
CHARACTERISTIC OF TRADITIONAL GASTRONOMY IN THE FUNCTION OF CREATING TOURIST LOYALTY TOWARDS THE DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

Gastronomy has the power to attract tourists as a tourist attraction and make them loyal to it. Toward discussing their research, the authors first base their hypothesis on the argument that traditional gastronomy creates loyalty toward the destination. In order to test the initial hypothesis, it was necessary to answer the question, “In what way does gastronomy create a sense of loyalty toward the destination”? The results revealed that there was a unique formula in which the degree of loyalty of tourists toward travel destination directly depends on the factor of a “gastronomic experience.” The higher this factor was rated, the more the degree of loyalty toward the destination increased. Mostly, it is done by tradition, culture, authenticity, uniqueness, ambiance, and quality of food, beverages, and services. That is, the original and unique gastronomic experience of the destination which is first and foremost introduced by traditional gastronomy.

Introduction

Customs and traditions from ancient times played their prime role in holding the identity of the people (Tan & Nguyen, 2024). If we were to describe peoples' customs and traditions as a rich and inexhaustible treasure that should be opened, discovered, known, and thus saved from oblivion — the priceless values that

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make up the beauty of the spirit of a people, then this must, first and foremost get ways that make all this possible (Cleave, 2018). Indeed, according to Hashimoto (2008), it remains one of the best approaches to reveal and understand the culture and tradition of a people by eating their authentic traditional food (Zaitul & Rina, 2021). These are the old traditional cuisines as something which are followed, marked and celebrated constantly as inherited from one generation to another and to be preserved from being forgotten (Stewart & Maffei, 2011).

Traditional cuisine is something that in modern-day has gained an extremely important place. Considering it as “healthy” food and prepared according to the recipe of “our grandmothers,” gastronomy is viewed as a solid bond that connects culture and tradition with the modern world (Naumov & Nair, 2024). Linking through history enables connection and helps with the national identity of the country. Also, traditional gastronomy has psychological determinants because it has a different meaning for each person (Vitković, 2008; Vitković, 2015; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019).

Such recipes are highly subjected to change and variation. Therefore, it is most important to track their originality to the eldest roots possible and let the guests know it has kept that authenticity (Cai et al. 2021). As one of the latest considerations by scientists approaching gastronomy as a science, rural tourism is put forth as an intermediate base between traditional gastronomy and another way of perpetuating its principles of preserving traditional recipes in the best way possible (Choe & Kim, 2018). These tourists are those “seeking a real experience; at the same time, they may give their grain of sand in its maintenance.”

There are different views on the role of food in tourism, as Tikanen (2007) pointed out: a) Food as a tourist attraction defines gastronomy as a strongly attracting feature with a powerful contractile zone. Concerning what the needs of tourists can be met with a great culinary experience, whether food or drink, it is them. These researchers state it is a motive for tourists that independently lures travelers who become loyal to destinations by gastronomy as a top experience and b) Food as a constituent element of the tourism product — an approach that establishes that food and beverage constitute an inextricable part of travel and tourism destinations. Tourists need to eat and drink, and this dimension treats gastronomy as an additional kind of tourism motivation. Even as such a motivation that originally did not bring tourists to a tourism destination, like here, can have an impact on the perceptions later on and create loyalty toward the destination as such if the experiences are blowing expectations away (Cimbaljević et al., 2023, Inđić et al., 2023; Luković et al., 2024).

In this paper, gastronomy is viewed as a tourist attraction. The research was within the geographical bounds of Vojvodina. Authors started from hypothesis H¹ that traditional gastronomy creates loyalty of tourists towards the destination. In order to confirm the initial hypothesis, it was first necessary to understand and answer the question: “How does gastronomy create a sense of loyalty to the destination?” The results showed that the most responsibility for loyalty to the destination fell on the factor of “gastronomic experience.” This work concluded with the fact that tourists visit tourist destinations only to enjoy their traditional and authentic cuisines, which might not be available in their regions. In this regard, Vojvodina proved to be an ideal gastronomic attraction

Literature review

Culinary tourism can be defined as an exploration of culture and history through food which leads to the creation of memorable experiences (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Pantović et al., 2023). In this way it connects and permeates through other types of tourism through gastronomy (De Jong & Varley, 2017). Various terms describe various forms of tourists' motivation by food and drink travel, among them are separated: culinary tourism (Wolf, 2004; Wolf, 2006; Ignatov, Smith, 2006; Recuero-Virto, N., & Valilla Arróspide, 2024); gastronomic tourism (Hjalager, Richards, 2002; Roslindo Kuhn et al., 2024); tasting tourism (Boniface, 2003; Lee, 2023) and food tourism (Hall et al., 2003; Getz et al., 2014; Milanović et al., 2023; De Jong & Varley, 2018; Rachao et al., 2019, Vljaković et al., 2023; Gafu et al., 2024).

