular destination. An important role in promoting these images is represented by food and one of the main ways in which images of a destination and its gastronomy can be established in the minds of the prospective tourists is through the media (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

Two important researchers, Bell and Valentine (1997) emphasize the importance and influence of the media: “Food writers, critics and broadcasters...show us not only how to cook, but tell us what, when, where, how and even why- to eat and drink. We might even go far as to argue that the food media make stars of the foodstuffs themselves”. Therefore, media plays a major role in attracting the attention of future clients, even for those particular customers who do not consider gastronomy as a relevant motivator while choosing their holiday destination.

The media has not only created stars of food, but also about chefs. For instance, in the UK each decade since the 1950s has seen a series of food related television programs fronted by a chef who has become nationally, sometimes internationally recognized: Philip Harbin and Fanny Craddock in the 1950s and 1960s, Graham Kerr (“The Galloping Gourmet”) in the 1970s and 1980s, Keith Floyd, Delia Smith, Gary Rhodes, and Anthony Worrall-Thompson and others from the 1990s to the present day. Furthermore, a brief scan through current television listings will reveal plenty of food-related programs. Indeed, there are many complex channels dedicated to food, such as Carlton Food Network in the UK. Travel programs frequently cover dining out when reviewing destinations. Both food and travel programs are usually presented in the category of “lifestyle” or “leisure”; these types of categories are used in order to connect the two activities in the mind of prospective consumers (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

4. Sustainable Gastronomy and Tourism Sustainability

In the contemporary world the search for good eating can be no longer dismissed as trivial. In the future ‘a greater appreciation of how quality of

food contributes to individual, species and societal well-being' will be necessary, according to Wahlqvist (1999). Good eating represents quality food and variety and it is obvious that this will be favorable for the health of the customers.

Gastronomy studies need to investigate ways of reducing the divide gap between the elite of food and the vast parts of communities, living in a state of 'gastro-anomie' (Fishler, 1980), increasingly alienated from their food supply (Coveney and Santich, 1997). As different studies have been part of a 'critical media pedagogy', gastronomy studies should be involved in a critical nutritional pedagogy, enabling individuals to resist food manipulations. Having access to different types of quality food is becoming a political issue and an environmental issue (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). The Italian-based international Slow Food movement, for instance, is already positioned in the defense of eco-gastronomy: "We wish to enjoy the pleasure which this world can give us, we have to give of our all to strike the right balance of respect and exchange with nature and the environment. This is why we like to define ourselves as eco-gastronomes. The fact is that our pleasure cannot be disconnected from the pleasure of others, but it is likewise connected to the equilibrium we manage to preserve with the environment we live in" (Slow Food, 2001).

For this reason community policy-makers should appeal to the contribution of gastronomy researches in their planning constructions. Gastronomy studies have to help with the evaluation of the options available to the industries involved and to the broader community in respect to future "food security", which is a bigger issue than is usually appreciated (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). Food security "is not only predicated on pestilence, famine and conflict" (Wahlqvist, 1999) but it relates, among others things, to trade, food processing, retailing human behavior and food choices, which creates the area of gastronomy.

Sustainable gastronomy indicates that communities can evolve socially and economically while keeping an eco-nutritional commitment to environmental sustainability and the optimum health of members of the community (Scarpato, 2000). In this way, sustainable gastronomy can be characterized as an eco-gastronomy and relates with all other components of an advanced system. It is important to take into consideration, that tourists are considered as members of the community during their holidays.

Also, sustainable gastronomy involves producing food that is environmentally sensitive, and preparing and eating it so that it sustains both mind and body. This affirmation has a few implications in both rural and metropolitan contexts. The most important are connected to (Hjalager and Richards, 2002):

- The survival of local food production, outlets and fresh markets;
- The viability of home cooking;
- The transmission of culinary knowledge and children's education to taste;
- The right to pleasure and diversity;
- The impact of tourism on gastronomic authenticity and community well-being;

Sustainable gastronomy means vanish the divide between the elite of food and the wide range of parts of metropolitan communities still living in a state of "gastro-anomie" (Fishler, 1980), increasingly alienated from their food supply (Coveney and Santich, 1997). It could also refer define a better appreciation of how the quality of food provides to individual, species and societal well-being.

