

CULINARY TOURISM – AN UNEXPLOITED OPORTUNITY FOR SUCEAVA COUNTY

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Abstract:

Culinary tourism suggests the idea of experiencing other cultures through food. Food and drinks are an equally - if not more - powerful tourism attraction, like museums, historical sites, sports and others. According to the specialists, the cuisine of the destination is an aspect of utmost importance in the quality of the holiday experience. The development of gastronomic tourism contributes to the improvement of the general perception of the destination. Gastronomic tourism applies to tourists and visitors who plan their trips partially or totally in order to taste the cuisine of the place or to carry out activities related to gastronomy. Furthermore, Food Tourism includes in its concept ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, authenticity, which are the values promoted by the tourism nowadays.

Our paper briefly presents the basic concept of gastronomic tourism and develop a study regarding the opinion of tourism agencies from Suceava County regarding the opportunities of the development of this form of tourism and their willing to introduce gastronomic attractions in their tourist packages. The study is the first part of a more complex one which aims to propose a strategy for the development of culinary routes in Suceava County.

Key words: gastronomic tourism, gastronomy, local development, resources, tourism

JEL classification: Z32, L83

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's gastronomic heritage has become a topic of great interest to the scientific community and to the various bodies responsible for economic development. The potential it has to become an important contribution to economic development has made the gastronomic heritage a matter of utmost importance in development plans. As a potential factor of tourism, territorial development and, of course, economic and scientific activity, the gastronomic heritage is postulated as one of the main economic and cultural assets of a country. This openness to the recognition of the different traditions and gastronomic heritage of a country allows us to glimpse a multitude of opportunities that the gastronomic heritage has as an essential element for the articulation of economic activity with culture.

Gastronomy has always been part of tourism, but its relationship has changed significantly in recent decades. In recent years, we have witnessed a phenomenon in which the great interest in gastronomy has meant that the gastronomic tourism relationship has evolved towards new models, giving birth to a new tourist segment - gastronomic tourism.

The need to eat equals us all, but at the same time differentiates us. Gastronomic tourism occurs precisely as a result of this difference between tourists who simply eat while traveling and those for whom gastronomy has a decisive influence on the choice of destination and want to satisfy their hedonic and cultural appetite, beyond physiological. More and more countries are using gastronomy as a source of new products and activities to attract tourists. Research in the gastronomic tourism sector appears as a response to the constant changes in the market and consumer preferences. The analysis of the way in which tourists see and evaluate the gastronomic travel experiences is an essential basis for the development and promotion of a destination.

Gastronomic tourism is recognized as a new trend for tourists, who are beginning to give a relevant value to gastronomy. This type of tourism encourages the tourist to consume traditional products from the region in their meals and drinks, but not only that; it also tries to attract tourists to the local culture and tradition through gastronomy, adding value to the final product or service.

A gastronomic route is a form of tourism that allows an organized discovery of a territory around an axis related to local and regional food and gastronomic heritage. This type of proposal is not focused solely on the productive aspect, but also on the final expression of these processes: gastronomy, which demands refinement, high-level services, and discussion, criticism and appreciation for the traditional dishes that are tasted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From the early stages of the tourism development, food was directly associated to tourism due to the simple fact that each person must eat and drink daily, no matter is doing the usual things or is traveling. The gastronomic tourism, also named culinary tourism or food tourism represents a relatively new form of tourism, but despite this fact, there is a very rich scientific literature in this field. A basic book, who explain the concepts and give a detailed review for the development of culinary tourism at that moment is *Tourism and gastronomy*, edited by Anne-Mette Hjalager and Greg Richards in 2002. Since then, several directions of study of the connection between food and tourism were approached leading to a complex and exhaustive literature in this field.