Among all expenditures during the trip, the tourists are the least willing to cut down the budget intended for food (De Rosa et al., 2019). This means that tourist consumption of food makes an important share in the incomes of local restaurants, kebab houses, bakeries, and MPs, in the agricultural and food industry, and thus in the economy of the destination. This refers not only to the consumption of gastronomic products, which as such are offered to tourists in their final form, this is also about the consumption of agricultural and food products in the region (Niavis et al., 2020).

This relationship is one of dependence, manifesting itself in four different forms, according to Hjalager and Corigliano (2000): Food has incorporated into tourism marketing and management over recent years by many governments. Food plays an important role in many destinations as a lure for the eye in brochures, videos and television programs. Especially where over 50% of new products and experiences are heritage-based, destinations are actively exploiting the opening of historic food factories and visitor centers. Festivals and events

have marked food as the central attraction that lures not only tourists but also locals (Devi, 2015).

Quan and Wang state four recommendations in the respect of developing food as a destination attraction (Quan, Wang, 2004), rural areas could promote the gastronomy of certain rural areas; destinations rich in food could turn into major tourist spots; the food from a destination can form part of a bigger tourism activity and food or gastronomic tourism may be used to boost the attractiveness of the destination. In today's market, the primary function of a restaurant is not only to provide food but also to give tourists an experience. Changes are something very essential in this modern world for running a restaurant because, in these competitive fields every restaurant has to make an attempt to make a serious impression on their customers with something special, and that special can be given from a different food experience provided in a unique atmosphere (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Barjaktarović, 2023; Pantić et al., 2021; Stoiljković et al., 2023; Eom & Han, 2019).

After doing a study, Henderson states that food has become one of the synonyms for Singapore — the majority of the people in Singapore think that food is the most appealing factor that will draw in visitors (Henderson, 2004). Therefore, in the Singaporean food became the most one in the promotional strategy in the marketing plan. Singapore arranges many annual food events and they use this as a major means to attract tourists. Among the festivals, Singapore Food Fair and World Gourmet Summit take leading positions; they introduce local food and cultural life from Singapore's perspective to the world. The government is raising the level of food health safety that can make sure the food delivered is healthy and safe to eat by both residents and tourists (Jones-Crank 2024). With great seriousness in developing food tourism, Singapore has developed a guide to Muslim dishes which is very important for the Muslim tourists.

This is how it has always been in the European framework, where the image of France has been about food and wine. Regardless of being in their domestic market or cultivating an international market, it is the reputation of food products, vineyards, or restaurants that have conventionally dominated national as well as regional marketing strategies. Very diverse regional food and cuisine have managed to become highly important and have turned into a tool used by French regions to distinguish themselves on the international stage (Liu, 2024). Nevertheless, the bigness of the French regions will further capitalize on this reputation of agricultural and food products to position itself as a traditional, rural authentic region (Frochot, 2003; Brad et al., 2018). It, moreover, is barely ever the image of restaurants and starred chefs by Michelin.

In 2007 Italy counted 130 wine routes 420 wine producing areas and 2 million people working in the gastronomic and wine tourism sector (Vecchio et al., 2024). These forms of tourism attract over 4 million foreign tourists annually with a turnover of about 2,500 million euros. Soressi, 2007 considered this not satisfactory. Hjalager and Corigliano compare Denmark with Italy and describe in these countries the basic features of the gastronomic cultures (Hjalager, Corigliano, 2000). In Denmark, food production differences dominate economically, while the strength of agriculture and food processing industries is, in many cases, an image quality compromise. This is in contrast with Italy since, according to Su and Horng (2012), the dominance of tradition is noticeable in their policy on food production and distribution.

