

The Role Of Local Gastronomy In The Development Of Tourist Destinations: A Brief Study Of Riobamba, Chimborazo Province, Ecuador

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been an important academic contribution on the role of local foods and the influence of development on national and international tourism, however, very few contributions have been made to substantiate the knowledge and empirical concepts of local gastronomies. This study focuses on the city of Riobamba (Ecuador), an area with a growing tourist impact due to its regional identity and especially its gastronomy, which has a significant influence on economic development. A bibliographic analysis and interviews were carried out in tourist localities popular for their gastronomy. The results show that the city of Riobamba has very important cultural manifestations linked to local gastronomy, including ancestral knowledge, culinary practices, rituals, and beliefs that, together with the cultural empowerment of citizens and culinary projects in the sector, can exponentially improve the development of local gastronomic tourism. In general, the document is based on two dimensions: the role of gastronomic tourism in socio-economic development and the potential influence of gastronomic tourism in increasing the tourist season.

Keywords: Typical food; ancestral food; traditional food; gastronomic tourism; tourism development.

Introduction

The different types of food (local traditional dishes) have proposed that gastronomic research is the fundamental axis in the search for adequate sustainable tourism (Everett and Aitchison 2008; Scarpato 2003), although there has been little interest from academia to investigate the topic of gastronomy and its influence on tourism development, especially from a socio-cultural and socioeconomic perspective (Boniface 2017; Fields 2002; Hjalager and Richards 2002). However, increasingly, different destinations around the world use gastronomy as a tourism marketing hook and thus increase the number of tourists traveling to a destination influenced by its gastronomy and thus contribute to sustainable tourism development (Okumus, Okumus, and

McKercher 2007; Okumus, Xiang, and Hutchinson 2018; Stalmirska 2021a). Likewise, gastronomic ancestral knowledge and cultural tourism make up a modality that seeks to attract more visitors with the use of environmental resources, local culture, leisure, sport, and events of any nature for quick, repetitive, enjoyable, and simple use by tourists, generate considerable importance in their analysis because at present the two areas are little studied in the locality (Cohen and Avieli 2004; Fields 2002; Henderson 2009; Roustas and Jamshidi 2020).

Destination management and tourism marketing have been successful in integrating local food into the tourism environment (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016; Roustas and Jamshidi 2020;

Stalmirska 2021b). Gastronomic tourism sustainability is often strategically linked to the locality, which gives firmness to regional identity and increased the competitiveness of the destination. This linkage between sustainability and locality leads to a strategic approach that tries to incorporate local foods with different strategies and thus promote the development of gastronomic tourism, which benefits not only the tourism industry but also the economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of the different destinations visited by tourists (Everett and Slocum 2013; Gössling et al. 2011; Sims 2009).

Tourism managers, academics, and especially marketers of the raw material of food production, present concerns due to a drop in gastronomic tourism due to the COVID 2019 pandemic because of the non-consumption of different foods which is one of the indispensable aspects of the tourism and gastronomic industry (Henderson 2009; Robinson and Getz 2014; Stalmirska 2021b). However, due to a possible end of the pandemic, tourism revival occurs, therefore, many destinations have tried to offer new special traditional culinary experiences to tourists, a technique applied many years ago (Stalmirska 2021a; Tsai and Wang 2017). This technique is one of the main enhancements to a destination's image and has been a key attraction for travelers because it is a representation of national, cultural, regional, and personal identities. In this context, food and gastronomic tourism is becoming a prominent research topic for scholars for the improvement of destination marketing strategies (Du Rand and Heath 2006; Rousta and Jamshidi 2020).

The topic of gastronomic tourism and the consumption of traditional foods has become the central driver widely researched in the literature on gastronomy, hospitality, and tourism, which positively influences travelers' experiences in each destination visited that guarantees the satisfaction of their vacations (Lashley, Morrison, and Randall 2004; Rousta and Jamshidi 2020). However, the issue of consumption of indigenous foods specific to the region and traditional foods consumed by travelers in tourism development behavior remains unaddressed in academia, as there are only a

few developed works on the topic (Choe and Kim 2018). From the few existing studies (Cohen and Avieli 2004; Hall and Sharples 2004; Mak et al. 2017; Robinson and Getz 2016; Rousta and Jamshidi 2020), they mention the significant value that traditional food has at the time of destination selection by tourists who make a preference for places with traditional gastronomic history, therefore, it equally inspires travelers to revisit these destinations full of history.

