

GASTRONOMY AND TOURISM

Nistoreanu Puiu¹, Şchiopu Andreea Fortuna², Nica Ana Maria³
and Tănase Mihail Ovidiu⁴

^{1) 2) 3) 4)} *Bucharest University of Economic Studies*

E-mail: puiunistoreanu@yahoo.it; E-mail: andreea.schiopu@com.ase.ro

E-mail: ana.nica@hotmail.com; E-mail : tmovidiu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Increasing the accessibility of tourism has led to an increase in the number of travels and tourists. Along with this, there has also been a development of individual experience, with tourists increasingly focusing on unique, individual experiences. Even the forms of mass tourism attract individualization clues through a series of elements associated with the components of the touristic package. These are best seen in the food and entertainment as part of the traditional culture of a people. Local gastronomy can be seen as an element of local cultural identity and as attraction and tourist experience element. The purpose of this paper is to observe the connection between tourists' experience and their views on local gastronomy seen: as an element in destination differentiation, an element in making of a memorable tourism experience and a decision-making factor in choosing a particular destination.

The results of the questionnaire based survey revealed that tourists who have traveled more consider that gastronomy can be an element of differentiation of destinations and contribute to creating a memorable experience but it is not a defining element in choosing a certain destination. In these conditions, gastronomy can be included in the category of elements that favor the tourism development having a secondary role in the choice of the destination but a main one in increasing the level of satisfaction of the tourist.

Keywords

Local gastronomy, gastronomy tourism, tourism destinations, unique tourism experience

JEL Classification

O13, Q56, L8

Introduction

The term "gastronomy" is, from the etymological point of view, made up of the terms of Greek origin "gaster" and "nomas" (stomach and law). At present times, the term has a high degree of multidisciplinary, being closely correlated with biology, sociology, medicine, history and culture in a broad meaning (Getz & Brown, 2006).

While the main role of gastronomy is to preserve the health of the human body by ensuring the supply of nutrients, in the last few decades more emphasis has been placed on another role, equally important, namely to create extra income from tourism.

The current trends in the tourism industry reveal, among others, a leap towards sustainable forms of tourism exploitation of resources, a separation of tourist flows, the gradual

transition from mass tourism to the niche one, that is based on local cultural identity. Thus, Kivela and Crofts (2006) point that the modern tourist is attracted by the local identity element, and gastronomy is part of this framework, by offering local culinary products prepared within the host communities using specific methods; all this complements the authentic tourist experience that the modern tourist searches for in the places visited.

The paper aims to identify the main traits of how gastronomy is perceived by tourists, as an intricate element of the tourism package. As per the results of the quantitative research, these highlight a series of perceptions that tourists have regarding the correlation of tourism and the local gastronomy experience.

Literature review

Local cuisine includes not only food offered in host destinations, based on raw materials from the region but also other culinary items such as cheeses or wines that are processed by specific methods, thus becoming true emblems of local or zonal identity (Nummedal & Hall, 2006).

The link between tourism and gastronomy is the subject of a substantial number of research. According to Cohen and Avieli (2015), there are four directions of correlation between the two terms: gastronomy viewed as an element of local culture, as a tourist attraction, as a tourist product and as a tourist experience. Thus, local dishes have become attractive to tourists, as gastronomy has been highlighted as an important part of the journey, through the interest of the modern tourist for new experiences.

Gastronomy tourism, also known as culinary tourism, gastronomic tourism, gourmet tourism, represents, according to UNWTO (2018), the search for unique and memorable food and drink experiences in both close and remote destinations. However, gastronomy tourism also includes a range of culinary events and activities, such as culinary festivals, traditional restaurants, cooking and tasting processes, presentation sessions and tastings, etc. An element underlying the development process of gastronomy tourism is represented by the efforts of local communities to protect and perpetuate their culture and identity, the specificity of their products, preparations and processes, thus ensuring a substantial increase in the competitiveness of the destination (Hillel et al., 2013).

Tourists spend about one-third of the holiday budget on experimenting with local gastronomy (Yeoung et al, 2009). According to the same survey, about 72% of international tourists were interested and very interested in local cuisine, specific to the area visited, and were also satisfied with the gastronomic experience.

