

THE COMPLEX ROLE OF FOOD IN TOURISM¹

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ABSTRACT

Food is one of the most important biological human needs and as such it is an inseparable part of tourism. It also represents one of the basic services during a touristic trip. The goal of this paper is to determine the role of food beyond this basic role it plays in tourism, to see how it contributes in increasing the number of tourist and their satisfaction with the tourist product and if food can elevate the quality of the tourist demand toward meeting the needs of the tourists. To achieve these goals different aspects of tourism will be analyzed, such as the motives for joining a tourist trip, the tourist needs and the different functions of tourism. The results of the study will describe and stress essential aspects on how to improve the quality of tourism.

KEY WORDS: hospitality, tourism, national cuisine, food, tourist needs

INTRODUCTION

The UNWTO on the Conference for Travel and Tourism Statistics in Ottawa has defined tourism as(UNWTO, 1955:1):

"Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes."

¹ review paper

The definition clearly points out that in the center of any tourist activity is the tourist. The tourism connects many service providers toward creating different tourist products that will satisfy the needs of the tourists.

In order for one to join a tourist activity a sense of absence of something and a wish to fulfill it needs to appear. If this something can't be satisfied by staying in the residential area, then one becomes a tourist. This means that before one becomes a tourist one has to develop a touristic need and be motivated to visit a destination away from his home, ultimately becoming a tourist and satisfying these needs.

The analysis of the tourist needs and motives is imperative for the development of a tourist destination and tourist activities that will eventually lead to repetitive visits and increase of the number of tourists. This paper will focus on the role of food beyond the traditional function of satisfying the basic physiological need of the tourist, pointing out the complex role that it plays in tourism as a motivating factor for tourism activity and its role toward satisfying the different tourist needs.

Literature review

This tourism is centered on the tourists and satisfying their needs. Each tourist can have different motives for traveling, as well as specific needs that one wants to satisfy with the tourist activities.

According to Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943) which classifies the motives in 5 categories (physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs) the need for tourism is placed on the fifth step among the motives for self-actualization. Many attempts have been made for adopting this theory during the 1970s' by researchers from different areas such as sociology, psychology and anthropology (Cohen, 1972; Dann, 1977; Gnoth, 1997). The model adopted by the tourism scholar Pearce that proposed a tourism motivation model that excludes the prepotency assumption from Maslow's model (Mohammad, Som, 2010) is one of the most acceptable.

In the 1990s' the approach toward the tourist motivation is focused on the two dimensional push and pull model. This model is a combination of two groups of factors; one that pushes the tourists to travel consisted by their internal forces and second that pulls the tourists which includes the external forces of the destination attributes (Baloglu, Uysal, 1996).

For the purposes of this paper we will base our analysis on the tourist motives given by Kevin Fields (2002). He has categorized all the tourist motives into four groups:

1. physiological, which include the basic human needs;
2. cultural, consisted of the need for knowledge, discovering, enriching ones experiences, learning etc.;
3. interpersonal, that are based around the social component of meeting people, being among friends, having conversation and discussions etc.;
4. status and prestige, that move the people toward touristic activities and destinations that will bring them high social standing.

The core of each motive is the need that has to be satisfied. The tourist needs are specific needs that can be defined as “a sense of something missing and misbalance of the organism, that can’t be satisfied in the place of residence and because of that, toward their satisfaction, they are causing inclusion in a tourist activity.” (Kocevski, 2013: 113). According to the UNWTO the tourist needs can be categorized in three major groups (Marinoski, 2008): social, family, and personal or egoistic needs. To achieve the goal of this paper the classification given by Buntasheski (Бунташески, 1995: 81) will be used:

1. need for change, which comes from the monotony of everyday life and is a need to change the living environment and achieve new experiences;
2. need for relaxation and recreation, which is a need for active vacation;
3. need for discovering, represented by the wish to explore unknown spaces, to find out more about something. This need is stimulated by ones’ curiosity;
4. need for affirmation and self-confirmation, when one is joining a tourist activity so one can become accepted by the community (an example are the “exclusive” tours); and
5. need for socializing, as a tourist need this is a need for socializing with persons outside the residential area. It also includes meeting new people.

The role of food as a motivating factor in tourism

This paper will use the categorization of tourist motives given by Fields (2002) to identify the role of food as motivator in tourism.

Physiological motives. The food is a basic motive that satisfies the human need for energy. However when one is on a vacation this need becomes more complex than just energy. One may wish to have food that will tinkle the senses:

delicious, visually stunning and full with flavors and smell. When part of tourism the food becomes more of a pleasure than a need.

Besides this effect the food can become a primary motivator for joining a tourist activity. Such examples can be the search for healthy food and diet, by people who are in a fragile health state. Good example are the people who have overweight problems, diabetes or cardiovascular problems. These categories can choose a destination based on the characteristics of the food.

Sometimes tourism can be motivated by the need of changing the food ways of a person. This means that one can join tourism because they want to experience new foods, different atmosphere and ways of consuming food.

Cultural motives. According to Kocevski (2013), the food is one of the basic cultural elements and part of the ethno-cultural identity of a nation. Therefore an important part of the cultural motivators is experiencing ones' national (traditional) cuisine that brings the tourist one step closer to the culture of the hosts. The cultural tourism is a constant search for authenticity of the visited destination, which includes giving into the flavors of the indigenous cuisine, prepared, cooked and served uniquely for the visited destination.

The food can be a main cultural motive for joining a tourist trip. This is the case in the gastronomic (food and wine) tourism, where people are joining to experience ones' cuisine and drinks, while the other cultural elements are complimentary to these.