Government departments in Great Britain have acknowledged the nexus that exists between tourism and food as well as movement by opening an agency that will help introduce the regional culinary sectors. In England and Wales, a government-backed organization, Food From Britain (FFB) includes the encouragement of the development of the British specialties and pies sector as part of its mission (Sharples, 2003).

The research methodology

The survey was conducted among the guests of the restaurant in Banstol. The place is a hive for a local cuisine-old-style dishes prepared with the old recipe of Srem, handed down from generation to generation. It is a place where all products used in preparing food are organic. The survey covered the period from March 2023 to August 2024. The responses were collected by a random sampling system. The number of respondents was 363 in total, out of which nearly 217 were domestic tourists and the others were foreigners.

The respondents were asked to rate 15 attributees:

- Portions are generous,
- I like the quality of the meat,
- The organic production certificate can be seen on the menu,
- It is a farm, so everything can be seen where and how it is grown,
- The organoleptic qualities of the food are excellent,
- The taste is unique,
- I have not tried anything similar,
- You can feel the spirit of the space and tradition,

- The food is traditional according to the recipe that was once used,
- You can feel it and the harmony of taste is unrepeatable,
- The ambience in which the food is served contributes to the taste of the food,
- I like the traditional dishes from which the food is consumed,
- I like the sound of the tambourine as traditional background music,
- I like that we are served by women dressed in traditional folk costumes,
- Everything we eat can be traced from “field to table”. It is priceless.

These attitudes had to be scaled. One is a low score, and five is high satisfaction. These attitudes are dished up to tourists with the objective of identifying which, in their loyalty, has the strongest linkage for or to any given tourist destination. The attitudes were subjected to factor analysis before final selection was made.

In their work, the authors started from the starting hypothesis H that traditional gastronomy creates loyalty of tourists towards the destination. In order to prove the initial hypothesis, it was necessary to answer the question: “How does gastronomy create a sense of loyalty to the destination?”. The results singled out one factor from all the opinions offered: “gastronomic experience”.

Result and Discussion

Most of the respondents were from Serbia (217/57%). Respondents were also from abroad in Bosnia-Herzegovina (49/12.9%), Italy (42/11%), Slovenia (33/8.7%), and the Czech Republic (22/5.8%). Among them, 178 (46.7%) were male respondents and 185 (48.6%) were female respondents.

The initial factor analysis (see Table 1) yielded a model that categorizes the variables into one distinct factor, collectively accounting for 94.912% of the variance.

Table 1. Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14,237	94,912	94,912	14,091	93,942	93,942
2	,358	2,384	97,296			
3	,156	1,041	98,337			
4	,059	,392	98,729			
5	,042	,281	99,011			
6	,039	,261	99,272			
7	,030	,201	99,472			
8	,021	,142	99,614			

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
9	,014	,090	99,705			
10	,013	,085	99,790			
11	,011	,076	99,865			
12	,010	,069	99,935			
13	,004	,027	99,962			
14	,004	,024	99,986			
15	,002	,014	100,000			

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood

Table 2 displays very high loadings for all 15 variables, which first of all means complete belonging to the factor of “gastronomic experience.” The authors consider this actually the answer to the question “How does gastronomy create a sense of loyalty to the destination?” Therefore, what depends on the feeling of loyalty is the unique gastronomic experience that destinations provide for tourists. Because each destination has its own “story” and with that one special gastronomic stamp or “gastronomic experience” belonging to it, this stands to reason.

Table 2. Factor Matrix^a

	Factor 1
	“Gastronomic experience”
v1	,996
v2	,975
v3	,961
v4	,989
v5	,957
v6	,949
v7	,971
v8	,961
v9	,956
v10	,987
v11	,958
v12	,944
v13	,996
v14	,973
v15	,965

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood

a. 1 factors extracted. 12 iterations required.

Complete uniqueness in the responses, regardless of gender and the country of origin of the tourists (Table 3), confirms the hypothesis H that traditional gastronomy creates destination loyalty. A significant formula has been developed illustrating how to determine tourist loyalty towards tourist destinations.

