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# GASTRONOMY TOURISM: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Nika Razpotnik Visković, Blaž Komac



NICK\_MICK, SHUTTERSTOCK

Visit of food market is a popular tourist activity.

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## **Gastronomy tourism: A brief introduction**

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to provide a theoretical and conceptual introduction for the special issue on the interactions between food and territory manifested in gastronomy tourism. We focus on four perspectives: sustainability, the role of heritage, the potential for rural development and the networking of stakeholders. The contributions critically examine the development potentials but also the weaknesses of the growing gastronomy tourism. The case study approach and qualitative methods provide a detailed and concrete insight into the emerging challenges of host communities, tourism businesses and farmers, public policy makers and visitors. The special issue also provides applicable results for stakeholders involved in the strategic development, creation and consumption of tourism offerings.

**KEYWORDS:** food, tourism, rural development, qualitative research, culinary experiences, agricultural products, place-making

## **Gastronomski turizem: kratek uvod**

**POVZETEK:** Cilj uvodnega članka je podati teoretični in konceptualni uvod za posebno številko o povezavah med hrano in prostorom, ki se kažejo v gastronomskem turizmu. Osredotočamo se na štiri vidike – trajnost, vlogo dediščine, prispevek k razvoju podeželja in mreženje zainteresiranih deležnikov. Prispevki kritično ocenjujejo ne le razvojni potencial, temveč tudi pomanjkljivosti rastočega sektorja gastronomskega turizma. Pristop študij primera in kvalitativne metode omogočajo poglobljen vpogled v nastajajoče izzive gostiteljskih skupnosti, turističnih podjetij in kmetovalcev, ustvarjalcev javnih politik in obiskovalcev. Posebna številka ponuja tudi uporabne rezultate za deležnike, ki sodelujejo pri strateškem razvoju, ustvarjanju in potrošnji turistične ponudbe.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** hrana, turizem, razvoj podeželja, kvalitativne raziskave, kulinarčne izkušnje, kmetijski proizvodi, ustvarjanje prostora

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# 1 Introduction

This special issue of *Acta geographica Slovenica* focuses on the geographical, economic, social, cultural and environmental interactions between food and territory, manifested in the relatively new gastronomy tourism. This type of tourism includes visiting places related to food production and consumption, including cultural events related to preparation processes or eating a special dish as well as seeing how a certain dish is being prepared (Hall et al. 2003). From a geographical perspective, gastronomy tourism is an important co-creator of landscape. It transfers global dimensions with its advantages and flaws into local contexts and re-creates space through cultural innovations. In this way the traditional landscape is transformed into what we can call a »culinary landscape« which reflects the complex relationships in a modern society, and the regional and cultural diversity that different cultural traditions form. Therefore, gastronomy tourism allows destinations to present their cultural uniqueness and diversity as competitive advantage in a globalised world. Gastronomy tourism is supported by global economy and mobility. As Scarpato (2000, 127, cited in Scarpato 2002, 63) stated: »People are travelling more to expand their business, that means they will be experiencing more [...] their palates will demand more and more. We actually have a group of people that have been travelling around the world, whether they're musicians, entertainers, lawyers, corporate businessman or educators (and their travelling) develop an influence of their palate instinct.« Gastronomy, therefore, has become an important criterion in the selection of holiday destinations and leads experiential tourism, such as wine tourism (Dowling 2014). To this end, destinations need to identify and promote the attributes that sustain their image, including specific products made from their own cultural and natural resources (Borzyszkowski, Marczak and Zarębski 2016; Skowronek et al. 2018; Yilmaz, Kiliçarslan and Caber 2020).

Although gastronomy is inherently diffused, partly tangible, partly intangible, it shapes and structures space, mainly through changes in social and economic structures, and land use. Due to its complex nature, it is difficult to accurately and fully understand the historic mechanisms, expressed in heritage, by which it serves as a resource for territorial development (Pérez Gálvez et al. 2017; Perry 2017; Tricarico and Geissler 2017). This is especially true because the territory is a complex construct in which different stakeholders (residents, visitors, investors) interact with their different perspectives, motivations, knowledge, experiences and expectations (Prada-Trigo 2018).