One of the most discussed subjects is the role of gastronomic tourism in attracting tourists and creating an image for a destination. Lai, Khoo-Lattimore and Wang (2017) built a conceptual model with six dimensions who describes a dual perspective of food image and its impact on the tourism destination; also, the paper gives suggestions how to design a brand focusses on the culinary resources of a destination. The idea of the differentiation of tourism destinations through the gastronomic attractions was developed by López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares (2011), which analyzed different location from Spain, popular and appreciated from the point of view of their culinary offers. The conclusions highlight that the culinary tourism and local food are core factors in the process of differentiation of a destination, especially due to the fact that the tourists are more and more interested in the cuisine and beverages available in a destination. Also, it is specified that the actors involved in tourism, both private and public, should consider the gastronomy as a key factor in attracting tourists and in the future development of locations. In her paper, Drašković (2016) discusses another subject related to role of gastronomic tourism for the development of a destination, that of creating the competitive advantage. Food is a dynamic component in the marketing mix who gives the uniqueness to a location or destination, creating a competitive advantage through the food and beverages as products, but also through the combination with services and attractions specific to each place. Especially for the rural tourism, the development of culinary tourism enhances the competitive advantage with positive results in term of local development, earnings for the local population and the number of visitors for the location. According to the Global Report on Food Tourism (2012) gastronomic tourism has a great potential for expansion, fact already confirmed by its evolution from 2012 until now; several fields of activity, connected with culinary tourism as: food production, agriculture and cattle breeding, different type of services are also stimulated by its development and, in the same time are contributing to the competitive advantage of the destination.

Another direction of study approached in the scientific literature on the gastronomic tourism refers to the experiences perceived by the tourists. The cuisine and local food and beverages are part of the culture and in this context, are able to create authentic experiences for tourist. According to Richards (2012), one of the most cited authors in the field, culinary tourism has an important role in the rescue of old tradition and customs which are in the process of disappearing. It offers the environment in which tradition and innovation join together to link culture and tourism, to develop unforgettable food experience, to produce distinctive food or to tell stories about food and people, contributing to the strengthening of the local identity and the sense of community. The development

of tourist sector and the increased interest of tourists for new forms of leisure transformed the tourist activities in experiences. During the entire process of development of gastronomic tourism, Richards identified three generations of new experiences: (a) first generation – the rise of gastronomy; (b) second generation – the co-creation of experiences between producers and consumers; (c) third generation – connecting food and people. In another study from 2015, Richards went further and studied the connection between these three generations of experiences and the marketing strategy. He highlighted that the tourist destinations are facing a difficult task in the contemporary crowded food marketplace: they must take into consideration not only the roles of food in the economic chain specific to tourism, but also how it affects the consumers. He proposes a new concept - Stylistic innovation – which involves a customized combination of the specific factors in the food system: producers, chefs, restaurateurs, critics and consumers. All these factors are part of a network and have their part of contribution to the success of gastronomic tourism in a destination. Communication plays a crucial role in connecting food to people and the new communication technologies should be used for promoting and supporting the gastronomic tourism (internet, social media, blogs, media).

The role of food in creating new, unforgettable experiences is analyzed by Chang et al (2011) in relation with culture and cultural capital. On one hand, food and the cuisine are integrated in culture and are influenced by it, but on the other hand, eating behavior and practices can influence the culture and education of people. Local cuisine serves as major factor in appreciation the culture of a destination with its symbolic meanings of traditions and special occasions. Although there is a big disparity of tourists' attitude regarding familiar and new food, the gastronomic tourism is able to fulfill a wide range of preferences and to represent a motivation for visiting a destination. According to Anton (2019), there are some conditions which determine the memorable experiences for the participants at gastronomic tourism: the authenticity of the food offer, the degree of adaptation of food and the cultural contrasts between cultural capital from the place of origin and host destination of the tourists. The perception of food authenticity has a positive impact on the tourist behavior and represents the first step in creation of pleasant, unforgettable experiences. In terms of cultural contrast, the greater the difference between the culture of origin of the tourist and the culture of the destination visited, the more he is attracted and wants to have different experiences, including culinary ones. Regarding the adaptation of food, it is view as a negative phenomenon which leads to the loose of the authenticity and affect the local, traditional values.

We must mention also the big number of papers which discuss about the experiences offered by the oenological routes, taking into account that the first gastronomic routes were oriented to wine production and tasting (Di Matteo, Cavuta, 2016), (Rachão et al, 2019) (Whalen, 2011), (Marlowe and Bauman, 2019), and many others.

