

CULINARY TOURISM AS A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE. THE CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF CÁCERES (SPAIN)¹

José Manuel Hernández-Mogollón

Universidad de Extremadura

jmherdez@unex.es

Elide Di-Clemente

Universidad de Extremadura

ediclemente@unex.es

Tomás López-Guzmán

Universidad de Córdoba. Campus de Excelencia Internacional Agroalimentario, ceiA3

tomas.lopez@uco.es

Gastronomy is becoming an important element of diversification and a tool for defining the brand and the image of a region, a country and a culture (Hjalager, 2010). In recent years, tourism has started to recognize the important power of attraction and communication of food products, to the point of turning them into true tourist attractions (Folgado et al, 2011; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). The peculiarities of the local cuisine are the starting point to create routes, travel packages and thematic proposals that put local food and products at the centre of the development strategies and the promotion of certain territories or destinations.

Food is considered as an element of local culture and as an expression of the history, habits and traditions of a community or a geographical area (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Lee and Crompton, 1992).

Culture determines and shapes the culinary history of a community and, through it, expresses itself and becomes a tangible, sensory and pleasant asset.

Thus, traditional dishes and local food turn into new tourist products and motivational elements of a trip.

1 This work is one of the results of the Research Project of the University of Extremadura(LOU 83): «The fine dining and high-end gastronomy, as an enhancer axis of cultural tourism in Extremadura.» The principal investigator is PhD. José Manuel Hernández Mogollón. The project has been funded by the Fundación Caja Extremadura.

Those tourists, who travel with a strong interest towards the culinary heritage of the destinations they visit, are called «foodies» by the scientific literature.

To that tourist category, local products are the expression of the identity of places and they play a cultural function, more than only a nutritional one.

From a theoretical point of view, scientific literature embraces the gastronomy tourism phenomenon within the consolidated tourist typologies of rural and cultural tourism (Milán and Agudo, 2010).

Regarding the first, several authors (Andreu and Verdú, 2012; Armas, 2008; Sidali et al., 2013) investigated the phenomenon of food tourism and the recent attention given to food typicality by tourists, from its complementarity with rural activities.

With regard to the second, other authors (Dos Santos and Antonini, 2004; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2008; Mak et al., 2012a; Moltz, 2005; Richards, 2002; Ritzer, 1995; Roden, 2003; Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2011) conceptualized gastronomy within the broader and consolidated framework of cultural tourism, highlighting the strong implications that link culture and food tourism.

Kivela and Crofts (2006) argue that consumers interested in food, are normally interested in multidisciplinary aspects related to cuisine and gastronomy, stressing the cultural curiosity of the culinary tourist.

Thus, the culinary or gastronomic tourism must inevitably be regarded as the expression of a new cultural trend. The *foodies* tourists are interested in local products and typical dishes with the aim of getting in contact with the social and historical background that has given birth to their unique elaboration and flavours. The present work assumes the gastronomic tourism as a cultural practice and typical cuisine as a sensory and experiential heritage.

According to Kivela and Crofts (2006), gastronomy is getting an important role as a tool for the development of a new niche market and specialized destinations.

Previous studies show that the share of expenditure that tourists address to food during their holidays is equivalent to a third of the total expenditure, which identifies the gastronomic tourist as an extremely attractive consumer (Fox, 2007; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Telfer and Wall, 2000).

Some authors state that gastronomy is the expression of the identity of the modern society (Richards, 2002), until the point that typical products are considered to be effective tools to struggle against globalization and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1995) of dishes and food (Feo, 2005; Mak et al., 2012b).

Scientific literature supports the strong relationships that underlie between gastronomy and tourism.

Nowadays there exist several research lines which focus on that subject (Campón et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is worth saying that it is a new and young research field which deserves more academic and entrepreneurial attention (Kivela and Crofts, 2006).

During the trip, the food is identified as an integral part of the tourist experience because it implies the possibility of tasting foods and dishes different from those we are familiar with or it simply teaches a new way to enjoy them (Quan and Wang, 2004)

Thus, the gastronomic curiosity is considered as an added motivational factor that makes tourists wanting to approach new culinary habits and life styles (Dos Santos and Antonini, 2004).

Quan and Wang (2004) identified in this aspect the experiential component of food and gastronomy as tourist product and as the main attraction of a destination. Thus, food products, as well as wines, become an extremely important tourist asset.

The main objective of this article is to define the profile of the current gastronomic tourist, with particular emphasis on the deep relationships that bind the gastronomic and cultural motivation, for this category of tourist consumers.

At the methodological level, we have developed an empirical work with structured personal interviews, directed at tourists who were enjoying local gastronomy in traditional restaurants of the city of Cáceres.

A questionnaire was the tool used to collect primary data. The target population has been identified in tourists or hikers, Spanish or foreign, who were in the tourist restaurants of the city of Cáceres, during the months of April and May of 2012.

Regarding the sampling technique, a simple random sampling of convenience has been chosen. Respondents were selected by interception, trying to cover different sociodemographic layers until getting a total sample of 720 individuals. Finally, the collected data were tabulated and analysed with SPSS version 19 and have been treated with univariate and bivariate analysis.

