

INTERCULTURALITY – A FACTOR OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT - PART 1 - GASTRONOMY IN TOURISM, ATTRACTION OR IMPEDIMENT

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In order to transmit a culture without altering it, while creating tourism, cultural and religious products, a variety of details must be taken into account regarding the basic tourism services such as accommodations and food. (gastronomy)

These services, especially gastronomy, must be suited for the type of tourism. This must be done because factors such as the environment are important in creating a great experience for the tourist.

Keeping in mind the European Parliament's suggestion to member states to improve tourism and perhaps develop new forms of tourism (such as rural tourism or gastronomic tourism), this study tries to identify what are the best environments for cultural tourism development and even the advertising of certain tourism packages at a national and international level.

Keywords: tourism, gastronomy, tradition, interculturality, advertising, tourism product

Cod JEL:L83, M10, M14, O18

1. INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, tourism and its economic effects have taken place in a large context of the globalized international economy.

The benefits of globalization still remains a controversial issue, especially due to the fact that globalization policies are examined without taking into consideration the interaction of key sectors of industry such as tourism.

Interculturality however, becomes a new way of life in a dynamic globalized society that imposes the conservation of traditions and cultures in order to coordinate and implement respect towards cultural diversity. An important function of interculturality is to determine cultures to coexist and to respect and appreciate each other. This favors the integration of people from various cultural backgrounds into other cultures and eliminates cultural barriers such as the gastronomica, religious, ethnic and linguistic barriers.

Lately, the tourists experience with cultural difference grew (Pizam 1999; Reisinger and Turner 2003; Robinson 1999; Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). An interesting subject, as seen by social psychologists and geographers, is the process of learning that tourists undergo while in a tourism environment (Furnham 1984; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Hottola 1999; Pearce 1982). This study focuses on the emotional aspect of the intercultural experience of tourists with limited empirical evidence but with great potential for development.

Intercultural studies should not be confused with anthropological studies regarding the guest-host relationship (Chambers 1997; Mason 1995; MacCannell 1992; Ross 1998; Smith 1989; Smith and Brent 2001; Yamashita, Kadir and Eades 1997), which generally focus more on the hosts' experiences rather than the tourist's adaptation to the new environment.

The works of Graburn (1989, 2001) and others are interconnected through the ritual of transition and have an interesting potential for future studies regarding the adaptation of tourists. Nowadays a different aspect of intercultural tourism is studied.

As a result of the small number of studies on tourists, the theoretical discussions about the adaptation of tourists remain subordinated to studies regarding stays. A good example of this is the well known U-curve of cultural shock (Furnham 1984; Pearce 1982). Almost five decades have passed since Kalervo Oberg (1960) presented his hypothesis as an explanation of human intercultural adaptation, founded on a large palette of studies about stays in the 50s (Adler 1975; Bochner 1982; Furnham 1984; Smalley 1963).

His work underlines the emotional curve that goes from depression to recovery, going through stages of euphoria, disillusion, hostility, adaptation and assimilation (fig. 1), with a number of names for each stage given by various authors (Pedersen 1995; Sue and Sue 1990).

At first the tourist experiences the joy of arrival, followed later by dissatisfaction and hostility – at the point when he/she encounters reality – and, in the end, adaptation and assimilation. Adaptation and assimilation are the last signs which indicate that the person became part of the host culture.

Today, the expression "cultural shock" is often used in everyday language as an indicator of difficulties experienced by tourists while visiting other countries, activities that last for several weeks rather than years (Pearce 1998; Wearing 2001).

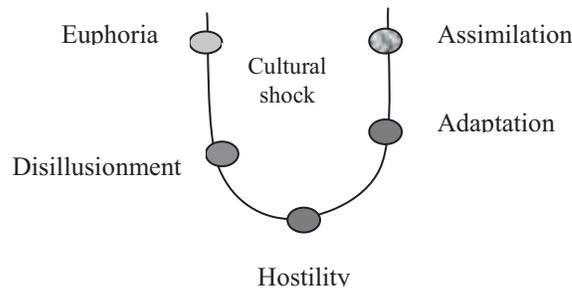


Figure 1. U Curve

The U Curve has been implemented as the dominant explanation of the tourism experience and cultural adaptation.

The cultural information for international tourists available on the Internet, brochures, and travel guides introduce consumers of tourism to the concept of the U Curve.

At the same time, academic literature regarding intercultural adaptation in tourism is based on cultural shock (Furnham 1984; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Graburn 1989, 2001; Hofstede 2001; Kaesbach 1997; Pearce 1982, 1998; Pedersen 1995; Reisinger and Turner 2003; Robinson 1999; van den Berghe 1994; Ward 2001; Westerhausen 2002).