5. Motivational Factors in Gastronomic Tourism

Many researchers use gastronomy as a tourism marketing instrument, and some of them use tourism to advertise gastronomy. But, apparently there are signs that such marketing strategies are not that effective. Due to the separation of the areas of tourism and gastronomy, tourism marketers frequently do not understand the gastronomic product, and many individuals from the gastronomic field do not understand tourism. In order for this problem to be solved it is mandatory that marketers have all the information regarding the gastronomy tourism market (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

The starting point of any investigation regarding the demand for tourism gastronomy product is the motivation that tourists have to visit different destinations and experience their gastronomy. Gilbert (1993) argues that because motivation is associated with needs and wants of the tourist to destination choice it is crucial to be aware of the motivations which are fundamental due to the fact that a motivation could have a strong influence on tourism demand patterns. As Hudson (1999) mentions, there are two fundamental factors to tourist motivation: push and pull variables; push factors are those that make an individual to want to travel and the pull

variables are those that influence where a person travels. Gastronomy can definitely fulfill both functions: on one hand, gastronomy could easily push people away from their familiar foods and eating patterns, on the other hand, this area could also pull individuals towards new and appealing foods.

Usually, people travel for different reasons, so the factors that motivates a tourist to take a journey are numerous and complex. The relationship of motivations to needs has meant that many studies have used Maslow's hierarchy of needs as basis. For instance, Ryan (1997) uses a scheme based on the motivational needs categories identified by researchers as being crucial to leisure motivations: an intellectual component; a social component; a competence-mastery element and a stimulus-avoidance component. A similar typology is found in the four categories of motivation suggested by McIntosh, (1995): Physical motivators, Cultural motivators, Interpersonal motivators, Status and prestige motivators.

5.1. Physical Motivators

Tourists can be motivated by the physical experiences they will endure during their vacations. The act of eating is physical in nature, even though there are many aspects. Food is usually experienced through sight, taste and smell; our sensory perceptions play a vital part in our recognition of food. Often, the physical motivators will be related to different needs that cannot be fulfilled in daily life, such as total relaxation, a change of climate, or the chance to try different types of food. Recently, many tourist areas provide food products or gastronomies that might have positive impacts on health and physical condition. The "Mediterranean Diet" in countries such as Greece and Italy, or the "Atlantic Diet" in Portugal accentuate the health benefits of their food, and are created to attract to Western tourists burdened by weight, cholesterol and other health problems. These health benefits are important because lately people have the tendency to focus more on what they eat and are more attracted by different types of organic food. So, it is important not to underestimate the crucial role that food plays in promoting gastronomic tourism (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

5.2. Cultural Motivators

Food has always been one of the crucial elements of the culture of any society. Mennell et al (1992) identified a rise in interest in “the sociology of culture” as an explanation for rising levels of interest in food and eating. Eating out has become an important part of people’s lifestyles in recent decades and the research for novelty is an important part of culinary-based lifestyles (Riley, 1994).

Cultural motivators are strong push factors for the progress of gastronomy and tourism. When tourists experience new local cuisines, they also experience a new culture. Cultural motivators lead the tourist into studying about, and experiencing, the culture of societies other than their own. A simple way of doing these things is through food (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

5.3. Interpersonal Motivators

Even though there are many individual travelers, most tourism activities happen in social groups; having someone to share an experience adds a little pleasure to this sort of experience. Meals taken on vacations can be a way of recreating such social relations, as Deem (1996) mentions in her research on gender roles on holiday. For women, vacations are often an extension of their working roles as coos and careers, rather than leisure experiences. Also, many of Deem’s respondents indicated that they achieve relaxation and happiness from the change in environment or daily routine on trip.

Holiday meals play an important part for the tourist, because these sorts of meals have the potential to build new social relations and strengthen social bonds. For instance, the chance to eat together may be enjoyable on holiday because everybody gets together and are more relaxed and where eating could create an even stronger social function. Communal dining is fading because usually families do not eat together every day because of their schedule or other problems that might interfere during dinners (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

5.4. Status and Prestige Motivators

Status and prestige play a vital role in the gastronomic field. Many chefs and restaurateurs seek Michelin stars with the same devotion that

tourists collect starred attractions from the Michelin guide. Eating in the “right” restaurants and more important being seen to eat there has always been an important way of drawing status distinctions (Richards, 2000). Gastronomic tourism has therefore become a fundamental part of lifestyles of the ‘new middle classes’, with holiday destinations being chosen by some individuals because their unique gastronomy reveals something about the ‘taste’ of the tourist, and therefore their status. This has become extremely important in the growth of independent travel, as mentioned by Munt (1994), and some destinations, such as Tuscany and Provence owe their success to their unique and special cuisine.

