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MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISTS – CASE STUDY FROM RURAL SERBIA

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Abstract

Gastronomy is an important aspect of culture in everyday life through which tourists can discover different parts of a tourist destination. The culinary experience is often a key factor in choosing a travel destination. The authors conducted a survey, during 2022, during four major events in rural parts of Serbia - Kulen Festival in Erdevik, Bacon Festival in Kačarevo, Cabbage Festival in Mrčajevci, Bean Festival in Čenej, a total sample of 295 visitors. The aim of the research was to determine the motivation and degree of satisfaction of tourists with the gastronomic offer in rural parts of the Republic of Serbia. The results of this research show that there are three groups of tourists based on their perception of gastronomic experiences. One of the conclusions is that each group of tourists has different motives for visiting a certain/particular gastronomy related rural destination. The results of this research undoubtedly indicate that there are great opportunities for the gastronomic tourism development in rural tourist destinations in Serbia.

Key words: motivation, satisfaction, rural destination, gastronomy

INTRODUCTION

Certain regions in the world have seen a huge increase in gastronomic tourism. To draw as many tourists as possible, who want to learn about a place via cuisine, several places opt to offer a variety of gourmet events. Globally, gastronomic tourism has a significant position (Stojanović & Čerović, 2008). A unique sort of tourism that has been examined in this study is gastronomic tourism, which is growing all over the world. It was determined that it plays a significant part in the growth of a tourism destination, location, or area (Vukolic, 2020). The culinary experience has many possibilities, from the need to travel to becoming the main motivation for choosing a destination and organizing the experience of visitors (Basil and Basil, 2016; Perez-Galvez et al., 2021).

Food has become recognized in the tourism market as part of the local culture consumed by tourists, part of tourism promotion, a potential component of local agricultural and economic development and as a regional factor influenced by consumption patterns and observed tourist preferences (Hall & Mitchel, 2001). Researchers have recently discovered a new connection between gastronomy and tourism, which is brought about by particular traveler types like chefs who look for novel culinary goods, methods, flavors, textures, etc. when exploring new places. They use this information for their renowned restaurants, making the cuisine of the place they visited a source of inspiration for their own culinary inventiveness (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021). In addition, gastronomy is also a factor of economic progress for different destinations, especially in developing countries (Mgonje et al., 2016). In that sense, gastronomic tourism is a great promoter of certain destinations, which means that the value of the product being promoted is maintained at the destination where it was created. To this end, tourism and gastronomy are explored based on three perspectives: consumer's perspective, producer's perspective, and destination's economic and social development perspective (Anderson et al., 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authors who explored gastronomic tourism discovered that gastronomic tourism consists of visiting food producers, restaurants, food festivals, or other locations where guests may enjoy meals that include regional specialties. The goal of gastronomic tourism is to showcase the regional cultures around various issues of the food industry (Green & Dougherty, 2009; Hall et al., 2003). Over the years, tourism has changed to become what it is now, with thematic tourism becoming more and more prevalent. Gastronomically speaking, tourism may be broken down into wine and beer, coffee, chocolate, and cheese tourism (Alonso & Liu, 2010; Pezzi & Faggian, 2020; Gajić & Vukolić, 2021).

Food and beverages are a means of developing tourism in specific destinations. Everett (2016) claims that food and beverages have always been important elements of the tourism and hospitality industry. Chang et al. (2018),

on a total sample of 340 respondents, investigated how food and sensory food preferences affect the intention of the tourists to return to the Bimbab Food Festival. They came to the conclusion that gastronomic tourism significantly influences the visitors' intention to visit the festival again. This means that people who like to travel to enjoy food are also interested in the food festivals, and they become loyal to this form of tourism after consumption. Ellis et al. (2018) conducted research related to gastronomic tourism but from the perspective of cultural anthropology, given that much of the literature on food tourism defines the kitchen as a place used in many forms and interactions with tourists (Olson et al., 2014; Murray & Kline, 2015; Gajić et al., 2022a; Gajić et al., 2022b).