Interpersonal motives. When talking about food as interpersonal tourist motivator we should consider that eating when being part of tourist activities has all the characteristic of eating out, which is different than eating in (at home or friends and family). Many researches on the topic of eating out (Payne and Payne, 1993; Caplan, 1997; Mintel Marketing Intelligence, 1999, Kocevski, 2009; Kocevski, Risteski, 2011) point out that the interaction with people and the social impact is more important than the quality of food. The food consumption during tourism has the potential of empowering the social connections and interaction. The decision of joining tourism, especially food tourism, can be result of the wish for renewing the connection and socializing with people that are dear to us or making new friendships stronger.

Status and prestige. Food can be used as status indicator by society when some food is branded as prestige while others are excluded. The restaurants where the food is consumed can also indicate status. This means that food can become a prime motivator in terms of joining a tourist activity to visit high status restaurants or to enjoy prestige food. In these cases the food is often used for

false projections of high status, by people who don't belong to that status group, while the food becomes a factor of exclusion.

The food snobbism can be another main motive for tourist activities. People can travel long distances to imitate the food ways of their idols, like visit the restaurants they do, eat the same food or consume food the same way they do.

The role of food in satisfying the tourist needs

Food is a basic human need, and as such one needs to satisfy it every day. It is inevitable for the tourists to consume food during their vacation to satisfy this basic need. However the role of food, especially the national cuisine, is more complex than that and can satisfy most of the specific tourist needs, as defined before. Following is an analysis of how food contributes toward the satisfaction of the tourist needs.

The **need for change** can be easily satisfied by consuming the national food of the destination, which is different than the national cuisine of the tourists. One's national cuisine is a mixture of habits, routines, customs and tradition in food ways, the techniques of preparation, the ways of consumption, the combinations of food products and spices, which are part of the ethno-cultural identity of the receptive country. Each country has its own, food related identity, meaning that there is always a difference between the cuisine of the visited country and the country of the visitors.

Eating out on vacations is followed by a relaxing atmosphere. The tourists during a vacation don't worry about doing groceries, what they will cook and how to cook it, as well as serving the food and cleaning after. Most of the people on vacation (Kocevski, Risteski, 2011) are eating out and avoiding all of the previous activities, which means food consumption becomes pure pleasure, thus satisfying the need for **rest and relaxation**.

By consuming the food of the local community the tourists are in touch with an important part of the community's cultural identity. When consuming the national cuisine the tourist is getting acquainted with the tradition, customs and habits of the indigenous people. This is more stressed when the tourists are visiting rural areas and are becoming part of the food preparation process. Learning about the culture through food satisfies the need for **discovering**.

The need for **affirmation and self-confirmation** can be satisfied through food during a tourist activity motivated by food snobbism or the food as a status factor. If during the tourist activity one consumes status food, one is fulfilling his need for affirmation and self-confirmation. This also happens when food

consumed by famous people is enjoyed, as well as consuming food in restaurants visited by these people.

Consuming food away from home is an act of socializing by itself; the food is consumed publicly, in company of others, often people one doesn't know. The food is often used for connecting people, and getting to know each other better because of the time spent together while waiting for the meal to be served and during consumption: the food is consumed in company of others, people are communicating, discussions are being held, deals are made, new friendships sealed, new people meet etc. This is how food can satisfy the tourist need for **socializing**.

Conclusions

The analysis of the tourist motives and needs and the role that food plays as one, clearly shows that the food in tourism shouldn't be viewed as a mere biological need that must be satisfied. The role of food, when food is part of tourism becomes more complex. It motivates people to join a tourist activity, sometimes being a secondary motive that compliments the primary one, while other times it becomes a primary motive. During this process the food can appear as any one of the basic tourist motivators, motivating them to learn about the culture by consuming the indigenous food, a food destination (restaurant, area, location) that will improve their status, or improving the interpersonal relations and connections.

This shows that the food can be used as a tool that can and will contribute toward increasing the number of tourist visiting the destination, especially when the food is the main motive for the trip. In this case it is imperative to clearly define the specifics of the cuisine that make it special and different from any other cuisine. Placing it on the market as a unique experience can attract a fair number of gastronomic tourist.

Attracting more tourist can be done with good marketing and promotion when the food isn't the main motive, by simply implying the exclusivity of the food served, location or the way of consumption (status and prestige motives).

Pointing out the opposite effects of food, like inclusion, meeting new people, relaxing atmosphere in the hospitality facilities, experience that brings people closer together and so on, can also contribute toward the increase of the number of tourists, especially of those which are motivated by the interpersonal motives.

Once the tourists are in a destination the food starts to play a more active role toward satisfying the different needs of the tourists. This is very important because the main goal of any tourist supply is to satisfy the tourist needs. In order for the food to contribute to its fullest toward the satisfaction it has to be carefully selected to fit the specific category of needs; which means that the food served during the tourism has to be planned depending on the type of tourist and their needs. For example the gastronomic tourist wants to enjoy the food at its fullest potentation, whether the food is part of the national, traditional or universal cuisine, while the foodie tourist (type of gastronomic tourist) wants to enjoy a more popular cuisine.

Food can offer diversity and unique experience which becomes different than the ordinary, everyday food consumption for the tourists; to hold a piece of the local tradition that will tell the story of the destination or simply bring people together.

In conclusion it can be said that when planning a tourist activity, the food should always be considered as an important factor that can bring tourists to a destination or help satisfy their different needs resulting in returned tourists and/or increased number of tourists. In order to do so the food should be viewed as more than a mere basic need for energy and become an important part of the whole tourist product.

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