According to Guzman et al. (2014), motivational factors for local consumption of local dishes can be divided into four theoretical categories: physical motivation, cultural motivation, interpersonal motivation and motivation regarding the personal status. In the case of the first two categories, the titles are clear enough and have been widely debated in the scientific literature, interpersonal motivation and individual status and prestige require further details. Thus, Guzman et al. (2014) show that a rather strong motivational factor in gastronomy tourism is given by the individual desire to meet new people, to spend time with them but also with relatives and friends, in order to smoothen routine of daily interactions. As far as the category of personal prestige factors is concerned, they are associated with the desire to attract the attention of others, for personal and individual recognition. Thus, tasting local dishes in an atmosphere typical of the destination they visit has the role of creating a certain social status.

Mak et al. (2012) propose another method of mapping the factors that correlate tourism and local gastronomic experience. Thus, there are five factors that have an impact on local tourist consumption and the decision to choose a specific tourist destination: the cultural, social and demographic influence, the characteristics of the individual personality regarding the culinary preparations, the past experiences, but also the factors of motivational category.

These categories are then grouped into four basic dimensions: symbolic, binding, contrast and pleasure.

If on the theme of gastronomy links with aspects such as tourist experience, economic benefits, improving living conditions for local communities, and so on, there are many studies, not the same can be said about the field of identifying the motivational factors of a culinary nature that lead tourists to choose a particular destination. Research on the weight of these factors in the final decision is also unknown due to the number of scientific researches carried out, their study being still very young.

Methodology

The quantitative research aimed at highlighting the link between tourism and gastronomy took place on the occasion of the Romanian Tourism Fair on 22-24 February 2018, the target audience being made up of fair visitors. They were questioned by operators according to the participation agreement. The research included two sections, one on tourism consumption behavior and the other on the place of gastronomy in the travel preferences of Romanians. The number of questioned persons was 251, but only 242 valid questionnaires were selected. The research variables are: preference for local gastronomy (restaurants of internationally known chains, restaurants of local chains, local/family restaurants, upper category restaurants, local markets), frequency of choice of different types of lunch and dinner meals (classic restaurant, fast food restaurant, self-service restaurant, bakery / pastry shop, restaurant with specialty, specialized restaurant, street-food caravan, grocery store), habit of drinking local drinks during meals, appreciation of tourist experience, the way in which local gastronomy is an element of differentiation of destinations, the extent to which gastronomy is a criterion for choosing a destination, the contribution of gastronomy to creating a memorable stay experience.

Results and discussion

Of the total respondents, 26% are in the age range of 35-44 years and 21.1% between 25-34 years. The gender structure shows 55% of women and 45% of men. Depending on the size of the income obtained, most (22.7%) are in the range 1500-1999 lei and 19.4% declared revenues in the range 2000-2499 lei. From the status point of view, 32% are married with children and 19.8% are "in a relationship". Most have university studies (54.5%). Regarding the status on the labor market, most of them have executive positions (41.3%), of which 24.8% are private sector workers and 16.5% are employed in the state.

The importance of local gastronomy is represented by the high share of tourist preferences. Thus, 75.5% prefer local units, of which 39% are family restaurants and 36.6% are restaurants that are known locally. 11.6% prefer restaurants from international chains, 6.6% choose upper-class restaurants and 6.2% opt for local markets.