The representation of the local culture of various destinations could be considered to be the traditional food that refines the palate of travelers and above all gives visitors a taste of the lifestyle of the destination visited. Also, it is estimated that the value of consumption of local cuisine by travelers should be examined in terms of the travelers' cultural background, since the perception of food is highly influenced by the tourists' own food culture (Choe and Kim 2018; Stalmirska 2021a).

The level of study of gastronomic tourism has not been addressed in-depth, the literature is very scarce and there are few studies on how traditional local food forms a special component in regional tourism and how the native gastronomy of the destinations is a fundamental axis in the culture of the different places that are in most cases the main attraction for tourists. In a way that this study focuses on the culinary riches offered by the city of Riobamba (Ecuador), which is located in the north of the province of Chimborazo, at 2,754 meters above sea level in an area with great natural and cultural wealth; crossed by the Andes Mountain range allows domestic and foreign tourists to perform various tourist, gastronomic and cultural activities. The valorization of the culinary heritage is born with the farmers who support and adapt to the system of the food products of different geographical areas of this beautiful city of Ecuador.

It is important to name the terminologies concerning the food heritage of the city of Riobamba and its surrounding areas or villages, which differentiate an ingredient from preparation and offer an impressive variety of culinary delights such as regional and traditional foods like the colada Morada

(drink of black cornflour and a mixture of fruits), the hornado (marinated pork and baked in firewood), the yaguarlocro (soup of lamb visors), the incomparable llapingachos (fried potato tortilla), the fritada (beef fried in firewood), the jucho (drink made of corn starch and a mixture of capulí and peach), the ceviche de chochos (chochos with pork skin, roasted corn and tomato juice with lemon), morcillas (pork visors stuffed with cabbage, rice and other spices), Caldo de 31 (soup of pork visors and other spices), among other delicacies offered by this beautiful city. All these regional foods may have potential values to influence the decisions and behaviors of tourists.

This research work studies the influence of traditional and current gastronomy consumption on the relationship between gastronomic tourism and regional identity. This exploratory study focuses on Riobamba as a research scenario because of its cultural heritage and rich food culture, which is increasingly considered a tourism resource, by pointing out products and destinations built to meet consumer expectations in areas of food heritage, handicrafts made with local products and cultural tourism. The results obtained from the exploration of the value of local food consumption conclude that gastronomic tourism plays an important role in increasing tourist spending and extending the tourist season. Although the study deals with a small locality in Ecuador, the results obtained and the research methodologies used are expected to have a great contribution and may contribute to the understanding of other destinations in the world that are experiencing a growth in their gastronomic offer for travelers.

Methodology

We proceeded with the respective literature review, however, it was evident that there was little interest in research on the topic being addressed since there are only limited research studies on the interrelationship between gastronomy, tourism, identity/cultural heritage, and sustainability. However, the scientific literature used was expanded with tourist brochures, websites, and regional newspapers to have an identified baseline and answer the research questions, especially the methodology to be

used according to the background found in the little literature found.

In this context, the methodology used in this research is that of an exploratory case study, a strategy that allowed systematizing the findings in the literature review to apply them to the situations of the study (Yin 2009). Due to the small scale of this research, which was one of the drawbacks for the study to be fully explanatory, the exploratory method was used. Some of the research reviewed has strongly recommended the case study methodology as an effective research strategy, as it provides a strong link between theory and practice (Everett and Aitchison 2008; Hjalager and Richards 2002).

The correct way to examine the evolving nature of cultural heritage and gastronomic tourism in Riobamba and its surrounding areas was to use as a case study this small region of the Sierra called the "Sultana de Los Andes" of Ecuador, which is recognized as an area with a great cultural and gastronomic heritage for a good welcome to travelers. A flexible methodological approach through the analysis of the bibliographic review found scarcely and with a greater contribution of the lived experiences proved to be very effective to capture in greater depth the data collected regarding the identity, cultural heritage, and most relevantly the role of food in the region.