Numerous studies on gastronomy tourism show that the use of gastronomy as an economic resource can have controversial impacts on the host communities. While Bessière (1998) sees local food as a means of cultural tourism experience, and the sale of local food products as a means of strengthening local identity, Carral, del Río and López (2020) remind us that gastronomy tourism does not always contribute to the cultural, social, economic, and territorial development or at least not to the expected degree. This is especially true in a competitive globalized world (Pitte and Moody 2002). As many urban dwellers once lived in rural areas, we need to discuss complex relationships between urban and rural, including a return to »local landscape«, *terroir* (Jamšek Rupnik, Čuš and Šmuc 2016). Gastronomy tourism shortens the spatial and technological distances that have increased due to industrialization and globalization of agricultural food supply chains (Wiskerke 2009) by engaging local actors involved in the food system (farmers, producers and processors, chefs and caterers, festival organizers and managers, policy makers and authorities), and the community. They obtain local skills, historical and cultural practices and traditional knowledge in the production, processing and transformation of products (Vandecandelaere et al. 2010). Therefore, we note regional differences as gastronomy became one of the centrality factors. This development is characteristic of cities, but often not so evident in rural areas, where it influences spatial development and formation of regional identity, for example, through the development of a tourist gastronomic region, a touristscape (Kowalczyk and Derek 2020).

Therefore, there is a need for a continuous scientific discussion on the positive and negative effects of territorialization of gastronomy (Table 1), which is also the aim of this special issue. The most important aspects of the food–territory–tourism triangle are discussed in the papers:

- sustainability in gastronomy tourism,
- the role of heritage,
- contribution to spatial, especially rural development, and
- networking of stakeholders.

These are not new topics in gastronomy-tourism research but due to the growing nature of this economic sector, they still require sufficient attention and a critical approach.

The papers presented in this special issue of *Acta geographica Slovenica* are based on empirical studies, two of which are comparative. The geographical level of the studies varies from local and regional (Kras region in Slovenia, Minho region in Portugal) to the macro-regional (Mediterranean, Alps), rural areas being the focus of the research, except for one case. One paper analyses the visitors' perspective, namely their satisfaction with gastronomy events, while the others focus on small local businesses, associations and public authorities, responsible for the development of gastronomic tourism offer. The units of the observation are also diverse, ranging from simple ones (a single restaurant or product) to more complex culinary events and culinary experiences (e.g. tours, workshops, routes).

In the following chapter we present the contribution of this special issue in more detail.

Table 1: Some phases in gastronomy tourism development in relation to selected factors, with an increasing added value from left to right (Hall 2002; Hjalager 2002; Richards 2002; Author's consideration).

LEVELS \ PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT		SELECTED FACTORS		
<b>ECONOMIC THEMES</b>				
<b>Phases</b>	Traditional		Modern	Postmodern
<b>Market</b>	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
<b>Economic</b>	Production and marketing, mercantile	Reinventing traditions	Offering new products and services, migration	Consumption, selling know-how to professionals, technology and communication
<b>Collaboration</b>	Unchanged	Enforcing cooperation between existing organizations	Creating new structures, still localized	Creating new structures in a global context
<b>Services</b>	Ingredients	Dishes	Meals	Gastronomic experience
<b>Behaviour</b>	Enjoying the food		Understanding the food	Experiencing the food and exchange knowledge
<b>Visitor involvement</b>	Quality of offer		Quality of service	Quality of experience
<b>SCIENCE THEMES</b>				
<b>Research focus</b>	Region (e.g., development)		Society (e.g., events)	Individual, culture (e.g., narratives)
<b>Research method</b>	Exploring phenomena		Acquiring knowledge	Exploring practices
<b>Tourism</b>	Development of »classic« tourism		Development of »mobile« global tourism	Development of cultural tourism and its »grey zones«, such as religion, industrial heritage, events, festivals, and gastronomy
<b>Focus in geography</b>	Food and wine geography		Culinary geography	Gastronomy geography
<b>THEMES COVERED IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE</b>				
<b>Level of cultural heritage</b>	Indigenous culture	Globalisation of indigenous culture (homogenisation)		Re-indigenisation of global culture, gastronomy of subcultures (localisation)
<b>Sustainability</b>	Sustainable economy	Non-sustainable economy		Re-sustainable economy
<b>Space/Visitor mobility</b>	Space is local	Relativisation of space, »globalised« local destination		Difuse space, global visitors in a local destination
<b>Rural development</b>	Bottom-up initiatives support local development	Top-down initiatives and formation of programs support local development		Bottom-up initiatives support wider regions and are supported by the global economy
<b>Stakeholder networking</b>	Networking in regions to promote culinary aspects	Top-down networking initiatives, quality standards, certification and branding	Bottom-up networking initiatives, opening of routes and trails, visitor centers and museums	Bottom-up-initiated/top-down-supported/market-based clustering activities between »inner« and »outer« stakeholders

