

Culinary Tourism - a key-aspect of Romanian tourism development

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ABSTRACT

Generally, this article aims at discussing the subject of culinary tourism, especially with its Romanian particularities. Besides resources, wild nature with mountains, rivers, Danube Delta, monasteries and medieval cities preserved in order for the contemporary footprint not to be noticed, Romania has an important background of traditional food products. These original and traditional products, as well as the authentic way of preparing them, increasingly invite the tourists to experience Romania from a culinary tourism point of view. The rural space of Transylvania, with its life, captivates more and more tourists and the article expresses the influence of British tourists arrivals observed in the last period.

Keywords: *culinary tourism, Romanian food products, authenticity, strategic management, British visitors*

INTRODUCTION

Ecological agriculture and public alimentation, as parts of tourism, have known a great and complex development, with an increasing proportion, both economically and socially. Romania may become, without exception, an important touristic attraction at international level due to the Carpathian Mountains and its untouched nature by time and people, with a unique and beautiful Danube Delta with its particularities and the advantage of the position of the Black Sea. One can add historical areas with medieval cities well-preserved in time, a unique rural space with Orthodox monasteries.

Romania has an international reputation with a strong personality which has multiple touristic destinations of great importance. In the tourism source-markets, the Romania's potential is a very good one. Romania is a good market to sell its touristic packages, but the touristic information is still reduced regarding the competitive advantage offered by this country. Besides this, it can be noticed a match between requirements and tourist needs, on one hand, and touristic offer on the other hand.

Nature, the natural environment of Romania respectively, remains an element that needs to be promoted with priority on the international touristic market. With all these advantages, which nature is offering together with its resources, in order to attract a higher number of foreign visitors, a remodeling of promoting tourism products is needed, not only in Europe, but also at international level.

During the last year, in 2012, according to the World Tourism Organization data, Romania was visited by 1,6 millions of foreign tourists. Average amounts spent by them were about

780 euros per person, considering the fact that they remain guests on Romania's territory for 3.5 days only (Gheorghe, 2013).

THE CONCEPT OF CULINARY TOURISM

Tourists have developed in time their preferences and necessities in terms of tourism. Not only that the financial and temporal resources have increased in tourism, but these requirements of the visitors have become more complex.

Culinary tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization as representing tourists or visitors that schedule their trips with the goal to taste the local cuisine of one given country or to realize activities concerning gastronomy.

Another definition of culinary tourism is given by the International Food Tourism Association which sees it as “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences”. Therefore, by definition, culinary tourism represents the search of unique culinary experiences being capable to satisfy tastes with the finest food and drink in a tourist trip.

In the specialized literature, there are three types of tourists that have interests in tasting traditional products (Frâncu, 2013):

- Entirely interested persons in searching new culinary experiences;
- Persons that are not choosing their touristic destination in a mandatory way for tasting traditional and specific food products, but they taste traditional specific cuisine of the area visited;
- Tourists that take part by chance to these offers during their trip.

So, if the first category is already well-coagulated, the last two categories become more and more powerful, filling the classic tourism.

Hall (2012) mentions the fact that the touristic experience focused on gastronomy does not include only the time and money spent at the touristic destination itself. With other words, there are several steps that have to be mentioned among the culinary trip of tourists:

- the moment before the visit – tourists eat at their homes or take food during their way;
- the journey – during this phase, local products start to be consumed by the visitors, no matter if they are using personal car, airplane, train, etc.;
- the trip itself – is the moment when tourists start to explore the local cuisine;
- the returning – local products are bought in order to be eaten on the way;
- the final phase – is the moment when the products bought from the visited country are eaten at home.

The importance of this type of tourism is materialized by the fact that it leads to a local, regional and national development of the economy of the country offering a high level of tourism diversification.

Therefore, one can talk about the management of touristic destinations, strategically designed and implemented through a marketing policy, based on specific theories, models, calculation techniques and principles. In order to offer the best experience for the tourist, a strategy which involves all the internal and external stakeholders has to be designed and implemented, offering in the same time a character of brand equity (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011).