Table 3. Goodness-of-fit Test

Chi-Square	df	Sig.
4589,331	90	,000

Based on the results that can be seen in table 4, the formula for determining loyalty among tourists toward tourist destinations is directly proportional to high ratings given by tourists for every offered item. The higher the ratings (average rating is around 4), the more loyal the feelings toward the destinations.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
Portions are generous	363	3	5	3,97	,041	,774	,599
I like the quality of the meat	363	3	5	4,02	,041	,774	,599
The organic production certificate can be seen on the menu	363	3	5	4,05	,041	,787	,619
It is a farm, so everything can be seen where and how it is grown	363	3	5	3,99	,041	,779	,608
The organoleptic qualities of the food are excellent	363	3	5	4,05	,041	,778	,605
The taste is unique	363	3	5	4,07	,041	,787	,620
I have not tried anything similar	363	3	5	4,01	,041	,774	,599
You can feel the spirit of the space and tradition	363	3	5	4,04	,041	,775	,600
The food is traditional according to the recipe that was once used, and you can feel it	363	3	5	4,05	,041	,783	,613
The harmony of taste is unrepeatable	363	3	5	4,00	,041	,785	,616
The ambience in which the food is served contributes to the taste of the food	363	3	5	4,05	,041	,773	,597

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
I like the traditional dishes from which the food is consumed	363	3	5	4,08	,042	,791	,626
I like the sound of the tambourine as traditional background music	363	3	5	3,98	,040	,767	,588
I like that we are served by women dressed in traditional folk costumes	363	3	5	4,02	,040	,767	,588
Everything we eat can be traced from "field to table". It is priceless	363	3	5	4,04	,041	,782	,611
Valid N (listwise)	363						

The authenticity of the cuisine is what makes the Vojvodina dish very specific and excellent gastronomy experience. The Vojvodina cuisine is an amalgam of quirks belonging collectively towards the diverse plurality of people who have lived in the area for centuries. Tourists love coming here, and they love returning here. Vojvodina cuisine is rich, multifarious, and flavored. One feels tradition and love through its preparation and serving. As noted by the interviewees, organoleptic properties for Vojvodina cuisine are superb. It is food that engages all the senses.

One of the most important characteristics of national cuisine is based on the raw material preferences. In almost all households in this area, food of animal origin (fresh and dried meat of domestic and wild animals, offal, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products), and some local fruits and vegetables are produced (Kalenjuk Pivarski, et al., 2023). On the whole, Vojvodina is quite rich in the uniqueness of gastronomic recipes enhanced by the flavor of the Hungarians and Austria-Hungary.

In the Vojvodina cuisine, as the most important parts are the grain dishes, whether it is made from whole grain, bought, or ground into flour, all dishes consist of dough; then it's dumplings (gomboce), doughnuts, buns salty and sweet, scones, muffins, and rolls. Namely, from the very rich choice of vegetables, which Vojvodina has never been lacking in, a large number of various vegetable dishes created cuisine characteristic for Vojvodina (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2018). In the daily food in Vojvodina, there is always a vegetable dish, either in the form of different vegetable soups, different stews, porridge, and puree, pureed, stewed, baked, or roasted single or mixed vegetables. More than in other parts of the country, in Vojvodina are more commonly used carrots, parsley, celery roots, and other roots, which are also prepared differently and in this manner used to prepare various other soups (Grubor et al., 2022).

Only “sarma” is remarkable among the prepared dishes belonging to the category of cabbage, but otherwise, beans may be singled out since they are prepared in about ten different ways. Traditionally, even in ancient times, plant-based foods were also used for the preparation of preserved food-winter foods, pickled in jars (peppers, cucumbers, green tomatoes, pumpkins, etc.). Also prepared were desserts: compote from apricots, peaches, plums, pears, and quinces, melons, apples, plums, cherries, sour cherries; marmalade from plums, apricots, pomegranate, quince, and grape; quince or peach marmalade; jelly from sour cherries, and cherries; watermelon. Juices: boiled tomatoes, apricot juice, raspberry, and strawberry, peach, quince, etc. Although “winter fruit” is still only a custom today when there is a whole variety of fruit and vegetables throughout the year, it is kept mainly by the older Vojvodina households (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. 2022).