A third big group of scientific paper in the field of gastronomic tourism are focusing the relation between globalization and its influence on the development of this type of tourism. With all the efforts to maintain the specificity of a tourist destination, the tourism is also affected by globalization. There are two main ideas emerged from these papers: first, is that the globalization threatens the gastronomic identity and leads to the homogenization and standardization of food in a 'homogeneous spaces' of tourism worldwide (Mak et al, 2012), (Diawati and Loupias, 2018). The second idea highlights the positive effects of globalization on the development of culinary tourism: globalization has also ensured that many local/regional foods to become international. The relationship between globalization and localization is not a diametric opposition, but a mutual one. Exchanges and each other supporting between the global and the local led to new foods and eating practices (Long, 2018), (Karagiannis, D., Metaxas, T. 2017).

3. CASE STUDY: GASTRONOMY AS TOURISM RESOURCE IN SUCEAVA COUNTY

Gastronomic tourism represents a type of tourism that provides a series of qualitative and quantitative benefits in many different aspects. However, it also has a series of disadvantages that hinder its expansion and consolidation as the main tourism product. Gastronomy offers a great variety and wealth of products to be exploited from a tourist point of view, Romania being an example of a wide range of gastronomic products specific to its different regions. This plurality of local gastronomy allows us to approach the different Romanian cultures and regions, which are very different from each other both for their gastronomy and for the traditions, landscapes and is a source of opportunities for gastronomic tourism. Despite its potential, culinary tourism is still undeveloped in Romania and it is poorly known abroad. Currently, this type of tourism is booming and it seems that at the moment there is a greater awareness in all areas of tourism development that support non-mass tourism.

Gastronomic tourism promotes the conservation of cultural and natural heritage. If we also consider that this type of tourism is often associated with cultural tourism or rural tourism, we can see that they benefit each other. The consumption of traditional products and typical dishes is encouraged and, in turn, the heritage is preserved, buildings and natural spaces are maintained, traditional elements are restored and various actions are carried out to provide a complementary offer.

In order to prepare our research, a SWOT analysis was developed focused on the general frame of gastronomic tourism.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Richness, diversity and complementarity of the gastronomic resource. - Hospitality - Access to various segments of the tourism market (business tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, etc.) in addition to gastronomic tourism itself. - A big number of celebrations and cultural activities. - Rich gastronomy. - Traditional lifestyle and recognized brands. - Wide variety of unique regional traditions - A continuous growing of the accommodation facilities in the rural areas - The development of air transport, many Romanian airports have international flights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced offer of the developed tourist product. - Low penetration in tourism marketing channels. - Lack of tourism mentality on the part of gastronomic agents, especially in the productive sector. - Lack of intra-sectoral relationships that promote tourism development. - Poor infrastructure in some rural areas - Lack of investment - culture and tourism must support each other, this can only be possible with the involvement of the government sector and the primary sector. - Lack of promotion - Romania has not created a clear and strong image on the international market, because it has not adopted a systematic policy of attracting foreign tourists.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New trends in tourist demand open new tourist markets such as gastronomy. - Sources of financing for tourist activities. - Gastronomic tourism is a market in opening and expansion. - Increased consumption of organic products and services of certified quality. - Aid to public administrations for the conservation of heritage. - Saturation of the traditional destinations. - Creating a gastronomic markets network to national level. - New buying habits and organization of the trip: adaptation to new buying habits and organization of the trip. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deficiencies in public-private coordination and collaboration. - Increased competition in the rural tourism. - Insufficient tourist training. - Important seasonality when depending on production. - International conflicts: war, terrorism, etc. - Tourism massification: awareness and change in the way of traveling.