The city of Cáceres has been the setting chosen for conducting this research, due to the fact that it is a tourist destination with an important cultural heritage, which joins a rich and varied culinary tradition and gastronomy.

In the near by rural areas, many typical products are grown and processed, and due to the positions of this specific geographical area, they get their special and unique organoleptic properties and flavours. Some of these products are certified by European foodstuff quality brands, such as Protected Designation of Origin (P.D.O.) and Protected Geographical Indication (P.G.I). Among them we have to mention: Dehesa de Extremadura Iberian Ham, Cherry of the Jerte Valley, Gata-Hurdes Olive Oil, Villuercas-Ibores honey, Torta del Casar cheese, Ibores cheese, Paprika pepper from La Vera (P.D.O) and Calf and Lamb of Extremadura (P.G.I).

Game meat is also one of the distinctive elements of the gastronomy and culinary traditions of the city, being the basis of many recipes and dishes. However, the star product of the local culinary tradition is the Iberian pig and all its derivatives (ham, sausages and meat products) (Ortega et al., 2012).

In addition to quality local products, Cáceres offers a wide variety of dining options. Some of them have been awarded by major national and international gastronomic guides, such as the Michelin and Repsol Guides (Michelin Guide, 2012; Repsol Guide 2012).

Most of these restaurants are located in the historic part of the city and are usually chosen by those consumers who look for a dining experience, meanwhile enjoying a singular monumental stage, as is the old town of Cáceres, declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986.

Based on these considerations, the need to investigate the demand for food tourism is noticed. The measurement, in quantitative terms, of travellers interested in local culinary resources and the knowledge of their current perception of typical gastronomy, allows us to give the right importance to the local gastronomic heritage and to detect actions and fittings of tourism supply system, necessary for attracting and satisfying the needs of this consumer segment.

The empirical study has allowed outlining the gastronomic tourists visiting the city of Cáceres, in their sociodemographic characteristics and their food preferences, along the journey and in their destination of origin, as well as its evaluation and knowledge of local foods and culinary traditions of the city.

The results confirm the relevance of the gastronomy and culture as tourist attractions. Culture and gastronomy have been the most mentioned motivations by respondents in order to visit Cáceres. Empirical data confirm what supported by the literature that qualifies gastronomy as part of the culture of a territory (Dos Santos and Antonini, 2004; Fox, 2007; Quanand Wang, 2004; Roden, 2003; Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2011).

The existence of an association between cultural and gastronomic motivation is confirmed. For those tourists who consider culture as an important motivation, gastronomy is a fundamental motivational factor too. In general, a consistent trend in the valuation assigned to the two motivational aspects considered can be detected.

Pearson coefficient (0,292) demonstrates that exists a positive and significant ($p=0.000$) correlation between gastronomic and cultural motivation.

The levels of knowledge of the products and dishes of local cuisine, as well as the quantification of its valuation, have been measured in this study.

The Iberian Ham of Extremadura and the local Torta del Casar Cheese are the most popular products as 82.2% and 75.6%, respectively, claim to know them. On the other hand, *El Frite* is the less popular dish (19,7%).

The evidence suggests that higher levels of knowledge of local products correspond to higher levels of preference. Therefore, the Iberian ham (76.1%) and the Torta del Casar cheese (50.4%) are the favourite products of the local gastronomy. This result makes us understand that there is a significant relationship between product promotion and appreciation of local products by consumers.

Regarding satisfaction this research has differentiated between the level of satisfaction with the local gastronomy and the overall trip. In both cases, results show high levels of tourist satisfaction.

It is interesting to focus on the satisfaction levels about the local gastronomy expressed by the *foodies* (Fox, 2007) tourists.

The results demonstrate that the gastronomic travellers visiting the city of Cáceres are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with local gastronomy.

Important conclusions could be reached that can improve the tourist development of gastronomic destinations, especially for those places that boasts a strong cultural heritage.

A well-structured culinary proposal represents an element capable of increasing the overnight stays of travellers and is an element which enhances the loyalty to a destination.

The study of the scientific literature has shown that culinary tourism must be understood within the broader and consolidated category of cultural tourism.

The results of the empirical study have shed light on tourism demand of the city of Cáceres, with particular emphasis on its interest in the local gastronomy. Over 50% of respondents said that food and local products were very important or quite important factors considered at the moment of choosing Cáceres as a holiday destination. However, the most prominent motivation was the cultural one.

It is interesting to note the relationship that underlies between these two motivational factors. Despite being gastronomy the second motivation, cultural being the first, we see that there is a positive correlation between the two analysed variables ($r = 0.292$, $P = 0.000$). The main conclusion of this study should be identified on the demonstrated correlation that links the two motivational factors: gastronomy and culture. This result represents an important contribution to the management and marketing of urban tourist destinations, with a clear cultural tourist vocation. For them, the enhancement of gastronomic resources enables them to strengthen their image and competitiveness in tourism markets.