## 2 Sustainable development and gastronomy tourism

Sustainable tourism reflects sustainable issues in tourism in general, and *»takes full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts to meet the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities«* (UNWTO 2017). Since tourism is one of the most important consumers of heritage food, heritage food tourism should follow sustainable practices, expressed through four main principles (Sanagustín Fons, Moseñe Fierro and Gómez y Patiño 2011):

- optimal and responsible use of environmental resources, including the conservation of essential ecological processes and biodiversity;
- respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and their values in order to build better understanding and cultural tolerance;
- building a viable economy, that ensures socio-economic benefits are distributed fairly and stable employment opportunities are provided and
- creating social services that improve the quality of life (see Tiran 2016) and food security of the host community.

Since access to quality food is expected to become an environmental issue, sustainable development is not only about preserving the past, but also about creating potential for the future (Fernandez and Richards 2021). Through its focus on the local economy, gastronomy tourism establishes a close relationship with these principles of sustainability. They manifest themselves in the expression of cultural heritage and consumption, the means and forms of production, the multiplicity and complexity of social interactions, and local trade (Carral, del Río and López 2020; Polajnar Horvat and Ribeiro 2019). Many (local) groups of heritage producers and consumers in rural areas, such as farmers, fishers and pilgrims, are directly related to food and gastronomy (Timothy 2018). In sustainable gastronomy tourism, visitors are encouraged to participate in the cultural life of the destination, explained and interpreted mainly through the cuisine, local products and all related services (Gheorghe, Tudorache and Nistoreanu 2014). They are also encouraged to behave responsibly in relation to the environment (harmless behaviour in the natural environment, green mobility to reach the destination, waste recycling etc.). However, it remains unclear how the sustainable gastronomy tourism contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas knowing that gastronomy is a key element for the sustainable tourism development of cities and attracts tourists with greater economic resources (Pérez et al 2017).

Numerous behavioural studies aim to investigate how sensitive tourists are to responsible travel, the role they play in it and their capacity to identify sustainable and unsustainable practices in the destinations they visit (see Kim 2012; Buonincontri, Marasco and Ramkissoon 2017; Birch and Memery 2020). The latter was also addressed in the first paper of this special issue, entitled **Culinary events in the Slovenian countryside: Visitors' motives, satisfaction, and views on sustainability** (Topole et al. 2021). The paper provides a detailed analysis of the motives and satisfaction of visitors to culinary events in the Karst region in Slovenia. The survey included 244 visitors to five events of different size, theme, character and history. A significant part of the study was devoted to measuring visitors' sensitivity to sustainable practices at the event they attended. Their observations were similar and did not differ in terms of their age, gender, education or place of residence. They appreciated the high-quality service and the use of local culinary ingredients, but were critical of the poor accessibility of the venues by sustainable transport, namely the lack of public transport, and the excessive waste generation, mainly from disposable plastic cutlery. This paper provides a good insight into possible organizational improvements in the future and draws attention to areas that local authorities should address in the future (e.g. the issue of accessibility by public transport).

## 3 Role of heritage

The link between (cultural) heritage and food is very close. From a heritage perspective, gastronomy is a mixture of tangible and intangible elements, it embodies the values and meanings of heritage bearers and represents their cultural identity (Richards 2001; Blešić et al. 2014; Pérez Gálvez et al. 2017). From a geographical perspective, food is a tourist symbol of place (Timothy 2018).

Tradition and heritage are an intrinsic resource of any territory (Ledinek Lozej and Šrmpf Vendramin 2020). They are perceived as enablers for economic development, as territorial identity is an economically valuable asset, especially when integrated with creative industries (Kozina and Clifton 2019; Kozina, Poljak Istenič and Komac 2019) – gastronomy sector being one of them (Tricarico and Geissler 2017). Topole and Pipan (2020) point out that the globalisation has localised cultural heritage making it an important distinguishing factor between regions (Leigh 2000).