Source: Own elaboration with information from Tourism Ministry, (2018) *Romania – National Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2030*, available at <http://b2b-strategy.ro/b2b/wp-content/uploads/Strategia-na%C8%9Bional%C4%83-a-Rom%C3%A2niei-pentru-dezvoltarea-turismului-Volumul-1.pdf>

The SWOT analysis shows the pillars of a future development of the gastronomic tourism in Romania for the future period, but also identifies the problems to solve: a poor promotion and marketing of products and gastronomic experiences in Romania, insufficient investments in infrastructure and services, lack of collaboration between public and private bodies acting in tourism. On the other hand, gastronomic tourism contributes to local development, creating a tourism industry and providing an outlet for local products. In many cases, the destinations of this type of tourism are rural areas or regions with low or moderate population. Tourism activity often results in the creation of jobs for the benefit of the population, not only in the hospitality industry, but also in traditional productive sectors (direct and indirect jobs).

The combination of food and tourism is becoming more attractive in recent years. Foreign or domestic tourists visiting a tourist destination taste more and more local products and take part in local brunch and traditions. These activities are added to the image of tourist destinations and boosted economic activity in the destination and its surroundings. Although the benefits are clear, many tourist destinations do not know how to include local food in their tourist offer and turn it into a valuable resource. That's why, one of the aims of this paper is to investigate if the travel agencies are interested in developing organized food tourist routes in Romania. Thus, the local food will be capitalized and it is possible to attract tourists from all over the world to Romania.

Romanian gastronomy, as well as culture, reflects, through each dish, the vast history of the country. From ancient times, the main occupations of Romanians were hunting, agriculture and animal husbandry, so that Romanian cuisine has always enjoyed a wide range of meat products, vegetable products and traditional dairy products.

The local development of a territory is the consequence of the enhancement of the human, cultural, natural, material and immaterial resources of that area and the planning, by public and private actors, of actions and projects that promote economic growth, social justice and the preservation of the cultural heritage of the territory, with the essential civic participation in key decisions that affect territorial development. Gastronomic routes are valued as the second-best gastronomic offer option that a destination can develop after gastronomic events. Although it is true that gastronomy has had an impulse as a tourist resource in recent years worldwide, since all tourists have to eat during their trip, it is considered that a series of strategies are needed to rescue, enhance and spread to traditional kitchens, this, joining government efforts that can provide local monetary resources, which are the ones that put these strategies into practice and research that can help with the creation of strategies.

Gastronomy enables the tourist development of the territory, both as a basic or complementary resource, by expanding the possibilities of commercialization and expanding it to other economic sectors. Travel agencies play an important role in creating tourist packages, and they can more easily introduce the notion of gastronomic route on the market and it is very important to find out their opinion about the idea of creating gastronomic routes in Romania.

The quantitative analysis of the study case consists in application of a questionnaire created for the tourism agencies and other economic entities from Suceava County which offer different types of tourist packages. At the questionnaire have answered 10 tourism agencies from a total of 21 situated in Suceava town. Taking into account the current situation of gastronomic tourism in Romania, our questionnaire aims to analyze how the concept of gastronomic route based on agri-food and local cuisine is currently defined and appreciated by travel agencies and what are the key aspects for these routes to contribute to local development. The results of the questionnaire will help to highlight the elements underlying the design and management of gastronomic routes and will inform about the aspects to be taken into account when improving existing routes or developing new proposals. The questionnaire consists in five questions, two of which are multiple-choice, a single-answer question, an open question, and a question using the Likert scale.

For this short study we made two hypotheses:

H1: The participants (tourism agencies) know the concept of culinary tourism.

H2: There is an interest to diversify the offers of tourism agencies with packages that contain gastronomic tourism.

First question refers to the characteristics of culinary tourism as a form of tourism; the results are shown in the figure no. 1.

