

Traditional Food. Case Study: Romanian Local Food

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Abstract

This paper attempts to identify the importance of Romanian local food for the national tourism development, how much they are sought by citizens and foreign tourists and the role of the government in their approving their certification and commercialization. Lately, people give a high importance on what kind of food they are eating, how it is produced or what it is made of. The quality of the food plays an increasingly important role for the consumers and this is why local foods are preferred instead of standardized products. Due to the fact that they are produced, processed and prepared in small quantities they have less preservatives or other harmful substances. Unfortunately these products are found in small quantities and only in certain seasons and areas, and each country, city and region have their own kind of food or drink. In Romania there are a significant number of traditional foods and beverages, and despite all the efforts made by the producers, their selling is hampered by the challenging logistics and too many rules and regulations that must be complied annually. The development of gastronomic tourism is based on the presence of this kind of products and a distinctive cuisine.

Keywords: local food, gastronomy, tourism, Romania.

JEL classification: L83, Q18.

1. Introduction

Romania has a special gastronomic potential as a result of preserving traditional features of Romanian cuisine that were also influenced by numerous foreign nations. Romanian traditional cuisine stands out with several components like culinary techniques, tools, the raw materials that are used and the dishes. One way to develop tourism in a sustainable way is to promote the consumption of local foods by both locals and foreigners. Integrating tourism with local food systems can lead to an economic growth, a more positive response to the customers' demands regarding the quality of food and it can build on the cultural heritage of the country. Hence, Romanians could better promote their local foods and beverages in order to gain a competitive advantage over other countries.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Gastronomy tourism

Food is an important component in any travel destination and could occupy as much as one third of the total expenditure of a tourist in a destination (Mark, Lumbers, Eves, 2012). Food can also form part of a peak experience for tourists and influence their decision to revisit a destination (Kim, Goh, Antum, 2011). Definitions of food tourism, gastronomy tourism, culinary tourism and gourmet tourism consider food as the primary motivational factor for these groups of tourists to travel (Boniface, 2003; Kivela, Crotts, 2006; Hall, Sharples, 2008). For example, the definition of food tourism is “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel” (Hall, Mitchell, 2001).

Food and tourism have a very close relationship and food is a critical tourism resource (Quan, Wang, 2004). It is vital for physical sustenance and all tourists have to eat when traveling, so food can be a major draw and primary motivator for some, satisfying a multiplicity of physiological and other needs and desires (Tikkanen, 2007).

Fields (2002) adopts the typology of tourist motivators suggested by McIntosh et al. (1995) to elaborate on the relation between food consumption and tourism. The four motivators are: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige.

Firstly, food can be a physical motivator as the act of eating is predominately physical in nature involving sensory perceptions to appreciate the food or tourists’ needs for sustenance. Secondly, food can also be a cultural motivator because when tourists are experiencing new local cuisines, they are simultaneously experiencing a new culture. Thirdly, it might serve as an interpersonal motivator as meals taken on a holiday have a social function including building new social relations and strengthening social bonds. Finally, local delicacies can be also a status and prestige motivator, as tourists can build their knowledge of the local cuisine by eating as the locals do, and exploring new cuisines and foods that they or their friends are not likely to encounter at home (Fields, 2002).

There are three ways of serving in food in different tourist destinations. The common and general way is to serve the foods in restaurants. The second one is to deliver them at feasts and festivals where food plays the central role of tourist marketing. The third method is to present the foods in canned or packed forms (Ardabili, 2011).

Tourists’ exposure to the local cuisine of a destination, acquired through previous visitation, can increase the familiarity of that cuisine and thus potentially enhance their preference towards it. The study conducted by Tse and Crotts (2005) supports these findings, indicating that repeated visitations are positively correlated

with both the number and range of tourists' culinary explorations, whereas first-time visitations were negatively correlated. Tourists may have an increased exposure to different foreign cuisines under heightened globalization. Given the growing influence of globalization, not only have tourists become more mobile, but the food they eat now has also become more international (Hall, Mitchell, 2002). There is an increasing availability of both ethnic restaurants in tourists' home settings and information sources about foreign cuisines which provide tourists with the opportunity to become acquainted with a variety of foreign cuisines before they travel to the destinations where these foreign cuisines originated (Cohen, Avieli, 2004).