The important question for gastronomy tourism researchers to reflect on is how heritage is understood, interpreted, and used for tourism purposes by tourism providers and local inhabitants who can convince the tourists something is real and authentic. The concept of heritagisation was established by Bessière (1998; 2013) who studied the role of heritage in local / rural development. Her studies of gastronomic experiences and attractions were the cornerstone for grounding the theory of the indispensable link between heritage and innovation in contemporary (gastronomy) tourism. Building on local initiatives, we can state that the link between heritage and innovation is a crucial element in the development of tourism experiences, which is the last step in the scale of progression of economic value, after commodities, goods and services (Table 1; Pine and Gilmore 1998; Richards 2012; Topole and Pipan 2020).

Two papers in this special issue explore how heritage, tradition and authenticity are perceived by gastronomy tourism providers (restaurant owners, farmers and culinary event organisers) and also how authenticity is perceived by their visitors. The first paper, **Luxury food tour: Perspectives and dilemmas on the »luxurification« of local culture in tourism product** (Poljak Istenič and Fakin Bajec 2021), highlights the discrepancy between the top-down and bottom-up approaches to in creating a gastronomy tourism product, including the selection of heritage elements and their significance. The authors present the process of creating a luxury food tour as a bottom-up initiative by a group of small businesses following the national tourism strategy to create five-star experiences. They point out that the criteria for luxurification from »top« side are often too ambiguous or even contested once thought through the integration of the heritage and tradition on the »bottom« side of the process.

The second paper, **Developing gastronomic practices in the Minho region of Portugal** (Fernandez and Richards 2021) shows how existing local gastronomy, which is a strong element of regional identity, is nowadays influenced by changing consumers tastes and their expectations of low prices. Restaurant owners therefore place great emphasis on the meal experience and less on the origin of ingredients and the introduction of innovations in cuisine. They do not visit local food markets or use other distribution systems for locally produced food, which has concrete territorial implications – it impedes local production, trade and social interactions. If the links between restaurants and the regional food economy are not restored, this can become a long-term threat to local gastronomy culture.

## 4 Rural development

According to Spilková and Fialová (2012), the »development of rural tourism in its various forms, including gastronomy tourism, represents a potential means of an alternative development strategy and economic activity in peripheral areas«. Gastronomy tourism encourages agricultural development through the promotion of niche and regional products and creates positive effects in terms of revenue and employment (Corigliano 2002; Fernandez and Richards 2021). However, rural development should not only be seen in economic terms but also in the function of building social solidarity in protecting local culture (Polat and Aktaş-Polat 2020). It is interesting to note, that more bottom-up gastronomy initiatives linked to local food producers are often based on a more flexible organizational logic that differs from the structures of conventional tourism (Richards and Russo 2016), probably linked to an increased mobility (Richards 2001). While they integrate into the global economy, including through low-cost airlines and internet-reviews, they strongly support the local economy. Examples of the renewed tradition of sourcing local products include Slovenian chef Ana Roš (Michelin ... 2021). Here we can see that the development of gastronomy tourism follows four economic phases, that lead from the local to the global level: First, it builds within existing economic structures and networks, then it integrates material suppliers, creates new types of connections and cooperation, and finally it creates 'intelligent' gastronomy clusters in the economy (Hjalager 2002). It is therefore necessary that such local gastronomy initiatives are supported by wider documents, such as the »new rural paradigm« grounded in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. The document strong-

ly supports the non-productive functions of agriculture and forestry through multi-level and multi-actor process (Ledinek Lozej 2021). The main feature of this approach is the search for synergies between agriculture and other sectors and the creation of »fertile links« to stimulate them (Ploeg and Roep 2003; Spilková and Fialová 2012; Tišler and Šuligoj 2020).

An example of such a link is the revitalisation and valorisation of local and traditional agricultural products through qualification tools, ranging from top-down European quality schemes (e.g. Protected Designation of Origin, and Protected Geographical Indication) to bottom-up initiatives for territorial or place branding, trademarks and heritage inventories (Barreda 2018). These mechanisms provide an opportunity for initially less competitive locally distinctive products to participate in the globalized, commodity-driven market (Parrot et al. 2002; Ledinek Lozej 2020). They stimulate endogenous economic development especially in areas that lack other distinctive attractiveness (Watts et al. 2005). However, the question remains, 'What is local?', if a product that is supposed to be standardised to some degree is considered authentic and therefore better (Blakey 2020).

