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Food safety as an indicator of hospitality in tourism

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Abstract:

The travel experience can be translated as the amalgam of the tourism destination that is directly associated with the main items of the trip: accommodation, food, and transport. This document argues that food possesses a special characteristic that influences the cultural experience of a destination as an indicator of hospitality. Well receiving and hospitality are commonly explained as the practice of receiving visitors that drives business, and especially in the food industry. This paper presents food security as the quality of hospitality and from our point of view as an indicator of the perceived experience by the visitor and also as an indicator of hospitality in a tourism destination.

Key-Words: Security, hospitality, food safety.

1. Introduction

The relation between food and Tourism does not always appear obvious. From the point of view of health and safety in the preparation of food it is possible to establish a link between the tourism experience and hospitality. This document is aimed at relating the pillar of: Food, hospitality, and security (hygiene and safety in

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Food) with one of the pillars put forward by the UN - Sustainable Tourism (Food safety – one of the pillars in achievement of sustainability).

This paper, aims to study food safety as an indicator of quality of hospitality in tourism and the effects of that connection, involving the management of trips, the food industry that supplies the tourism destinations and the management of those experiences.

The choice of destination occurs through the perception of a variety of motivating factors that encourage tourism movements, such as attractions, means of accommodation, gastronomy etc. However, limiting factors are taken into considerations, which adversely influence the choice of visiting destination. A relevant and decisive limiting factor in the choice of tourism destination is insecurity. This insecurity can manifest at variety of levels, from publicized crime on the journalistic media, local epidemics and differentiating habits relating to consumption and production of food.

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the scale to which food safety is a direct indicative component of attractiveness in travel, and above all to argue the proposed issue, by placing it in objective consideration: food safety is a variable indicator of hospitality, enabling it to be managed and established as an aspect worthy of bearing in mind by businesses in the food industry.

This document is based on a study of an exploratory nature and uses a bibliographic method of research, aiming to open debate on the subject of food safety in studies of tourism hospitality.

The authors intend to address the subject of hospitality from the perspective of the social sciences by representing aspects of human reception and the personalized

character of services, therefore allowing us to understand the necessity of studies on safe food and its importance as an indicator of value for local hospitality.

Hospitality as an asset is above all the converging of people resulting in the creation and exchange of experiences. This aspect has come to be sought after in various sectors of the productive chain of the travel and tourism industry, with the premise of adding value to the travel experience. Food has become a target subject of study in the tourism experience, so it is understandable that the safety of that experience is shares a direct link to matters of food safety.

Food is one of the essential components of the said tourism tripod. The concept of visitor safety is essentially providing the visitor with the opportunity to acquire and share new experiences without putting himself at risk and securing conditions so that visitor may continue to experience a good trip.

Considering that gastronomy presently constitutes an important cultural and touristic attraction to a local, country or region. Often indicated as a secondary motivator in travel, food and all the experiences that revolve around it guarantee the safety and health of the visitor. The general assessment of the experience of a trip is directly influenced by what the visitor eats, not only during the act of eating but also the after effects of that act.

We consider food safety to be an essential asset to the hospitality service, in the field of debate about management strategies for tourism products.

We observe that the demand market values the food component in the whole travel experience, and has become an important factor in the marketing strategies of holiday promoters and also part of what tourism destination's supply.

The legitimacy of food safety is not viewed only from the market's point of view but also as aspect that dictates the attractiveness and a variety of other components that comprise the total experience of the trip. (Cooper et al 2006)

The nature of hospitality

The field of study in hospitality has experienced some rapid and very significant changes over the past 4 decades. Last century big business chains consolidated themselves and conquered the world through web placement, this new interface conferred these businesses with a worldwide range of service distribution. The consumer profile indicates that these clients search for the kind of quality guaranteed by the standards of big brands, but also the personal touch and human interaction typical of local hospitality (SPOLON, 2009), this transcends the quality of service in itself. The new paradigm of the demand looks to buy mass produced services that simultaneously recognise them as individuals with unique needs.

Thusly the change in pattern points to the appearance of new studies of hospitality, provoking expressive changes in research and knowledge production on this matter.

Previously viewed as one of the pillars of tourism, accommodation was studied not only from the operational and administrative point of view but also from a social and anthropological perception. Nowadays accommodation is being analysed beyond just as a commercial practise but also from the political, social or even virtual viewpoint. (SPOLON, 2009)

There are various definitions for hospitality most of current concepts introduce the perspective of accommodation. The act of welcoming in the human behavioural dimension intends to satisfy client's expectations in a personalised, familiar and unpretentious act.