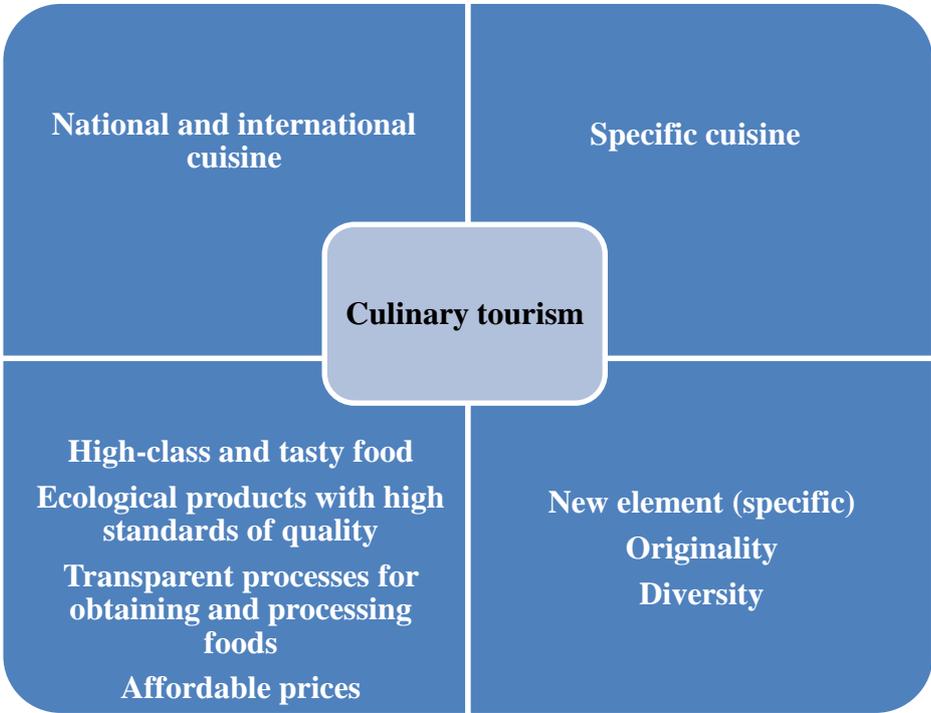
In addition to the advantages offered by nature, landscape, seaside or mountain areas, the local products, especially the natural ones, gain a bigger and bigger share in the tourist's consumption, which brings uniqueness for the new desires of the touristic consumer. A local competitive advantage can be added, because these traditional culinary products are made near to touristic resorts, increasing the number of jobs, so revenues are a real help to the agriculture.

Moreover, tourism gains ground when gastronomy is brought in the forefront – because it becomes a motivation when a touristic destination is chosen, a fact that influences the traditional products offered, which are obtained and made in a way as natural as possible. According to experts, more than one third from the share of tourist destinations expenditure is based on food, which shows a growing importance in choosing travel packages.

Another definition very frequently met for the gastronomic or culinary tourism is the one given by Hall and Sharples (2003) according to whom this phenomenon, of culinary tourism, is a travel for testing, to explore a region from the gastronomic point of view, together with leisure and entertainment. So, primary and secondary producers of such types of food products, culinary festivals, fairs, special events, farmer’s fairs, cooking shows, cooking demonstrations are included, which allows testing the quality and the originality of the products, etc. The absolute importance of this process is that, besides testing, tourists can learn new ways and customs to cook differently by themselves, with a better understanding of the local cuisine.

In what concerns the types of food, in Romania there are a variety of products, even if one can talk about cheese, meat, fish, fruits, chocolate, wine, beer, tea, jams and compotes or other traditional related products. Together with these, the gastronomic routes tend to gain increasingly more interest, especially in our country.