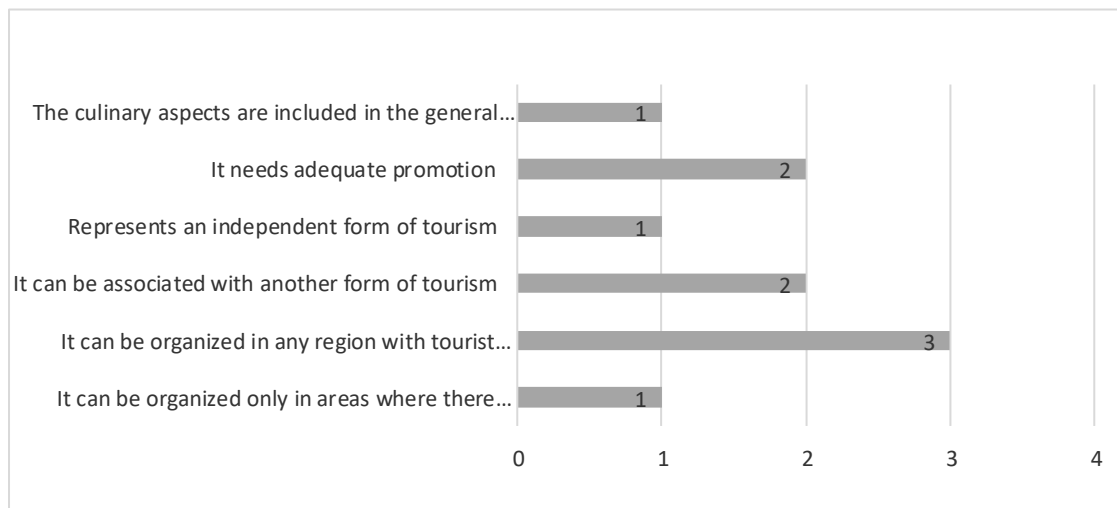


Figure 1. The opinion of travel agencies on culinary tourism as a form of tourism

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the opinion of travel agencies on culinary tourism, as a form of tourism, the participants have identified the most important characteristics of culinary tourism, e.g.: it can be organized in any region with tourist potential, it needs an adequate promotion and it can be associated with another form of tourism. The answers highlight the big potential of gastronomic tourism for any type of destination, both from urban and rural areas.

The second question investigates if Romania has possibilities to develop culinary tourism in future; from the point of view of the travel agencies involved in this questionnaire, all stated in proportion of 100% that Romania could focus on the development of culinary tourism because it highlights the traditional local and national cuisine. Gastronomic tourism is practiced only by a niche of tourists, it manages to attract more and more tourists passionate about gastronomy and more, because through local cuisine you can discover part of the culture and history of a certain area, food being a service basis in any tourist package.

Knowing the fact that gastronomic tours are not developed in Romania, the third question focused on the specific elements which should be included in a gastronomic trail to attract tourists.

According to the respondents, the elements / aspects that must be part of a gastronomic route to contribute to the local development of a certain territory, most stated that tasting traditional products and the possibility to purchase specific culinary products are elements mandatory that must be part of a gastronomic route. In second place are the following aspects: visiting production centers or private producers to see how certain products are prepared; visiting other attractions of the area, directly or indirectly related to the specific culinary preparations and the tourist guide. Table no. 1 shows the complete answers at the third question.

Table no. 1. The frequency of the answers

Possible option	Frequency
a) Tasting traditional products	5
b) Visiting production centers or private producers to see how these products are prepared	3
c) Visiting other attractions of the area, directly or indirectly related to specific culinary preparations	3
d) The possibility to purchase culinary products specific to the area	5
e) Organizing cooking classes	2
f) Walking between two points of the gastronomic route to see the geographical attractions, fauna or flora	2
g) Car rental	1
h) Accommodation services	2
i) Tourist guide	3

Source: Own elaboration

The forth question asked the participants about which Romanian region is the most suitable for the development of culinary tourism. Most travel agencies considered Bucovina to be the region in Romania where it would be possible to organize gastronomic tourism in various forms. Transylvania was ranked next, after Maramures, and the last position is occupied by Moldova and Banat. It is possible that this result will be influenced by the origin of the respondents to the questionnaire, because this questionnaire was applied only to travel agencies in Suceava. I cannot dispute the fact that Bucovina is a corner of heaven, where several forms of tourism can be combined and traditions and gastronomy are an unpolished diamond.

The last question is future oriented towards the decision of including gastronomic tourism in their tourist packages. 80% of travel agencies answered that they are willing and happy with the idea of selling tourist packages and other specific services for gastronomic tourism while 20% answered that they are willing, but with certain conditions. I think that most travel agencies said they were delighted with this idea because the profile of tourists changes from year to year. Travel agencies have noticed that tourists are particularly interested in “authentic” local food and “unique” culinary experiences, different from those they usually enjoy in their area of residence (Figure no. 2).

