

## FOOD TOURISM, VECTOR OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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*Abstract: Food tourism is the culinary experimentation of a geographical region being considered an important component of tourism in general. Food tourism promotes unique and impressive gastronomic experiences, being a major factor in choosing a tourist destination, thus, along with the landscape, accommodation and climate, the culinary experience has become defining for those looking for memorable taste sensations, who have a culture of food and drink tasting.*

**Key words:** *tourism, gastronomy, food tourism, tourist destinations*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourists are visiting various places and countries and are fascinated by the culinary part, while local food has great potential to increase sustainability in tourism. Pavlidis and Markantonatou highlight the fact in the literature, various terms are used, such as “culinary tourism”, “gastronomic tourism”, “gastro-tourism”, “wine tourism”, “food tourism” and “gourmet tourism”. [17] Food tourism is the terminology applied throughout this paper. Food represents a cultural and historical heritage and also a fundamental commodity, and gastronomy has become increasingly important in modern society. [4,17] Food has an effect on human health, as well as on agriculture, water, transport and the environment in general, as a way of planning for land, water, energy, transport and ecosystem services. [4]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology consisted of the critical review of the available specialized literature, and a comparative analysis of the identified views and opinions.

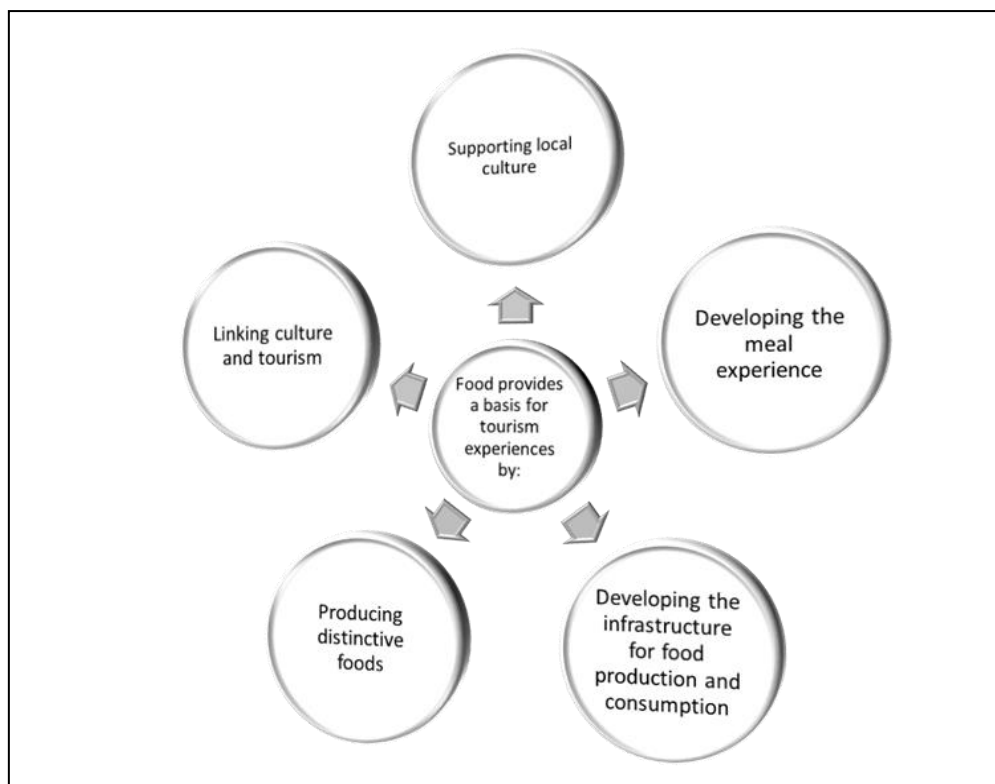
### RESEARCH RESULTS

Hall and Sharples [8] have developed an integrated definition of food tourism which can be defined as “visits to primary and secondary food producers, culinary festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of the specialized food production region are the main motivating factors for travel”. Travel Industry Dictionary defines gastro-tourism as being a recreational trip made to experience the food of a region. [28]

While food tourism is primarily a rural tourist attraction, there is an increasingly popular shift to urban food tourism. [24] Food experiences are gradually more included in the economic and development strategies of various cities and regions. [20] Most hospitality and food companies are small, reflecting a fragmented industry though. [18]

Food and tourism have a strong historical link, food tourism generates jobs and economic activity and plays a major role in the contemporary economy. [5,26,29]

Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte [26] quoting Smith state that food is one of the key elements of a nation's culture and identity, along with its history, symbols, myths and discourses. According to Kim et al [14] food represents a social, cultural, material and symbolic signifier. Ellis A. et al, [6] conclude that food is a cultural experience and so the importance of authenticity is essential, and this authenticity cannot be separated from the traditions and customs present in the destinations.