We find that the most comprehensive concept in the words of Gotman (apud WADA,2003)

“the process of aggregation of the outsider in the community and inhospitality is the inverse process”. Baptista (2002) defines hospitality as: “a privileged method of interpersonal meeting, marked by the welcoming attitude of one party in face of the other. Sansolo (2004) also reinforces the theory that hospitality involves essentially human aspects, highlighting that “as we walk the path on the search of a definition of hospitality, we make it evident that we are dealing with a human value, socially constructed and culturally encoded.

Professor Ada Dencker (2004) Presents and defines the concept of hospitality as “the manner in which we welcome the other, the exercise of alterity, to be able to live with differences within the parameters of respect, tolerance and reciprocity.”

Although the term hospitality and its various meanings are quite common in everyday life, more so in travel and Tourism literature, they are applied in very distinct ways given different situations. According to WALKER (2002) the concept of hospitality sends us on a long voyage through history.

“The concept of hospitality is an ancient as civilization itself. It has developed from the old custom of breaking bread with a stranger, to the complex multifaceted conglomerates of hospitality of hotel companies, food companies and reception services at tourisms destinations. The word hospitality derives from hospice meaning asylum, shelter, old French word that means “to give help or shelter to a traveller”.

In more relevant studies we come across an author by the name of Luiz Camargo (2003) who presents what he calls “fields of hospitality” bridging the gap between the abstract and concrete concepts of hospitality. Concretely, hospitality is the

competence to receive the users of services, namely in the field of accommodation. Abstractly: The comprehension of hospitality as a human and cultural phenomenon with deep social roots. It's important for the comprehension of historical and social aspects that are found in human hospitable behaviour.

The author also reminds us of the concept of experiences, as a service, and the importance of man's role in that process. The experience is so absolute and the participation of the person who produces and experiences the service is superlative.

According to the author, the concept of hospitality is based on two main axis A Cultural axis - the exact notion of hospitality, covering accommodation in all its different forms. From greeting people, to welcoming, and even sharing food with the visitor, the aggregated value of that food, not only on a physical level but also as entertainment, provides the visitor with a memorable experience. And the social axis, as a form of social interaction provided by these experiences also referred in the work of (Lashey 2002).

Camargo (2003) and Lashey (2000) also speaks of a commercial dimension that is distinct from the other axis due to commercial exchanges that take place, discussing the welcoming traits that surface during that particular act. The author argues that after all it is not a totally unconditional exchange.

The simple act of taking care of the visitor, the person who is out of his place of residence can, be considered a form of hospitality, and the type of welcome received is what comprises the term hospitality. Part of taking care of a visitor means to ensure their safety and wellbeing, including what food they eat.

The act of hospitality starts right with the production of food and choice of ingredients, to the place of consumption, and the whole process in between. The attitude of following the rules of health and safety that leads up to the production of

a ¹safe food and therefore safe consumption, signifying a concern with hospitality, which is transformed in a better touristic experience.

¹ Safe food does not offer any type of hazard to the consumer's physical integrity. (PAS).

Gastronomy as an attraction

Gastronomic tourism is defined by a trip that is totally or partially associated with an interest in food and drinks, (Mitchell and Hall 2003) and consequently related to the organization and promotion of food and drink events, tastings, and festivals. All activities from visiting primary and secondary food producers, to participating in gastronomic festivals and events, involving the experience and action of being in contact with a different culture and tradition through eating and drinking (Hall e Mitchell, 2002).

In the early '70s and '80s gastronomic travel meant visiting 2 and 3 michilin restaurants. However nowadays, as pointed out by Richard(2007), gastronomy has achieved a growing value as an intangible cultural asset, contributing a destinations attractiveness and uniqueness.

With that in mind we have accompanied the growing number of studies on the importance of gastronomy for a tourism destination's "gastronomic identity" as a relevant cultural element for their success. * (Belisle, 1983; Sheldon and Fox, 1988; Reynolds, 1993; Faulkner *et al.*, 1999; Sparks *et al.*, 2000; Kivela, 2001, 2003; Hall *et al.*, 2003; Ramos *et al.*, 2004; in Fox, 2007).