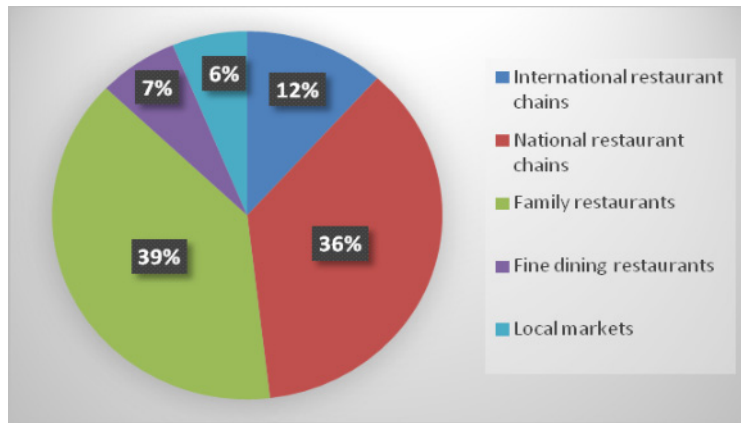


Fig. no. 1. Preferences for different types of food units

Source: own data

Concerning the frequency of choosing the different types of food units for lunch, the highest average was obtained by the classic restaurants (3,4 out of 5 the maximum of frequency) followed by the specialized restaurants (2,98), the specialized restaurants (2,95), restaurants with specific (2.56), fast food restaurants (2.36), grocery stores (2.25), street-food caravans (2.21), bakeries/pastry shops (1.98). The best score was recorded by classic restaurants, 14% of respondents always use it for lunch. On the opposite side, 40.9% of respondents say they never choose bakeries and pastry shops for lunch.

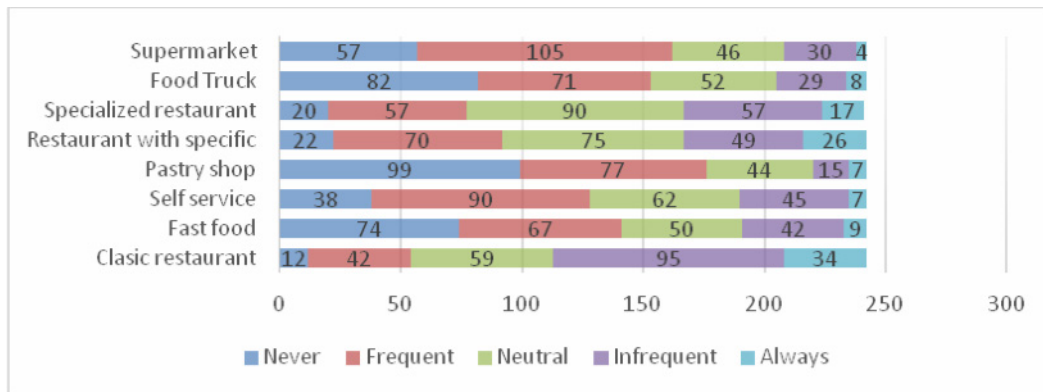


Fig. no. 2. Preferences for different types of food units for lunch

Source: own data

Regarding the frequency of choice of different types of catering units for dinner (see fig. Nr. 1), the situation is relatively similar, the highest average was obtained also by the classic restaurants (3,58 out of 5 the maximum of frequency) followed by the specialized restaurants (2,98), the specific restaurants (2,96), self-service restaurants (2,33), fast food restaurants (2,10), grocery stores (2,05), street-food caravans (1,95). The best score was also recorded by classic restaurants, 19% of respondents always use it for dinner. At the other extreme, 51.2% of respondents say they never choose bakeries and pastry shops for dinner.

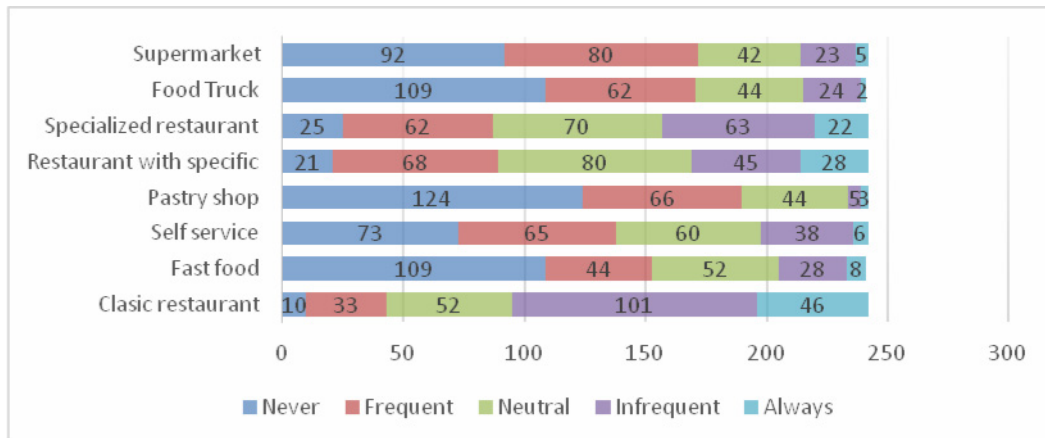


Fig. no. 3. Preferences for different types of food units for dinner

Source: own data

Another variable surveyed is *the habit of drinking local beverages during meals*, of which the highest frequency is represented by local beverages consumed during dinner (133), followed by local drinks at lunchtime (96). The lowest frequency was recorded for drinks purchased from stores (42).