The following factors were recognized by Lee et al. (2012) as being pertinent to the growth of gastronomic tourism: food culture, food knowledge and information, sensory preferences, and health-related characteristics. Their findings showed that while 18.5% of respondents were unaware of this kind of travel, 43.5% of all respondents came with the intention of engaging in gourmet tourism. Attitudes, behavioral control perceptions, and behaviors have been found to be previously associated with behavioral intentions when choosing a travel destination (Lam & Hsu, 2006). The importance of certain food attributes and the impression that food leaves on tourists is of great importance for the development of loyalty among tourists (Gillespie, 2001; Hong et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019, Gajić et al, 2021a). The same authors point out that the results challenge the traditional view of quality attributes, emphasizing that authenticity is a key aspect of quality, satisfaction and loyalty in gastronomic tourism. It is of great importance that managers and managers of catering facilities know that there are different types of tourists (Levitt et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2018; Vukolić et al., 2021).

Each kind of traveler is often thought of as a group that has comparable interests, requirements, attitudes, and sociodemographic traits. This information is required for the establishment of marketing campaigns and tourism-related products (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021). In their research, Kivela & Crotts (2005) proved that there is a need to categorize visitors who visit a certain place on the basis of gastronomy as a motive. Tourist classification is an important process that helps catering and tourist facilities to create products, adapt to each type of tourist and to establish accurate tourist measures in certain locations. Various classifications of tourists have emerged in several studies for which gastronomy is the main motive for traveling and spending money (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; McKercher et al., 2008; Bjork & Kauppinen - Raisanen, 2016; Robinson et al., 2018; Cordova- Buiza et al., 2021).

This research concludes that those tourists who are most attracted to the cuisine of a certain destination have significant purchasing power, that this type of tourist expects a high level in terms of certain aspects, such as quality and originality of domestic cuisine. The same and similar research focusing on gastronomic tourism classification is mainly grouped into three areas: analysis of tourist destinations, food festivals and gastronomic markets (Lopez-Guzman et

al., 2017; Kivela & Crofts, 2005; McKercher et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Crespi-Vallbona & Dominguez Perez, 2016). Hall et al. (2003) state that it is necessary to define the connection between the experience received by visitors and their spending at the destination. Kivela & Crofts (2005) established a method for classifying visitors according to three essential aspects: the first examines the gastronomic knowledge presented by the visitors; others analyze their interest in gastronomy as a decisive element in making a travel decision; the third studies the gastronomic experience of the visitors.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

This paper aims to contribute to the existing academic literature on gastronomic experiences in tourism. Its main goal is to analyze the tourists' interest and motivation in connection with the gastronomic offer in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. The authors conducted a survey, during 2022, during four major events in rural parts of Serbia, Kulen Festival in Erdevik, Bacon Festival in Kačarevo, Cabbage Festival in Mrčajevci, Bean Festival in Čenej. Data for this research were collected through fieldwork that included a representative sample of 295 visitors who attended these tourist and culinary events in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. The research was conducted in 2022, from February to September, in order to get acquainted with the opinion of gastro-tourists about gastronomy and their motivations. The survey used in this study is based on various previous works (Lopez-Guzman et al., 2017; Perez-Galvez et al., 2017; Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2016; Kim et al., 2009; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021) and provides answers to various questions about tourism and gastronomy. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

		N	%
Gender	Male	133	45.1
	Female	162	54.9
Age	18-30	99	33.6
	31-60	126	42.7
	61	70	23.7
Education	high school	111	37.6
	college or university degree	100	33.9
	Master's or PhD	84	28.5
Salary	low average salary	52	17.6
	medium average salary	117	39.7
	high average salary	94	31.9
	extremely high average salary	32	10.8

The reliability of the questionnaire is investigated by Cronbach's Alpha test which must be greater than 0.07. In the case of this research, the value of this test is 0.813, which indicates high reliability.