Domestic and international visitors are becoming more adventurous and open to new experiences overall and particularly to different types of foods. Many of them are also looking for the genuine and authentic factor, which can be found in local foods and eating places (Reynolds, 1993).

A country's food can be an important element of its image and that's why the theme has always been used in promotion, especially by locations that are traditionally associated with fine foods such as France and Italy. However, other countries, for example Romania is not giving a great importance to promote its food and wine.

Tourist food consumption can lead to economic benefits as viability and sustainable competitiveness of a destination. There are many economic advantages of food tourism and governments see it as a tool in rural development which can help stimulate agrarian economies that are declining, protect existing jobs and create employment opportunities (Boyne, Hall & Williams, 2003). These objectives correspond with those of sustainable tourism development policies such as developed food tourism in the countryside can favour local farming communities and small-scale business ventures. In other places, food tourism may also reinforce environmental protection by discouraging the wasteful transportation on long distances of food supplies. Advantages are, therefore, not just confined to economics and business, but they encompass social and environmental factors, which interest companies that have a commitment to corporate social responsibility as well as officials. It simultaneously supports the tourism and agricultural sectors and builds bridges between the two industries. Although culinary tourism has opened up new markets for producers, it has not had a major effect on the prices that farmers receive in exchange for their goods. For farmers, the primary benefit may be that it diversifies their income and protects them against some of the uncertainty they may face in other markets (Green, Dougherty).

2.2. Local food

Definition - Geographic proximity is only one component of the local foods definition. There are a host of other characteristics that may be used by consumers to define local food systems. Some may associate production methods as part of what defines local food. For instance, sustainable production and

distribution practices reduce the use of synthetic chemicals and energy-based fertilizers, are environmentally friendly, and limit chemical and pesticide residues on food. Some consumers also extend the term 'sustainable production' to include fair farm labor practices and animal welfare. The concept of local food may be also extended to whom produces the food: the personality and ethics of the grower; the attractiveness of the farm and the surrounding landscape, and other factors that make up the "story behind the food." The term "provenance" describes the production methods or traditions that are attributable to local influences, and it seems to capture the essence of the component of the local food definition (Thompson, Harper and Kraus, 2008). Local food systems have also been synonyms with small farms that are committed through social and economic relationships (Hughes et al. 2007).

Characteristics of Local Food Suppliers - At local food markets, producers sell a variety of products and are part of a short supply chain in which they deal with storage, packaging, transportation, distribution and advertising. This is why it can be difficult for producers to meet intermediary demands for high volumes, consistent quality, timely deliveries and out-of-season availability (Shipman, 2009). Time invested in customer relations, travel and delivery, processing and packing and scheduled harvesting in order to meet the needs of direct marketing varies across direct-marketing venues, but it is particularly extensive for farmers' markets and u-pick operations (LeRoux et al. 2009). Lack of infrastructure related to distribution of local and regional food has also been reported as a barrier to local food market development (Shipman, 2009). Lack of capital investment for supply chain infrastructures, such as vehicles, temperature controlled storage facilities and processing plants can be a significant barrier to starting local aggregation and distribution businesses (Ostrom, 2006). Significant costs of direct marketing and on farm processing, especially those related to time and labor, can present obstacles to the expansion of local food sales (Lawless et al. 1999; Biermacher et al. 2007).

Trace back Mechanisms - Because most small farmers must combine their products with other farmers' products to make processing and shipping more economical, challenges are encountered with regards to the product quality, consistency, and traceability. With two or more suppliers, which is often the case in mainstream supply chains, trace back can be more difficult if not impossible (Golan et al. 2004). Once a product is combined with others, it is no longer identified with the origin and production processes of a particular farm. Without traceability in place, buyers must assume higher levels of risk and liability in cases of food borne illnesses. Because these buyers attempt to reduce the risks, they often look for established record management procedures before purchasing local foods from their supplier. However, many small and local growers lack the knowledge or resources necessary to create product monitoring systems that would facilitate quick and easy product identification and trace back (Shipman, 2009).