By gastronomic route one can understand a route situated along a circuit well defined that expresses the thematic tourism, composed by local brands, including, in the same time, touristic objectives, such as some places where the food is made or restaurants which contribute at feeding tourists with the best fresh food. In this way, not only the territory, the traditional customs and the direct source of these products are promoted (for instance, visiting the animals and fruits farms), but also the fact that tourists can stay as long as possible in the area, a primordial aspect for obtaining additional revenues.



Source: Author's own computation

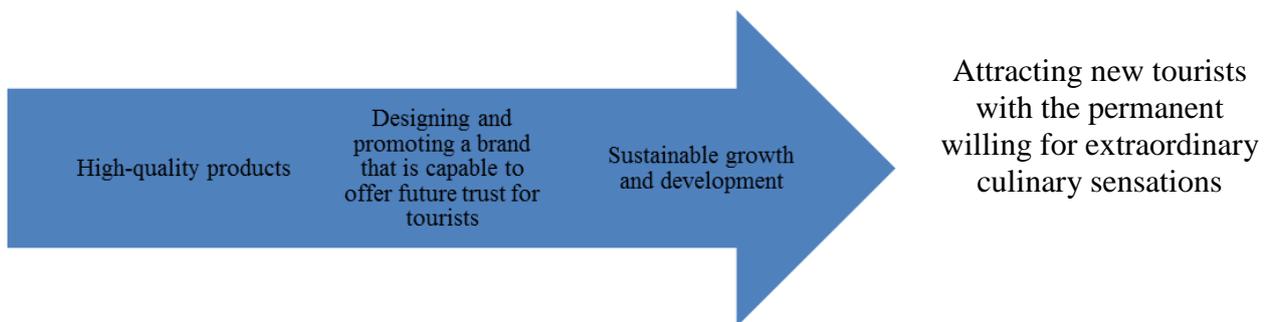
Figure 1. Classification of gastronomical tourism according to consumer demands

More often, in Romania, tourists like the idea of direct participation in the process of these products, so they are allowed to contribute if they want to the moment when various

traditional Romanian dishes or desserts are produced. While it is obvious that influences from several migratory people that crossed by Romania's territory during the history exist, such as the Hungarian people or the Germans who still live here, or the influences from Turkey, Greece and France, the uniqueness of the Romanian cuisine is characterized from the ancient times, from Dacians' and Romans' period, who best shaped this space with their customs and traditions.

Therefore, by culinary tourism, tourists want to obtain what is presented in fig.1.

Culinary tourism providers have to bring quality offers on their owns, in order to obtain competitiveness, uniqueness for a long-term, profit that can create more jobs and to attract more investments in the region by:



Source: Author's own computation

Figure 2. Strategic management of culinary tourism providers

ROMANIAN CULINARY TOURISM

Romania has a lot of traditional culinary products. Apart from this, the competitive advantage that Romania owns is the way of cooking, old customs, preserved from the ancient times. The products are being offered in many fairs and cultural events in order to gather a large number of visitors, by combining the entertainment with cultural education and food. So, Sibiu, an old city, is famous for the soft cottage cheese, Braşov another old city, is famous for the cheese wrapped in fir bark, Silvoiţa and Topoloveni are famous for the plum jam and the Bucovina and Maramureş regions are famous for thier cookies. (Găină, 2013)

Moreover, one can add the vegetables and fruits, which are naturally planted and finally are prepared for preserves, compotes and jams, honey and bee products, herbal teas, wines, juices made from apples, pears, mushrooms obtained in specialized arrangements, hunted meat (fresh or processed for later consumption) etc. Tourists staying at pensions can see specialized appliances that are used in the preparation of food, such as mills for grinding cereals, vessels for seeds' germination, juicers for obtaining natural fruit juices or wine. Here, tourists can notice the manufacturing process of the clay pots, real "tools" which are traditionally used in cooking.