Five factors were identified by factor analysis: 1. Excitement, 2. Cultural Experience, 3. Interpersonal Relationship, 4. Health Concern and 5. Sensory Appeal. Regarding the defined factors, the highest average score was given to the "Health concern" factor (m = 4.77; SD = 0.315) and then the "Cultural experience" factor (m = 4.59; SD = 0.390). The "Interpersonal Relationship" factor received a slightly lower average score (m = 4.50; SD = 0.514) while the "Sensory Appeal" factor (m = 4.18; SD = 1.030) and the "Excitement" factor (m = 3.65; SD = 0.673) received the lowest average scores. The "Excitement" Factor had four items rated according to the following ratings: tasting local food (m= 3.37; SD= 1.398), more relaxed than at home (m= 4.41; SD= 0.823), no noise and traffic jams (m=2.79; SD= 1.28) and different food from what they usually eat at home (m=3.17; SD= 1.29) which is related to the excitement that visitors experience during their stay at various gastronomic events (Table 2).

Table 2. Food motivational aspects

Factor	m*	SD	Food motivational aspects (items)	m*	SD*
Excitement	3.65	0.673	Tasting local food	3.37	1.398
			More relaxed than at home	4.41	0.823
			No noise and traffic jams	2.79	1.282
			Food is different here from what I usually eat at home	3.17	1.298
Cultural Experience	4.59	0.390	To discover the taste of local food	3.99	1.144
			It offers a unique opportunity to understand the local culture	4.39	1.060
			To discover something new in local culture	4.27	1.125
			Increase my knowledge of different cultures	4.29	1.132
			An authentic experience	4.39	1.104
Interpersonal Relationship	4.50	0.514	To be able to pass my experiences with local food on other people	4.01	1.229
			Tasting local food increases friendship	4.28	1.106
			To give recommendations for local restaurants	4.13	1.169
			It allows me to enjoy pleasant moments with others people	4.43	0.973
Health Concern	4.77	0.315	Local food is good for health	4.19	1.279
			Local food contains a lot of fresh ingredients	4.11	1.234
			Local food is produced under the food laws	4.16	1.364
Sensory Appeal	4.18	1.030	Local food smells nice	3.61	1.510
			Local food tastes good	3.51	1.442
			Local food is visually attractive	3.44	1.526
			The taste of the dish is different	3.44	1.492

*M=mean; SD= standard deviation

CONCLUSION

Gastronomic tourism is presently recognized as a valuable strategy in the promotion of certain tourist sites, owing to tourists who increasingly highlight the value of getting expertise in everything linked to the gastronomic culture in the areas they visit. This study examined the interaction between the visitors and gastronomy at four major gourmet events hosted in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. Tourists that visit such locations desire to expand their sensory experiences relating to cuisine in addition to learning about its legacy. The link between cuisine and tourism is an important consideration in the evaluation of tourist destinations, particularly those related to culture and history. In recent years, several studies have focused on gourmet locations rich in intangible cultural heritage. This study looked at local food as a tourist attraction while visiting a region and how it influences visitor motivation and satisfaction.

After surveying 295 respondents who visited various rural gastronomic destinations in Serbia during 2022, it was concluded that tourists have different attitudes towards gastronomy and food in general. Therefore, there are three groups of gastronomic tourists who have participated in previous scientific papers, but also in this research modeled on Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen (2016) as well as Cordova-Buiza et al. (2021), as Survivors, Enjoyers and Experiencers. This research also contributes to the previous similar research and existing scientific literature. The level of gastronomic interest among tourists depends directly on the culinary motivation and on how tourists experience the pleasure of the food itself. Regarding the culinary motivations of tourists, empirical evidence of the presence of five different factors has been obtained. According to the research by Kim et al. (2013), the factors are labelled/categorized as excitement, sensory appeal, cultural experience, health concern and interpersonal relationship.

This research, in addition to theoretical implications, also has practical ones that contribute to the improvement of business and management of gastronomic tourism, understanding the characteristics of different groups of gastronomic tourists through their motivation and satisfaction, which must be examined further. In order for local gastronomy to become another means of tourism competitiveness, it is necessary to establish measures that will positively affect the promotion of the destination by improving the business of restaurants, food and beverage festivals, more competitive prices and generally improving the gastronomic offer in one destination. After extensive research, the authors came to the conclusion that gastronomic tourists at these events are significantly motivated to visit gastro destinations, but significant differences are observed among respondents of different categories. This research can be the basis for further extensive research by the authors.

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