Most studies focus on the meeting of two cultures, the traveller's and the host's, through the vehicle of food. One gastronomic aspect that always differs from the

traveller's place of residence and the visited destination is the creative process involved in the production of a meal, seasoning, condiments and also the method and format of production.

Street stalls typically fall into this context due to their traditional process of confection, and also in the way they are commercialized.

Food safety is based on very similar health and safety legal practices in various places all over the planet. However some aspects of a cultural nature fall short of the legal rules of conduct in the production of safe food, this insecurity has a negative effect on the tourism experience.

The experience of consumption plays a fundamental role in contemporary social economic life.

In this context the economy of experiences (Pine &Guilmore, 1991) gains prominence when associated to the tourism experience emphasising aspects like animation, aesthetics evasion and learning, by means of providing a memorable experience.

However the attractiveness of a dish is not only due to its visual aspects, but also the process of production. Whether or not the food used to create that dish was safe, will directly affect the gastronomic experience. Thusly there must exist a means of presenting the tourist with information about what food he is selecting, to safeguard him from unpleasant situations that when eating out.

Security as an indicator of a destination's level of hospitality also depends on practices that go on in that destination, food and catering is one of those practices.

Many Tourism destinations associate their food industry with their identity and image shown to the public.

Safe food, food safety and Hospitality.

Eating is one of the most important human activities, not only for obvious reasons but also for social and cultural aspect that are implied. Therefore eating involves various aspects, from the production of food, transformation into meals, and forms of presentation to the consumer.(Garcia 1997)

Due to the risk of contracting illnesses through the consumption of food, consumers have become more aware and demanding about the quality of the food they eat. The hygienic and sanitary quality of food constitutes an important factor in the prevention of food related illnesses, and a relevant factor in social development.

According to the UN food safety is one of the pillars in the challenge for sustainability. Therefore we can affirm that, said security also guaranties the reception of the patron. (HANSHIRO, 2002)

From the hospitality point of view food safety is an action that directly affects the visitor and the resident of a tourism destination, by building ties of empathy between the visitor and the resident. (GRINOVER, 2005)

One of the mechanisms used to assure innocuousness in food production is the use of the Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), a set of procedures that should be followed by the food industry to guarantee the best hygienic and sanitary standards, and conformity between the food produced and sanitary legislation. (RDC 216,2004)2

Data from the World Health Organization Shows that in most cases of bad hygiene are related to faults of temperature control during preparation of food. For that reason hygiene has a fundamental role to play in the prevention of food related illnesses, the main public health problem in most countries. Therefore, hygiene in with the handling of food signifies “Taking all possible measures to guarantee the

sanitary innocuousness of food, maintaining their distinctive qualities and nutritional content. (ASSIS 2011)

Good practices in the production of food is a prerequisite to allow the analysis of dangers and critical points control system (CAPPCC or HACCP)

Good practices are defined as all the necessary procedures to guarantee the quality of foods.

They are practices that should be obeyed by all parties involved in the handling of food, from the moment of selection to the preparation and finally the sale of that food to the consumer. The purpose of good practices is to avoid the occurrence of illnesses provoked by contaminated food. Precautions to be taken into account to prevent contamination can be summarised as: Personal hygiene, environmental hygiene and food hygiene.

The concept of the APPCC/HACCP system was born in the chemical industry in Great Britain in the '50s and was later applied in the US in the "60s with the development of space travel. To guarantee that all food supplied to astronauts was sanitarily safe, NASA organized a committee of specialists to study a method to produce danger and contamination free safe foods. (ASSIS, 2011)

Research indicated that the system should be based on prevention, involving all the steps of food production: Environment, people, storage, distribution all the way to the final moment of consumption. In other words for each step of the food production process there is a security procedure to avoid and prevent the risk of contamination, survival and multiplication of micro-organisms. (SOUZA, 2002)

The catering market in Brazilian Tourism destinations is audited by the top organ of sanitary control, which exercises power at a local level, to guarantee the production of safe food. This action has little effect on the tourism movement to destinations,

however displaying certificates and quality control stamps provides the tourist with reliable information, thusly granting him with a feeling of confidence in the dining establishment. This is a hospitable act that allows a tourist to trust a food service in a totally different location in comparison to his place of residence.

Hotel's and their allocated food areas follow strict food safety rules. Understanding of the importance of food safety as part of the tourism experience is already strongly embedded in these establishments, for that reason the rules of health and safety are given particular attention.