Food quality designations and regional brands are a suitable tool for developing sustainable rural tourism as they allow tourists to learn about the social and economic life in a given region, meet producers, visit their workshops or farms, and learn about the resources needed to create quality products (Spilková and Fialová 2012).

Designated local food products and related activities are therefore often included in tourism products and are part of culinary tourism experiences such as culinary events, tours and routes (Kumer et al. 2019). Local food products form »a whole that constitutes a strong and distinctive element and can lead to positive differentiation associated with image, quality and reputation« (Fabry and Zeghni 2014), and can lead to a new relationship between urban and rural areas by the redevelopment of landscapes (Férérol 2018).

However, the expectations of the producers who are entering in certification or branding process are sometimes too high, as shown in this issue's paper **Labelling, certification and branding of cheeses in the southeastern Alps (Italy, Slovenia): Montasio, Bovec, Tolminc and Mohant cheese** (Ledinek Lozej 2021). Paper depicts various collective instruments for valorising cheese products from top-down European and national quality schemes and inventories of traditional agricultural products and heritage, to grass-root initiatives such as Slow Food instruments and local brands. The study finds substantial difference in the use and impact of geographical indications in Italy and Slovenia, as well as dissonance between the expectations of the producers when entering in these schemes and real effects on the small-scale farming (and dairy production) in the study regions.

## 5 Stakeholder networking

For tourism to develop successfully, actions should be planned and managed responsibly (Pilar and Londoño 2015). Even though democratic inclusion is one of the premises of sustainable development, the multiplicity of stakeholders can hinder the process of shared decision-making in community-based tourism development. Insiders, represented by residents, local business managers and public officials, and outsiders, namely investors and tourists, compete for limited local resources to serve the visitors as well as their own interests. In this way new forms of clustering and networking are created (Vries, Go and Aple 2018), framed by the changing (national and international) legal environment.

Due to the described development from local to globally influenced local service, tourism products, including gastronomy products, are becoming more complex. The changes in gastronomy tourism of rural and urban communities are supported by their wish to attract visitors, entice them to stay longer, spend more money, and encourage them to visit again. It was necessary to develop a package of attractions to capture the attention of today's increasingly demanding clientele (Spilková and Fialová 2012). For the same reason, tourism strategies of destinations promote and encourage development of integral tourism products rather than simple ones (McKercher 2016). Clustering activities and attractions and creating rural tourism products such as tours or routes, stimulates cooperation between local areas, and local agents (Spilková and Fialová 2012).

The complexity of stakeholder networking in different types of tourism products is evident in the fifth paper in this issue, **Models of stakeholder collaboration in food tourism experiences** (Šmid Hribar, Razpotnik Visković and Bole 2021). The study identifies different groups of stakeholders and their motives

to participate in tourism experiences. It presents three emerging models of stakeholder networking, including their hierarchical relationships, the organisational characteristics and challenges, such as financial support, degree of formality, and openness of the network.

The last paper, **Gastronomy as a social catalyst in the creative place-making process** (Razpotnik Visković 2021), changes the focus of the previous contributions – it addresses gastronomy events and discusses the place-making potential of gastronomy in the urban context and its contribution to five important characteristics that define the quality of a place: diversity, liveliness, innovativeness, creativity and openness/tolerance. By analysing the network of stakeholders, who organise and participate at the selected events, the understanding of gastronomy and food as vectors of social inclusion and participation of community members is broadened, going beyond the scope of direct economic benefits.

## 6 Conclusion

Although gastronomy is multidisciplinary, this special issue shows that geography is certainly able to present its different perspectives. The contributions in this special issue of *Acta geographica Slovenica* focus on four of them – sustainability, role of heritage, contribution to rural development and networking of stakeholders. The authors have three main objectives. First, they identify and critically assess not only the development potential, but also the weaknesses of the growing gastronomy tourism sector. Followed by the introductory paper, the case study approach and qualitative methods used in the research provide a deep and concrete insight into the emerging challenges of host communities, tourism businesses and farmers, public policy shapers and visitors. Second, the authors identify knowledge gaps in contemporary gastronomy research that should be addressed in the future. Finally, the studies presented offer applicable findings and conclusions for stakeholders involved in the strategic development, creation and consumption of the tourism offer in a given territory.

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