The problem with cultural shock is that it applies to all countries; such as countries that are part of the European Union and countries that will join. The theme of interculturality intersects with that of personal mobility and it applies to countries facing immigration issues as well as countries with emigration issues.

It has been proven that the issue of interculturality applies not only to people who travel for work related purposes but also to those who travel for tourism reasons.

Consequently, The European Parliament invites the member states to improve their tourism image in order to stimulate the development of cultural tourism. Also, member states are invited to take into consideration the emergence of new forms of tourism such as rural or gastronomic

tourism which are beneficial to the hospitality industry but also transmit cultural information regarding people and traditions.

2. GASTRONOMY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

We also must be aware of the fact that, over time, any culture loses some traits and gains others. This process is beneficial to the formation of a European culture and should be accepted.

As for the gastronomy of ancient Europe, our knowledge is greater when we take into consideration the traditions of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

As it is already well known, the Greek and Roman civilizations were the most developed civilizations, covering most of the continent with their influence.

Food had great symbolism and played a role in rituals; in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, there are numerous references to the gifts that the Greeks offered the gods, as per their polytheistic religion. During the Hellenistic period, however, they started to focus on gastronomy (the first cook book – *Hedypathia*, in free translation, to live voluptuously). Contact with the much more advanced Greek culture and the expansion of the Roman Empire fostered links between numerous cultures and the implementation of various influences in different forms.

The discovery of America had a great impact on the European gastronomy. In just a few decades, a vast amount of new ingredients arrived in Europe and mixed with the already existing European ingredients. European cooking as we know it today is, at its core, based on the historical event of the discovery of the new continent.

It will be an era of great chefs, true celebrities; the apparition of restaurants in the form which lasted until the present day; of the writing of cook books by the greatest professionals and the structuring of the noble cooking – complicated, elegant and refined which made France famous and influenced the gastronomy of many other countries.

For a long period of time, up until the first half of the 20th century, gastronomy was a concern of the elite. In 1972, however, there was a great change in cooking. Rejecting the idea of sophisticated, complicatedly cooked and pretentiously served meals, *Nouvelle Cuisine* starts a new era of fresh foods, cooked to be simple and to taste good. Also, *Nouvelle Cuisine* tried to maintain the initial flavor as well as the aesthetics of the meal which the way of preparation – elegant yet simple – had to stand out.

The 20th century also gave us fusion cooking. If, until then, a French meal was French meal and Japanese meal was a Japanese meal, typical of Japan and completely different from the French meal, fusion cooking allows and promises very tasty cultural transfers. Fusion cooking combines elements of several culinary traditions without identifying itself as one particular tradition. Starting in the 1970s, many restaurants started proposing fusion menus based on real facts such as the cultural diversity of their customers, their passion and possibility to travel and the ever increasing complexity of preferences and the need for new experiences.

Experts say that in over 100 years we will go beyond the system of the five basic tastes. What if instead of searching for a permanent supply of food in a supermarket, in standardization a guarantee of quality or in advertisements the truth about the quality of food, we tried to rediscover the link between food and its true sources and tried to judge its quality beyond the prefabricated mentality that is imposed on us? What if we relearned to value food as a gift of Earth, to think of it if not with the adoration with which the Aztecs worshiped corn, at least with the respect with which our grandparents honored bread and with the joy with which they marked every celebration with a feast?

3. GASTRONOMY IN TOURISM – ATTRACTION OR IMPEDIMENT

In the past few years, the study of gastronomy and culinary institutions has become a subdivision of sociological and anthropological research (Beardsworth and Keil 1996; Bell and Valentine

1997; Fine 1996; Lupton 1996; MacClancy 1992; Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo 1992; Warde 1996; Warde and Martens 2000; Watson 1996).

However, while the relationship between tourism and the different cultural aspects of the destinations – such as art, religion, sexuality – have been studied in detail by researchers of tourism.

The interface between food and tourism has been, until now, neglected by the promoters of tourism as well as the promoters of gastronomy.

In advertising literature, the gastronomy of tourism destinations is heavily endorsed. Of course, the few publications of gastronomic tourism often consider it an important attraction

There are too few studies regarding the culinary habits of tourists or of the processes of transformation of local foods as they are influenced by tourists (Reynolds 1993).

The unusual and familiarity are general categories of world wide interpretation (Schuetz 1944).

These categories have great importance in tourism and have been reminded by Cohen (1972) in a formulation of the types of roles of tourists. His main argument is that tourists travel in search of the unknown but need a certain amount of familiarity in order to be able to enjoy the experience.