Visitors to the Fair were also questioned about how local gastronomy is an element of destination differentiation. On a 5-step orderly scale (strong agreement, agreement, neutral, strong disagreement and disagreement), the highest number of responses was the agreement (41.3%) followed by neutral (31.8%), strong agreement (21.1%), disagreement (4.1%) and strong disagreement (1.7%). Therefore, for the majority of respondents, gastronomy is an element through which travel destinations can be distinguished on the tourist market. However, gastronomy represents only a relative measure of the choice of a destination, the answers being distributed on the same scale as: neutral (42,1%), agreement (27,3%), disagreement (15,7 %), strong agreement (12,4%), strong disagreement (2,5%). However, most people appreciate that gastronomy contributes to creating a memorable stay: agreement (50%) and strong agreement (18,2%). Other results obtained for this question are: neutral (26,4%), disagreement (3,3%) and strong disagreement (2,1%).

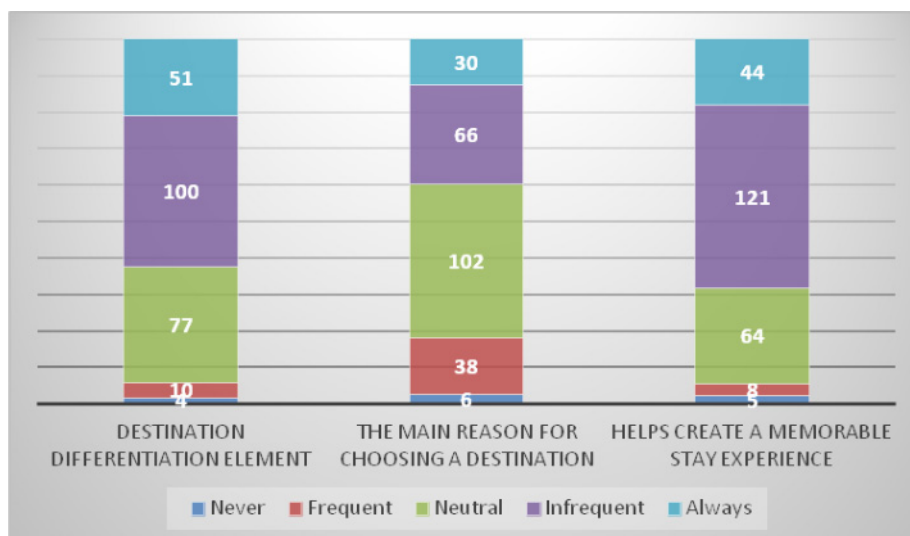


Fig. no. 4. The role of gastronomy in tourism

Source: own data

Tourist experience was measured on a scale of 1 (not related to tourism) to 10 (tourism specialists), most of the respondents appreciated their own tourist experience with 8 (33.5%), 7 (20.7%) and 9 (18.6%).

Conclusions

The transformations made in recent years on the tourism market and, in particular, the intensification of efforts to assert local identity on the basis of sustainable development have contributed to the promotion of gastronomy tourism as a distinct form of travel, which has also led to an increase in concerns in the sphere of conceptual delimitation. The relationship between tourism and gastronomy mainly aims at belonging to local culture, thus becoming an important tourist attraction capable of generating significant travel experiences and is strongly argued by the gastronomy site in the travel preferences of tourists at international level. With regard to the impact that gastronomy tourism has on economic and social development, many research studies demonstrate the benefits for local communities, both economically-socially and culturally. However, the way gastronomy is a criterion for choosing a holiday destination is less represented in the literature. The quantitative research carried out at the Romanian Tourism Fair on 22-24 February 2018 had as its main objective the identification of the place of gastronomy in the Romanian travel preferences. Although local cuisine has been recognized as an important criterion for distinguishing tourist destinations, contributing to the creation of a memorable travel experience, less than 30% of respondents indicate it as a criterion for choosing a holiday destination, which requires the intensification of the concerns of all "local actors" in the development and promotion of culinary tourism products, thus enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations and, on this basis, shaping gastronomy as an element of formation and orientation of tourist flows.

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