Results and discussion

Throughout history, reference is made to the encounter of the Spaniards with our indigenous peoples, which opened a generous path of syncretism that gave birth to various gastronomic expressions that are shared along the Inter-Andean Alley. The hornado, to cite an example, is prepared in all the provinces of the Ecuadorian Sierra, however, despite sharing a common base of ingredients and preparation processes, each town perfected its recipe. In practice, centuries of perfection are put to the test. Entire centuries in which different social, political, and even technological phenomena enter the scene.

Riobamba has its gastronomic history, which starts with the ancestral knowledge of its indigenous Puruhá people, is transformed

with the arrival of the Spaniards who chose their territory to found their first city in Ecuadorian territory, reinvents itself by founding a new city after the earthquake and

thanks to the economic prosperity derived from the arrival of the train, is influenced by new citizens from Guayaquil, Quito and all over the world.

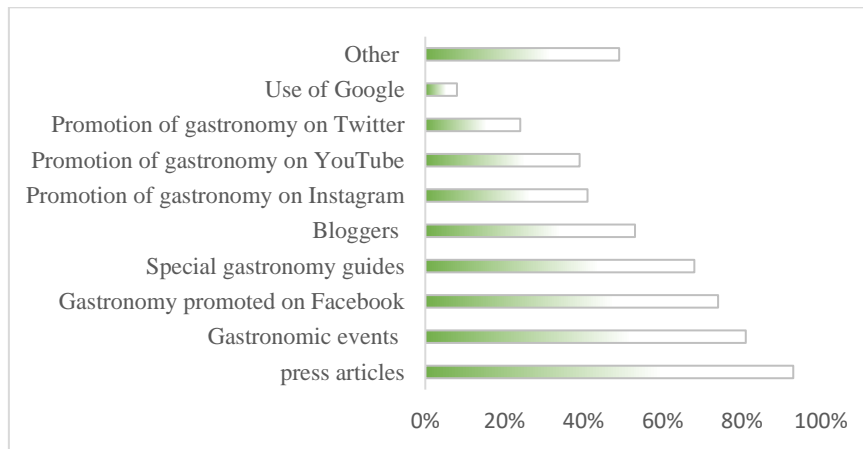


Figure 1. Activities used in the promotion of gastronomic tourism.

From the previous point, we can understand the presence of typical foods and traditional foods in Riobamba's gastronomy; typical foods that, without having their origin in the city of Riobamba, are part of its gastronomy. traditional foods, which are precisely those that were born and perfected in its territory.

The dried meat and chicken, are a good example of typical food because although their origin comes from the Ecuadorian coast, for several decades, are part of the gastronomy of Riobamba. Likewise, ancestral foods can be related to the diversity of knowledge, practices, and above all traditions as a way of life that there is still no research gap, as they have developed as a custom throughout history.



Figure 2. Contribution of food identity categories

All this knowledge of communities and indigenous peoples that has been transmitted from generation to generation has been preserved mainly by the practice and customs of the original peoples of

Riobamba. It is important to mention that the ancestral knowledge that is still maintained in this city is the knowledge that is practiced and transmitted mainly in the indigenous towns and communities, hence the tourist attraction for the various travelers who have visited and continue to visit this corner of Ecuador, becoming an icon of

gastronomic tourism. An important finding of this research is that there is a large percentage of promotional content (see Fig. 1) that is related to food, which attracts the attention of many tourists as these advertisements are found on different websites and social networks, corroborating that there is the promotion of places and activities related to gastronomic tourism that

are attractions of the city of Riobamba (see Fig. 2). Likewise, the different attractions most frequently visited are summarized (see Fig. 3). It can be seen that most of them are restaurants that positively promote gastronomic tourism in the city, followed by tourist and cultural events and traditional and musical festivals.