**Figure 1. Tourist experiences obtained through food**

Source: adapted from Richards G., 2012, *Food and the tourism experience*, UNWTO Global Report on Food Tourism

Acheson [1] explains that "food plays little or no part in the choice of a holiday destination, except for individual travelers to countries like France, Italy or more distantly, India, where it may well be an integral part of the holiday experience"

Hjalager and Corigliano [12] observed that "Food is the theme of additional tourist activities in regions and enterprises whose core products are something else". The authors also realized that food satisfies both the physical and social needs of the body, through social relationships, learning and belonging.

Increasing interest in local cuisine and cuisine has not only had an impact on tourism revenues, but has also provided social and economic contributions to the local community. [23] The increased interest in specific foods and local cuisine has led to a growth in gastronomic tourism, linking local communities to a local quality image. [11]

Frochot I. [7] concludes that food and wine are a strong unifying theme for a tourism product, but probably not its basic element.

Frochot quoting Hu and Ritchie, [7] suggests that "food has also been identified as the fourth most important attribute for tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness after climate, accommodation and scenery".

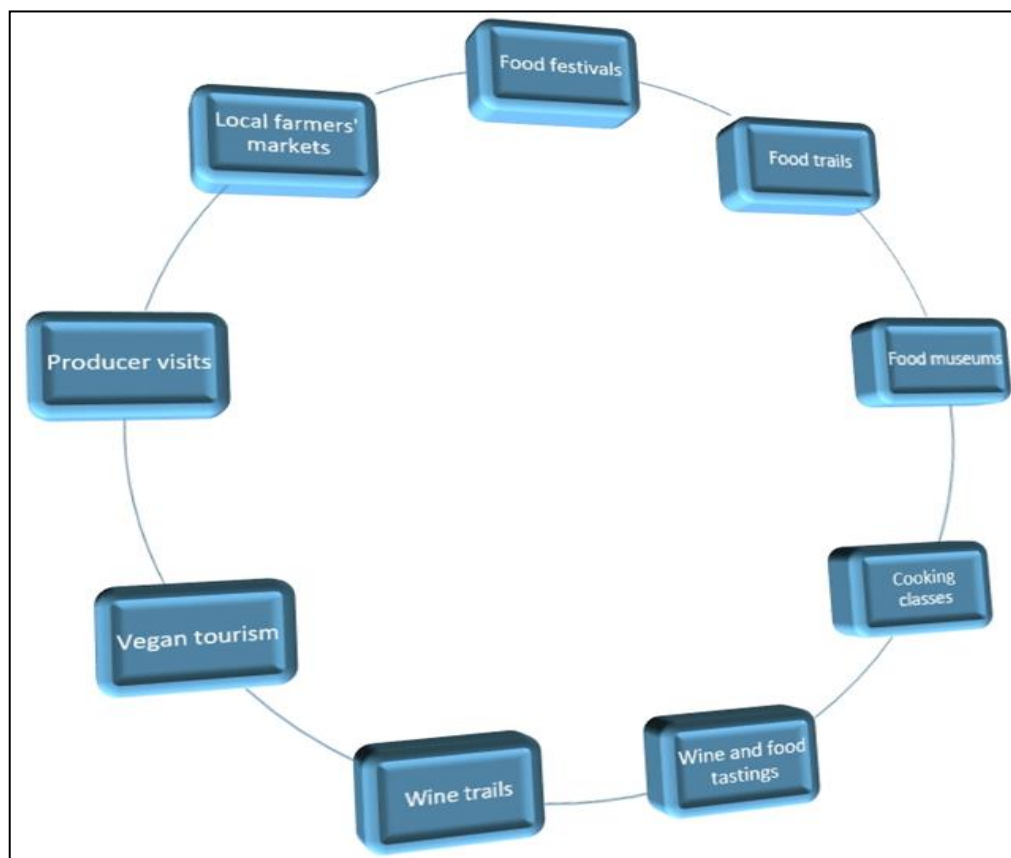
According to Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte [26] "Food tourism as a collective discourse binds farmer, producer, distributor, retailer and consumer together thus providing stakeholders and communities a utopian vision of the future." The authors also mention that food represents the geography of the place.