Farmer Expertise and Training - The process of producing and selling local foods includes inherent risks, such as exposure to bad weather, pest

infestations, quality inconsistencies, food safety liability, and fluctuating input prices. Growers often need education and training at local level in order to meet the market requirements and expand the access to local customers on issues related to risk management, appropriate postharvest practices, record keeping, good agricultural practices and liability insurance requirements (Shipman, 2009.). With regards to the producers who had never sold directly to local food service operations, Gregoire et al. (2005) found some obstacles in terms of local regulations, knowledge of food service's purchasing practices, and ensuring a safe food supply. Leadership and training for young farmers and farmers' market participants has been reported to be a necessary element for local food systems growth (Tropp, Barham, 2008). Encouraging volunteerism either on farm or at market outlets, such as local farm stands, has been reported as one successful way of training a new generation of farmers interested in local marketing (Karlen, 2009).

Health and nutrition - Local food systems may offer food items that are fresher, less processed and which retain more nutrients (e.g. because of shorter travel distances) than items offered in non-local systems. For example, locally obtained foods may be healthier because “freshly picked foods (...) retain more nutrients than less fresh foods” (Lea, 2005). Consumers may purchase the same amounts and types of fruits and vegetables, but in the case local foods, they are fresher and the nutrient content of diets is improved. Also, local food systems may increase the availability of healthy food items in a community and encourage consumers to make healthier food choices. For this to be true, at least two conditions must be met: local foods systems must increase the availability of healthy food items in a way that is infeasible or impractical for non-local systems, and consumers who purchase local food must make different dietary choices that they would not have made without the local option available (Morland, Wing, and Roux. 2002; Moore, et al. 2008).

Local food consumers - Gender, age and educational backgrounds were found to be key factors that usually influence consumption of local foods. Previous studies have suggested that socio-demographic changes, such as an increased income, greater leisure time, modern means of transports and later marriage, have played an important role in tourism demands (Franklin, A., Crang, M., 2001). Franklin and Crang, 2001 indicated that demographic variables can be perceived to be a vital factor affecting destination choice. Glanz et al. (1998) maintained that as income and education level increased, people perceive food as something not related with the simple satisfaction of hunger, but with the sense of taste (Glanz, Basil, Maibach, Goldberg, Snyder, 1998). In other words, socio-demographic changes, more education and better jobs, can be important influencing factors in food choice (Wadolowska, Babicz-Zielinska, 2008). According to Flynn et al. (1994), there are differences in the attitude towards food consumption between men and women. Women seem to select the “safety of the food” and “price of the food alternatives” as the primary preferences in food purchases, whilst males tend

to choose “the taste of the food” as the key preference in food purchases (Flynn, Slovic, Mertz, 1994).

Olsen (2003) stated that age can be positively linked to the frequency of seafood consumption. Olsen revealed that when choosing seafood, older people are more involved in health than younger people. The difference of cultural interests among age groups can be found in past studies (Kim, Cheng, O’Leary, 2007). They showed that individuals of less than 30 years old were 1.25 times more likely to visit theme parks than people who were between 30 and 60 years old, while people from the middle age group were the most frequent participants at cultural events or fairs.

Kim et al. 2003 identified that the education level had an effect on tourist destination choices. They showed that participants with a postgraduate degree were 1.5 more likely to visit such attractions than low education groups. Their study added that there was a positive relationship between the level of education and motivation to gain knowledge and seek aesthetic experiences (Kim, Lee, Klenosky, 2003). Regarding health concerns amongst education groups, Valli and Traill (2005) explored the effects on yoghurt preferences and consumption across EU countries, and they suggested that the higher educated consumers were more interested in their health, with yoghurt consumption being generally higher among better educated consumers as these consumers associate yoghurt with healthy benefits. These benefits were less important to less well-educated consumers (Valli, Trail, 2005). Wadolowska et al., 2008 perceived personal factors, such as the education level as influencing factors on food preference. They identified that negative or neutral perceptions of food in relation to health arose more frequently amongst people with primary school education level (Wadolowska, Babicz-Zielinska, 2008).