In recent years, British visitors have been increasingly interested about Romania, more interested about the lifestyle of the Romanians and their naturalness lands. The number of British visitors exceeded 100,000 persons in the last years, they being very interested in the Romanian agro-touristic pensions.

Moreover, a regression will be presented, based on two variables:

-The total number of foreign visitors who accomodated in the Romanian agro-touristic pensions;

-The total number of British people arrived in Romania.

The situation is analyzed during 2001-2010 for which statistical data from National Institute of Statistics, Romania, are available.

Table 1. The total number of foreign visitors accommodated in the Romanian agro - touristic pensions and the number of British visitors (2001-2010)

Year	The total number of foreign visitors accommodated in the Romanian agro- touristic pensions ¹	The number of British visitors in Romania
2001	6000	56.000
2002	9000	60.000
2003	12.000	69.000
2004	17.000	55.000
2005	18.000	77.000
2006	18.000	90.000
2007	20.000	118.000
2008	20.000	128.000
2009	19.000	104.000
2010	20.000	92.000

According to the results obtained after applying the regression function using *Microsoft Office – Excel 2010*, this has the following structure:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta * x_i + e_i \quad (1), \text{ where:}$$

- y_i and x_i represent values of the cause and effect variables;
- α and β are the parameters of the regression equation;
- α means a point of intersection that the regression line has with the O_y axis;
- β – shows the change of y expressed in units when it is noticed a variation with 1 unit of x ;
- e_i - is composed of other influential factors which are not essential, expressing a residual value (also called random error).

Replacing with the results generated by the program, the above mentioned function will have the following feature:

$$y_i = 3.54 + 0.14 * x_i + e_i \quad (2)$$

Therefore, Multiple R represents the correlation coefficient and because it fits the interval (0.5-.0.75), shows the fact that there is a medium intensity correlation between the two variables taken into consideration.

R square - determination coefficient – is 0.55, so the arrival of the British visitors influences in a proportion of 55% the variation of the foreign visitors accommodated in Romanian agro touristic pensions. In the same time, the coefficient β is positive ($0.14 > 0$) which means that

¹ Observation: Starting with 2009, the rural pensions were defined as agro-touristic pensions.

when the number of British visitors increases by 1000 persons, the number of tourists who are accommodated at the agro touristic pensions increases with 145 persons. Due to the fact that β is positive, one obtains a direct relationship between the two variables under contextual analysis.

Table 2. The results obtained from the regression function

SUMMARY OUTPUT		
<i>Regression Statistics</i>		
Multiple R	0.745607871	<i>Significance F</i> 0.013300753
R Square	0.555931097	
Adjusted R Square	0.500422484	
Standard Error	3.580075239	
Observations	10	
ANOVA		
	<i>df</i>	
Regression	1	
Residual	8	
Total	9	
	<i>Coefficients</i>	
Intercept	3.542425193	
X Variable 1	0.145554474	

Source: author's own computation using the data from Table 1

Significance F (in this case equals 0.01) – significance level – which is lower than 0.05, shows the fact that the obtained results are significant.

CONCLUSION

Lately, the culinary tourism engages a high interest. Countries with high potential (specific products, unique ways of cooking) must integrate this branch of tourism into the global strategy of tourism. The profit brought by culinary tourism contributes not only to the development of the existent structure, but it also contributes to the development of certain touristic packages in the future because it helps all the related industrial branches – agriculture, transports, the sustainable environment.

Tourists' culinary experience on the territory of the host-country refers not only to the time and money spent in the resorts, but it also takes contact with the local products from the very beginning, when the tourists enter that country and, in their turn, they can buy, according to their preferences, local products which caught their attention during the trip. Moreover, not only the direct visitors get into contact with a specific cuisine, but also their relatives and friends at the return, if non-perishable goods are brought. Depending on their quality and taste, local products are creating an indirect advertisement for those who remained at home.

Romania has a huge potential, both as landscape and cuisine and it has to extend its efforts to continue the promotion of its touristic products, not only at European level, but also at global level as well.

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