In gastronomical sociology, this sizing of familiarity and the unknown is the basis of Fischler's distinction (1988) between "neophobic" and "neophilic" gastronomic tendencies.

According to Fischler, the two tendencies reside in all individuals. People are considerably more skeptical and conservative when it comes to trying new foods. At the same time, however, they are attracted to new and unusual food.

These two terms have roots in biology as well as cultural influences. There are considerable differences between cultures, thus influencing neophilic tendencies to a certain extent.

Up until recently, the majority of Asian people have avoided new food. At the same time, people from the Western world have progressively embraced new food. In every culture, especially in the West, there are great differences between social classes and people. Thus, people can be classified by the predominance of neophilic or neophobic tendencies in gastronomy.

Such a classification can be quite important for the study of culinary habits that people have on a day to day basis.

It could also be considerably significant for the study of food in tourism where people are exposed at a larger scale than that of a day to day basis and to types of food that are unusual to them. Of course, the relatively strong neophobic tendencies that a tourist might experience against the neophilic tendencies can be implemented in the construction of a new classification of the culinary sphere, parallel to Cohen's general theory.

However, the main characteristic of the culinary situation that tourists face is the fact that they exaggerate the tension between the neophilic and neophobic tendencies they experience. On one hand, the nourishment implies that the body is used in an unfamiliar environment and its ingestion amplifies the neophobic tendencies. Thus, tourists become skeptical when it comes to consuming unusual food, the ingredients of which are unknown to them. Such a meal can be a threat and implies a greater "survival risk" than other situations. This situation occurs especially when tourists visit developing countries which are prejudicially believed to be mysterious or dangerous. In these cases, neophobia tends to be dominant.

Few are those who can try unusual meals without being interested in its preparation or content prior to eating. "What is this?" is probably the first question tourists ask when they find themselves in front of an unknown dish. Researchers observed that tourists who are otherwise adventurous become picky and skeptical when it comes to trying out new traditional meals

On the other hand, there are always tourists who want to experience new things and are willing to take risks. The trip stimulates their neophilic tendencies, motivating them to try new and unusual meals and drinks.

However, even those willing to try new experiences can be skeptical of local cooking, especially in less developed countries. That is why, it is very important to analyze the local culinary culture

and to examine the obstacles imposed by the tourists. An example regarding the above statement would be a quote from a German tourist in Thailand: "I do not eat meat in Thailand; the people here touch the food with their hands."

One of the first things that tourists avoid when going to a foreign country is the consumption of local water. Many tourists are reluctant when they have to eat at local taverns even though they might seem welcoming.

Such mentalities have led the authors of the book "The Food from Taverns in Thailand" to contradict themselves regarding the prejudicial concept that food from taverns is generally unhygienic. However, after it has been accepted that in and around where food is served in such places there is lack of hygiene, "the horrid image of chickens wandering freely near the place, that of dirty dishes and uncovered condiment containers," authors ask themselves "if millions of people consume this food on a daily basis and nothing happens to them, surely it is not that disastrous, from a medical point of view, for a tourist to try the food once or twice?" (Yee and Gordon 1993).

The tourists' opinion regarding the safety of local food constitutes a great impediment in the development of new culinary experiences. Even when not under neophobic influences, tourists are skeptical when it comes to trying or eating local food and will most likely worry about their health or the disgust generated by the presumptive lack of hygiene of the food. To add to this problem, there is also another impediment hosts may face, such as the rejection of the way the food is to be consumed.

Even when they do not reject the local culinary traditions, tourists can be intimidated by the unfamiliarity of the host. Perhaps the best example of the difficulties encountered by tourists resides in the usage of local eating utensils such as chop sticks, used especially in east and South East Asia.

Differences between cultural categories and nature are even more obvious when raw ingredients are used. In some locations, the "ingredient" is still alive at the arrival of the tourist to the restaurant.

Although criticized, these practices are accepted in the Western civilization through the keeping of live crabs in the restaurant's aquarium and the boiling of them in front of the customers. Seafood restaurants often display the fresh, raw seafood on ice.

Although it is of considerable importance, the role and significance of food in tourism has been surprisingly scarcely discussed in sociological literature.

In this chapter, we started from the tension between attraction and repulsion towards a new dish, analyzing the dilemmas encountered by tourists found in unfamiliar culinary situations.

This chapter was based first and foremost on the variety of experimental constraints in such situations. However, these aspects of local gastronomy, transformed and filtered to a certain extent, have managed to attract tourists.

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