Food consumption can involve many emotions. The symbolic meanings of food might be based on the cultural values and knowledge that were gained through one’s own experience about which types of food are pleasurable (Lupton, 1998). Food has many associations which can affect its taste, such as childhood memories, positive emotions evoked by good times or the setting and place in which the food was sampled (Spiller, 2012). Even though one aim of food festivals is to evoke emotions through hedonistic experiences (Wakefield, Blodgett, 1994), there are not many published researches on food festivals which investigate the emotions evoked and social impacts of the taste of food. Nevertheless, these are likely to impact food preferences and choices (Spiller, 2012). It has been suggested that consumers are more likely to perceive a service encounter as an experience if they take part in producing the experience themselves (Harris, K., Harris, R., & Baron, 2001).

Local food commerce – There are three forms of commercialization who show common elements in terms of the trend presented by these types of product, namely, one that is moving towards an entertainment-based or dramatized approach to resources and space (in order that they be enjoyed and experienced first-hand), as well as more participative interpretation. When these resources

become protagonists, the tourism image of a country, region or destination is associated with gastronomic aspects, a feature that is directly reflected in tourism slogans and logos.

Trips to a destination - in these cases tourists travel, either independently or in organized tours to destinations that are well known for their gastronomic prestige. These places tend to use gastronomic products as the main attraction, although they also include other elements of cultural or natural appeal and of recognized value.

Thematic routes – These appear on different scales and consist of itineraries that seek to explore a place through short visits based around a single gastronomic aspect or theme. Routes may revolve around a particular product or specific dishes. Gastronomic routes offer a series of pleasurable moments and activities related to the distinctive elements of an itinerary, such as trying products or dishes, taking part in guided tours in order to learn about the agro-industrial production of the product, purchasing products in specialist shops and visiting traditional markets etc. It must be highlighted that such routes enable a product to include elements that, individually, could be presented as complementary resources of other tourism models, but which taken together form the backbone of and create a final product of great value.

Events – These include thematic festivities (traditional fairs, markets and festivals celebrating typical customs and products) whose influence goes beyond the strictly local area and which attract large numbers of visitors from outside (Lopez, Martin, 2006).

3. Romanian local food

In Romania, gastronomic tourism is almost unknown, even though it is practiced in one way or another, but in an empirical and unorganized way. Romanian cuisine is a mix of different dishes from several traditions that came into contact with it. At the same time, it continues to maintain its own character. Romanian cuisine has been greatly influenced by the Ottoman cuisine, and by the cuisines of its neighbours, such as Germans, Serbs, Bulgarians and Hungarians.

Quite a few different types of dishes are sometimes included under a generic term. For example, the category *ciorbă* includes a wide range of soups with a characteristic sour taste. These may be meat and vegetable soups, tripe (*ciorbă de burtă*) and calf foot soups or fish soups. All of them are soured with lemon juice, sauerkraut juice, vinegar or the traditionally *borș*. The category *țuică* (plum brandy) is a generic name for a strong alcoholic spirit in Romania, whilst in other countries every flavour has a different name (www.wikipedia.org).

There are some traditional foods which are consumed only during holidays, such as the traditional *cozonac*, a sweet bread with nuts, poppy seeds or *rahat* (Turkish delight). During Easter, lamb is the most common dish. Its variations include *borș de miel* (lamb sour soup), roast lamb and *drob de miel* – a

Romanian-style lamb haggis made of minced offal (heart, liver, lungs) with spices, wrapped in a caul and roasted. The traditional Easter cake is pască, a pie made of yeast dough with a sweet cottage cheese filling at the center. Romanian pancakes, called clătite are thin (like the French crêpes) and can be prepared with savory or sweet fillings: ground meat, cheese or jam. Wine is the preferred drink, and Romanian wine has a tradition of over three millennia. Romania is currently the world's ninth largest wine producer. Moreover, the export market has recently started to grow (www.educations.com).

Romania produces a wide selection of domestic varieties (Fetească, Grasă, Tamâioasă and Busuioacă), as well as varieties from across the world (Italian Riesling, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Muscat Ottonel). Beer is also highly appreciated, generally blonde pilsener beer, which has German influences. In Romania, there are a few breweries with a long tradition in brewing and distillation. According to the 2009 data of FAOSTAT, Romania is the world's second largest plum producer (after the United States) (FAOSTAT). Approximately 75% of Romania's plum production is processed into the famous țuică, a plum brandy obtained through one or more distillation steps (<http://www.regard-est.com>).