The most basic of meals can deliver a novel gastronomic experience. Such basic gastronomy can persuade status-related motivations as tourists try new types of cuisines and foods that usually they do not have the chance to taste around their home. There is also a situation where travellers are not that adventurous and eager on trying new types of foods because they seek comfort in familiar foods in mass tourism resorts, the modern status-conscious tourist is enthusiastic in seeking out the local cuisine, frequently the ‘traditional’ or ‘peasant’ food is not provided by the tourism industry.). Apparently, the main goal for the adventurous tourist is to find that “hidden” little restaurant patronized only by locals. This type of behavior can develop a paradox; status can only be achieved from the experience if others are aware about your consumption, but in this situation you have the risk of others finding your “hidden” location and eventually destroying its uniqueness (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

6. Globalization and Localization

The association of gastronomy and local, regional and national identities is apparently threatened by the process of globalization. As food such as “French fries” become accessible everywhere and previously seasonal foods are sold all year round there is an apparent dissociation of food and place. In a continuously changing gastronomic landscape, the forces of globalization and localization are both exerting pressure on our eating habits. The increasing of fast food has come to define the globalization of culture and economy encapsulated in the term “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 1993). McDonald’s franchises more than 25000 outlets in 120 countries. The Big Mac has become such a famous standard culinary product that is used to

measure the buying power parity of national currencies. Even though some tourists have welcomed the homogenization of the gastronomic landscape as a mean of eating a lot and at a good price, others consider that fast food is unhealthy and unnatural and think that this kind of food is depriving locals and tourists of eating some natural, exquisite and typical food (Hjalager and Richards, 2000).

According to Ritzer and Liska (1997), tourists have the tendency to seek for the “comfort food” of home in their trips, and apparently the tourism industry has been happy to provide McDonalized products in order to satisfy their needs. For Ritzer, the package holiday itself is a simple and classic example of McDonaldization. These authors considered that the package holidays can turn into more flexible because the rest of the world has become more McDonalized. If there is a McDonald’s in every tourism destination, tourists no longer have to worry about their food, and will not want them included in their package.

Global cultural reproduction is not just affecting the way in which we consume food; it also includes a noticeable effect on our experience as tourists. Holidays used to be all about having a break from our ordinary lives. On the other hand, as tourism experience has become more democratized and more extensive, Urry (1990) has called attention on the evolution of “tourist culture”. One of the most important factors of the tourist culture is the establishment of specific settings in which tourist consumption happens—the homogenized spaces of the tourist industry (Edensor, 1988). These spaces used to be prohibited to tourist destinations, but the leisure and vacations are assuring that these “holiday” environments are becoming a part of our everyday lives. For example, we can visit a French restaurant to re-live the culinary experiences of a holiday in France, or we can visit a “beach bar” to relieve the joy of a Mediterranean holiday in the summer.

To sum up, gastronomy has a noticeable potential as a way of expanding and marketing tourism regions worldwide. Even though a tourist may be an enthusiastic consumer of gastronomic typical products, some individuals feel the need to save the gastronomic heritage before it is destroyed by the globalization or McDonaldization. Gastronomy is making progress because the living culture around is in a continuous transformation. It is therefore important to be aware that sustainable development of gastronomic tourism is not just about conserving the past, but it is also about creating the future. To fossilize culinary products is to make them as distant

and unreachable to the modern consumer. The power of gastronomy as cultural resource is precisely to change, whether through globalization or localization

7. Conclusions

As this study shows, tourism and gastronomy are complex and comprehensive areas that include a wide range of resources. Creating tourism for gastronomers or gastronomy for tourists is similar to the process of making a meal- a meticulously activity that has as a result, a complex and unique experience that will attract tourists from all around the world.

Also, it is important to take into consideration that in this kind of field it is crucial to understand the needs of the tourists with regard to food products. Not being aware of this sort of information leads to issues in identifying potential locations for food products among consumers.

Regarding the globalization of gastronomy, according to Giddens (1996), this process can be understood “as a process of linkage and interdependence between territories and of ‘in here-out’ there” connectivity’s (Amin, 1997). Also, as Held (1995) wrote, globalization is characterized by a growing number of chains and webs of economic, social, cultural and political activity that are global in field, and moreover, the growth of the stages of interaction and interrelation between states and societies in an increasingly series of networks of regional and global economic and cultural relations.

Tourism, food production and consumption gain the potential to take advantage of globalization processes and regarding the crucial role of tourism as mediator and modifier of cuisine and food is only now being acknowledged. As a tool of globalization, tourism has rose pressure between the local and global, eager to produce global food products and, in some cases, renewing and enhancing local food traditions (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

This paper also focuses on the motivational factors in this particular field that are often neglected by marketers or business people who work in the gastronomy area. Analyzing different motivational factors that emphasize the consumer behavior is the key to a remarkable growth in the gastronomy tourism and therefore maintaining viable some traditional dishes that are an important tool in attracting tourist from all around the world.

Also, gastronomy has considerable potential and became a vital tool in the promotion of tourism regions worldwide. In the recent years, many people feel that their traditional and typical food is being replaced with some products

that are harmful for the population and more important that their gastronomic heritage is washed by different process such as globalization or the McDonalization. Thus, it is crucial to fulfill the demands and expectations of tourists because they can contribute to the growth of the local economy; the solution to this is to provide them with healthy, typical and fresh food that will satisfy their needs, in the contrary case, they could add to the demand for imported foods, increasing imports and sinking the economic advantage of tourism.

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