The results of the questionnaire are showing the interest of the tourist agencies for this form of tourism and, also, the decision of selling gastronomic routes, if they are well designed and adapted at the local specific. Both hypotheses of the study were confirmed, even the organization of gastronomic tourism involves infrastructure investments and/or the compliance with a set of strict rules regarding the preparation and serving of culinary dishes.

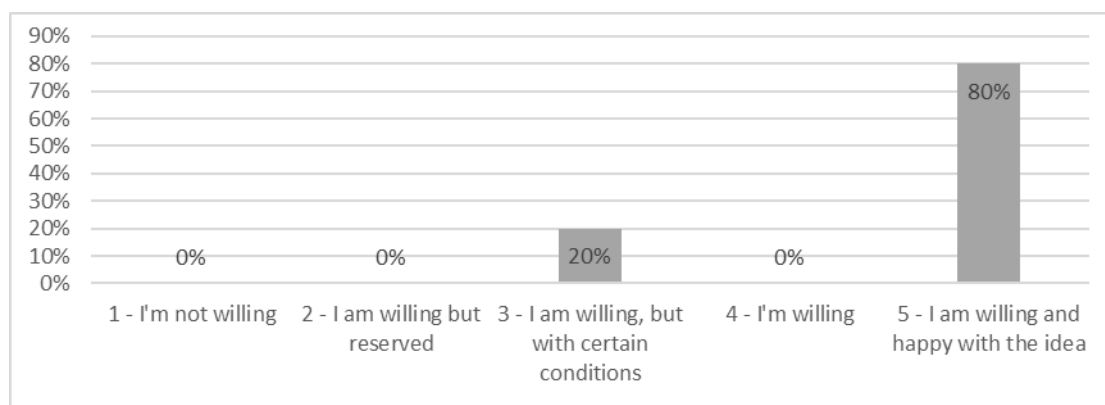


Figure 2. Interest of travel agencies regarding the sale of tourist packages and other specific services for gastronomic tourism

Source: Own elaboration

The weak point of this quantitative approach is the fact that there were a limited number of respondents, all of them situated in Suceava town. For a better accuracy and cover of the subject, the research can be continued at regional and/or national level.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The gastronomic tourism is currently a clear trend, already considered a successful strategy so in the coming years we will see its evolution, both at national and international level. Rather, the question is whether Romania will take advantage of its resources and orient them in an appropriate way towards new trends or whether we will passively observe how other countries exploit this opportunity with better strategies. Gastronomic tourism in Romania has a great potential that offers many possibilities for development, adapted to the specific of each region and tourism destination.

Gastronomic tourism is based on tradition and culture, concretized in gastronomy. This means that gastronomic tourist destinations promote the conservation of traditional and cultural elements and capitalize on resources that would otherwise be doomed to loss. This conservative

aspect of heritage is an example that well-managed gastronomic tourism can become an example not only of integration with the environment, but also of enriching the environment.

For the culinary tourist, food and drink do not only satisfy hunger and thirst. Enjoying them means gaining a deep knowledge of regional cuisine and wines through an existential experience of local cuisine.

For decades, the potential of Romanian gastronomy has been ignored and it is time to appreciate the treasures that this wonderful country hides. Appropriate strategies, adapted and customized are needed to transform the opportunities in successful business activities in the field of culinary tourism. The results of our short questionnaire show the interest of a group of actors (travel agencies) in diversification of their offer with tourist packages designed for culinary resources specific to different regions or locations. The study must be continued with other actors in the field and used to propose a strategy to develop gastronomic routes and, generally speaking, gastronomic tourism in Suceava County.

Threats can occur everywhere, there will be predictable threats and less predictable threats, such as the current pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has particularly affected tourism. Travel restrictions and social isolation measures imposed by governments around the world in an attempt to stop the spread of coronavirus are severely affecting global tourism, from small businesses to large hotel chains or tour operators. The year 2020 is proving to be a catastrophic year for this industry, which is currently facing the biggest crisis in its history.

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