Gastronomic experiences become one of the most important activities for tourists traveling to a destination. [23] Traditional food is part of the authentic experience that more and more tourists are looking for today.

"Food tourism is the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place." [28]

A study by Sharples [23] showed that a food specific to a geographical area can be a powerful tool for both individual businesses and the region as a whole. Food tourism can be considered as an element of major importance in the development of local strategies. [8]

Two of the most important elements that a destination has are gastronomic variety and regional identity. [2,6]



**Figure 2. Specialist niches within the market of food tourism**

Source: adapted from Molgo and ETFI, 2021, *The European market potential for food tourism*, CBI, <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/food-tourism/market-potential>

According to Ellis [6] the destination is the focal point of tourism, combining product and experience.

Studies [7] show the importance of food and wine in the satisfaction of tourists and the selection of the destination, even if there are certain differences in the results obtained.

Food tourism is an important and valuable symbol of local culture, one of the most effective tools for achieving sustainable rural development, with local food becoming a means of tourist attraction. [17,22]

Destinations have begun to understand the importance of food when selling tourism products and services. [20,6] An important factor in assessing the pleasure of tourists on a trip is the quality of the food they eat at their destination. [16]

Slow food revived interest in gastronomy, all starting with an Italian journalist who in 1986 tried to reintroduce traditional local food, and this led to a widespread movement throughout Europe. [13]

Food tourism is often associated with agritourism, tourists being invited to learn how to produce organic food in rural areas, to participate in the process of cultivation or harvesting or to try environmental products. [5] Rural communities have festivals that

attract tourists from other areas, offering traditional local food here, and these festivals are becoming a more important part of the tourism economy. [24]

According to Casangiu Siea [3] the gastronomic aspect is essential in the choice of holiday destinations, and recent research shows that this trend is constantly growing.

According to the information provided by the Research and Markets, the global food tourism market was valued at \$1,116.7 billion in 2019 and is expected to gain a market value of \$1,796.5 billion by 2027. [25]

France is known for its refined and exquisite food, which has led to it becoming a major tourist attraction from this point of view. [13] Starting with The Michelin Guide from 1901 until today, with other guide books, itineraries and specific websites, French cuisine has gained notoriety by giving a new legitimacy to the place through tourism. [21]

The United Kingdom promotes culinary festivals in different parts of the country, with a clear association between food and tourism [13]

Roberts and Hall [21] mention that “consuming regional specialties directly from where they come, is an act of complicity with the location, a way to become part of the privacy of that place, a symbolic consumption of the history and traditions of a land”.

Through gastronomic tourism and culinary experiences, tourists can get acquainted with the local culture, the authentic taste of the area, the history of a country and can make connections with the locals.

Tourists, while enjoying the food of an area, create connections with the locals and, later, with the local culture.

Food tourism thus brings together food, culture and tourist destinations. At the same time, food and gastronomy, respectively, highlight the key aspects of the intangible history of a destination, thus we can definitely say that food tourism has evolved significantly in recent years, thus becoming one of the most active and inventive parts of the large tourism industry.

## CONCLUSIONS

Food is related to identity, culture, production and consumption, as well as sustainability issues. Food is also a major component of the tourism product. Tourism does not only mean tourist attractions and accommodation conditions. Another aspect, extremely important for all tourists, is the possibility of serving meals during holidays or trips.

Related to all this is the observation of the specific characteristics of different cultures, the understanding of the qualities and attributes related to the products and culinary specialties produced in that region through their consumption.

We can see that although food, along with accommodation and attractions, is one of the key components of tourism, there are many tours organized just for the sake of experiencing this culinary culture. Authentic traditional food and drinks are without a doubt real tourist attractions that are always available to visitors.

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