Restaurants and other related food premises only recently understood the importance of participating in the travel and tourism market, which led them to realize the significance of the client /tourist experience.

However the hospitality value chain isn't restricted only to the tourist, it is intimately linked to the regular customer, the customer who is repeatedly exposed to the safety of the food consumed.

The security of the gastronomic experience to Tourism.

Gastronomy has gathered an even greater importance in the development of tourism destinations which by themselves and relying on their own resources would not be able to attract sufficient number of visitors. For this reason many regions have acquired the label of tourism attractions and have been subjected to strategies to improve the tourism experience.

Eating is generally a group activity, a social activity, when a family gathers around a table to share a moment in some designated place. For this reason, the location where this group activity with family and friends takes place should be viewed as a

place of social interaction. Those places, during travels are generally in public areas and are known as “gastronomic scenarios”. (SCHLUTER, 2006)

Restaurants are places of socializing and reception for visited cities, they are without a doubt, a place where hospitality ties are formed. Restaurants are where the gastronomic experience takes place; therefore, food also has a role to play in the reception of visitors. The intangible service of welcoming is not only comprised of the meal in itself, but also the production and serving of that meal and customer service provided at the moment of consumption.

It is also possible to find gastronomic scenarios in hotels and means of transport like plane, trains and ships. Gastronomic scenarios acquire a singular importance because food constitutes one of the greatest tourism experiences in a destination, and poses a great value in terms of identity and welcoming.

Food as a form of pleasure indicates that gastronomy can be developed (Nunes dos Santos 2007. 239) as a form of welcoming, representing a feeling of safety and kindness to the tourist. Given an opportunity a tourist can get to know and establish ties with a location, but those ties need to be reinforced by a feeling of security and many other activities.

Taking care of food, from its origin to the moment of its presentation, demonstrates a high regard for the quality and safety of food and equally conveying that image regarding the rest of the destination. This image of quality and safety of a destination should be visible to the visitor, to reassure him with a feeling of being welcome and having a positive attitude towards his health and safety.

Adding to that the fact that most tourists look to get to know the local culture, to eat traditional food, to try traditional dishes and everything that differs from what they usually consume. That action involves the exploratory nature of a trip and should be

surrounded by food safety precautions assuring a safe and welcoming travel experience. Insecurity, provoked by fear of some kind of suffering or ill-being that could ruin the trip, limits the quality of reception. Unclean environments, unhygienic and dirty destinations show a lack of care for the visitor's expectations and impede the relationship between the visitor and the "taste" of the visited place. (Cohen & Aveli, 2004)

The most pressing concerns amongst tourists are related to gastrointestinal complications, rather than deeper issues such as ingredients, nutritional value, calories and other harmful chemical substances found in food. This concern about gastrointestinal problems occurs because it has an immediate impact on the tourist's recreational activities. These fears are also heightened by widespread journalistic reports, facts and guides on what to eat and what not to eat, and which places to avoid. (Cohen & Aveli, 2004: 171)

According to Cohen and Aveli (2004, p758) eating and drinking is physiological action, therefore there is always a risk of ingesting foods from unknown sources. Swallowing each piece of food constitutes an irreversible decision that in extreme cases could lead to a life or death situation. Taste is the main regulator of this exchange between the body and the environment. Although it's repetitive and nutritious function is a simple part of everyday life, taste gains a greater importance when in contact with new and uncommon situations, encountered during a travel. Thus food represents a potential health risk.

Food often establishes a permanent reference in the visitor's memory, when attempting to recall positive and welcoming experiences in past travels. For this reason, reception and care for quality of the visitors experience were treated as

priorities in tourism destinations, recognising the visitor as a person deserving of special treatment.

Final considerations.

The evolution witnessed in the human dietary habits that were beforehand considered mechanical acts indispensable for our survival, now bear a greater significance in current day life, making us reflect on its importance as an economic, social and pleasurable activity.

A good part of the importance given to the act of eating is related to the conditions experienced at the moment of consumption. Food safety is directly related to hygiene practices that transcend the final place of production in itself. However it is in the moment of consumption that the tourist comes in contact with the food and it is in that moment that he associates the good experience with the place of consumption.

Gastronomy, in all its amplitude, has managed to position itself, not only as a compliment to a destination, but also as a main attraction to the tourism market. Therefore food security can be considered as a high priority issue for regions that wish to attract visitors, making it an essential indicator of local hospitality.

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