The basic original meat dishes from Vojvodina are those at which the meat products will be used as slices or chopped down (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2017). Breading and deep frying relate more to the traditional portrayal of meat in Vojvodina. Frying is certainly not the healthiest way of cooking, but it provides a certain juiciness and softness to the meat. Thus, the most frequently fried items are chicken white meat and pork leg steaks (Banjac et al., 2016). Offal, which once upon a time was considered as foods for poor people because it was much cheaper than meat, has many uses. The black and white liver, heart, and the spleen were used; those of the small and big gut, as well as stomach, were disposed of. But generally throughout Vojvodina, under the heavy Central European culinary influences, sausages are made from spiced pig offal (Grubor et al., 2022).

Besides different types of meat and meat products in Vojvodina cuisine, there are also many other animal foodstuffs. In the first place this is milk and dairy products-meaning various hard and soft cheeses, sour cream, sour milk, yogurt, whey, butter, etc. Formerly, butter was manually prepared at individual farmsteads for personal needs (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2018). Poultry farming is an activity that the people of Vojvodina have practiced since time immemorial. Primarily they were engaged in chicken, later also in geese and ducks, and much less in turkey. Therefore, eggs have comprised an inseparable part of the cuisine of Vojvodina for centuries. Their consumption was increasing along with the consumption of bakery products, especially biscuits and little tarts, whose structure has a special place (Banjac et al., 2016).

Other pre-dispositions of food regarding good taste as ultimate include some of the following. The way of serving, the traditional costume of the waiters, music in the background of the restaurant, the interior of the restaurant with its furniture, and some decorations speaking of old times. Very important quality of food, in addition to its taste, is whether the ambiance integrates the restaurant well into space.

The responses we received from the respondents, wherever they are from and whatever gender they are, inarguably proved that gastronomy is and can be a tourist attraction with very clearly defined contract zone.

Conclusion

Research implies that destination loyalty is achieved by a formula where loyalty is directly proportional to high ratings given by the tourists across a set of statements circled around the factors of “gastronomic experience.” In this way, food may become a central motive in the development of a given destination, which may, in turn, be beneficial to the overall economic progress. Vojvodina reveals itself as a destination with potential for the development of food tourism. Particularly in its rural parts. Official support for the food concept within tourism and creation of different developmental opportunities through projects are evidence of real and potential support of this concept by the state’s highest-top policymakers.

Tourism expenditure on food is one of the categories normally quoted, in total probably the backbone of many national and sub-national economies. Prices of food and beverage account for an approximate one-third share of the total expenditure (Gao & Wu, 2017; Fust’e-Forn’e & Jamal, 2020; Marinello et al., 2023). From this, there should be no problem recognizing why this type of tourism should be given special consideration. Tourism is multifaceted and may also represent an extra employment provider for food producers and the industry (Martínez et al., 2019). The demand made by tourists is thus a promising opportunity for market expansion, product innovation, and diversification. In sum, investments in the agri-food sector keep on producing; hence, the sector grows as a result of tourism (Randelli & Martellozzo, 2019; Popescu et al., 2019; Nancu et al., 2023).

Unquestionably, the gastronomic form of tourism is most important to the further development of the rural areas of Vojvodina and Serbia as a whole. But each region of Serbia contributes its specifics into the common culinary and beverage pot of the country. Gastronomy Tourism is also associated with several economic impacts. In this respect, tourism plays a significant role as an activity that can foster rural development and rescue agrarian economy under threat of degradation (Okazaki, 2008), then protecting current workplaces and giving birth to new ones. These would match a policy of sustainable tourism development and rise in scope of place-based development of gastronomic tourism appeal related to the countryside, which can work fine for local agricultural communities and small investors. In other words, food tourism may even come to the rescue of the environment by discouraging food transportation, in any case, from very far. This relates not only to matters concerning the economy and business but also brings in the social and environmental aspects, which are of concern to authorities and to firms placing great emphasis on socially responsible business.

Gastronomic tourism would lead to an increase in demand for agricultural-food products and gastronomic specialties; the building of brands which can mean visibility on the market by themselves, marketing information for producers and suppliers themselves (direct insight into consumer tastes), educational opportunities for visitors and the local population in the form of various workshops, and organized festivals and events, regional and local distribution of consumption, as well as the maintenance of old crafts and traditions in general. This would achieve the most important development target of rural gastronomy tourism, which is the prevention of rural depopulation.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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