The seasons also influence the food that is served. During summer and autumn, markets overflow with fresh vegetables and fruits coming from local farms. Radishes, spring onions, potatoes, nettles, spinach, lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers delight the shoppers in April and May. From the end of May to late September there is a large variety of fruit: cherries, apricots, strawberries, raspberries, plums, pears, melons and watermelons, peaches, blackberries, blueberries, apples, grapes, quinces and nuts.

Beekeeping has always been one of the traditional occupations in Romania, and the products (honey, wax, honeycombs) are also sold on the market.

In the Romanian legislation - more precisely in the Order No. 690/2004 for approving the "Norms regarding the conditions and criteria necessary for attesting traditional products" - the traditional product is defined as "a product that must be obtained from traditional raw materials, that present a traditional composition or a traditional way of production and/or processing which reflects a traditional technological production process, which is clearly different from other similar products from the same category." (Order No. 690/2004). Moreover, for the product to be registered as such, it has to be "traditional in itself, or must express tradition". (Order No. 690/2004).

Under the new legislation's terms, in order for traditional product to be approved, it has to be manufactured in Romania, it must not have any additives and the raw materials must be local. The technological process and the processing must have a traditional characteristic and the recipe must be submitted for generation to next generations.

For the producers, one of the advantages of registration of local foods and beverages is represented by the possibility of obtaining funds to support their manufacturing and be better represented on the market. Unfortunately, at present,

some traditional products that are made in small quantities have limited possibilities of marketing.

Two main conditions must be met by the producers in order to obtain the funds. Firstly, the traditional manufacturing of processed raw materials will be made in line with the quality requirements set out by the EU legislation. Secondly, the finished product must have certification as a traditional product. Each year, the Ministry of Agriculture renews its lists of traditional products.

Following the introduction of new legislation in the field of traditional products, the number of certified products has declined in recent years.

Table no 1 presents the status of Romanian traditional foods between 2005 and 2013. It results that the number of certified foods and beverages from 2011 to 2012 decreased greatly. In 2014, there have been certified 30 products made by 10 manufacturers and 51 cases from 10 other operators were rejected. This shows that there more rigorous verifications of documents and certifications of products are in place.

Table 1. The number of Romanian traditional foods between 2005 and June 2013

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
No. of products	280	695	774	325	450	279	1050	438	111	4402

Source: MADR

The highest number of traditional products that are certified and nationally registered includes: meat products (1541), followed by dairy products (1535) and bakery products (750). Also, in Romania there are certified traditional beverages (285), vegetables and fruit (jams) (193) and traditional fish products (11).

Conclusions

The main purpose of this article was to show the nutritional value and economic importance of the local food, especially the traditional Romanian one. As a result of this research, there are nine motivations to consume local food: the exciting experience, the authentic experience, togetherness, the prestige, the sensory appeal and the physical environment. As part of the tourist experience, eating local foods is a way of breaking with standardized and globalized way of living. Although, this distancing from daily life is already possible in tourists' countries through eating in so-called "ethnic" restaurants, it is more pleasant to eat it in the country of its own origin. Skills and culinary practices may be different from one another. Promoting a specific local food by conserving the skills and

techniques used at its preparation can lead to re-enacting history, re-appropriating what has been lost and may also help to create, innovate and accept change.

With respect to the significance of food in tourism, Romania, as a country which has many agricultural advantages, could create new ways of attracting more tourists, along with ethical diversity and consequently food variation. All these may represent an appropriate base for gastronomy tourism. In order to accomplish this goal, attention must be paid to two significant points: firstly, the food itself and secondly, the way it is served. Serving local foods in traditional dining rooms may take a central part in tourist satisfaction and presenting some explanations about the food, the regional culture that lies beneath their way of cooking and preparation can be another way to impress them.

Finally, it is recommended that the government should set up an organization to promote culinary internationalization and better restaurant service, help restaurateurs engage in international exchanges, plan large food festivals, boost the international visibility and image of Romanian cuisine, and raise the international prestige of Romanian chefs.

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