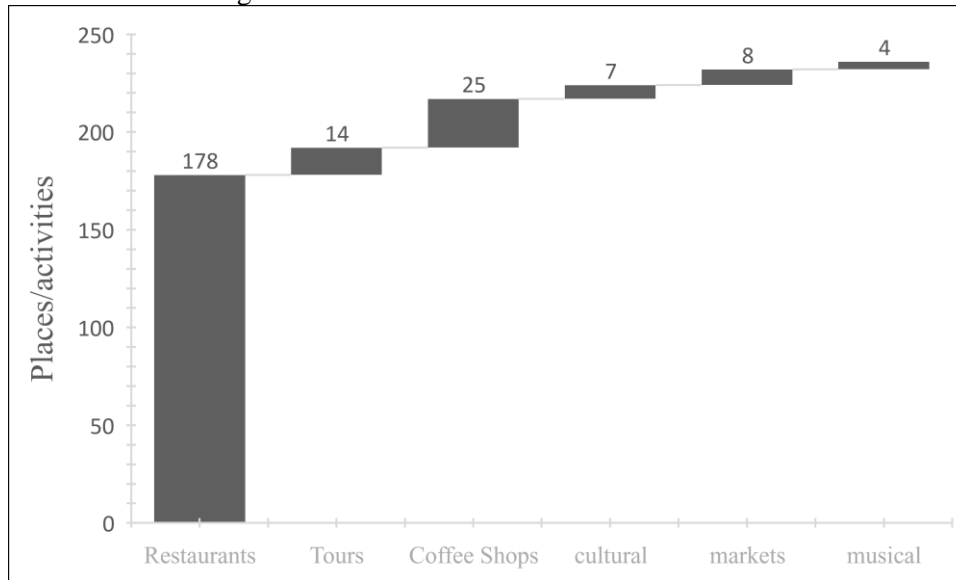


Figure 3. Distribution of recreational sites and activities.

Evidently, the role of local gastronomy in the development of tourist destinations refers to the trip to live an experience of tasting local, typical and traditional food. Likewise, Riobambeña gastronomic tourism is also related to musical events, gastronomic festivals, museum visits, walks through the surrounding areas of the city, etc. According to scientific literature (Andersson and Mossberg 2017), gastronomic tourists, are classified into different groups according to the importance of food in their destination, from those who do not care about local food to those who travel exclusively to taste typical and traditional cuisines, the ancestral delicacies of Ecuadorian peoples. With this literature review study it has been found that most travelers recognize and select their travel destination according to the type of local food which is a very important factor when making a trip, also for the decision to revisit the same place and this is also mentioned in other studies (Silkes, Cai, and Lehto 2013).

In this context, the food products, services and gastronomic culture of a destination and especially of Riobamba are a unique strategy with no possibility of being imitated by other localities. The ancestral food as a social indicator, represents in a prestigious way the highland region and its citizens. In addition, travelers have the tendency to look for food that is native to the destination. The tangible characteristics of typical and traditional food, such as its taste and ingredients, can contribute to improve the image of the destination (Pavlidis and Markantonatou 2020; Silkes et al. 2013).

Finally, the interest of tourists in local and traditional gastronomy was evident. In the province of Chimborazo, the basis of popular cuisine is a cultural fact that records culinary activities of the Puruhá culture, in which in addition to the use of existing products such as potatoes, oca, melloco, mashua, among others, the processes of transformation of food under certain knowledge, technologies and secrets, acquired over time, are taken into account. For tourists, Ecuadorian food has a social, cultural and experiential meaning, product of the evolution and mixture of flavors from

all regions of the planet, because our ancestors had a relationship with European, African and Asian peoples among others, who placed their tradition and culture and introduced plants and animals, which, combined with the Ecuadorian native, significantly represent the culture, history and identity of Ecuador and especially of the region studied.

Conclusions

The limited information from this exploratory case study precludes conclusions that are debatable, but it is hoped that this research will encourage the scientific and academic community to continue studying the relationship between local gastronomy and the development of tourist destinations, as well as sustainability and place identities.

This study has confirmed that local gastronomy is an adequate means of analysis to promote tourism in the city of Riobamba and also to collaborate with the results obtained to add a missing perspective to the knowledge of tourism, which is extremely essential in the regeneration of the regions.

Similarly, this research demonstrates that gastronomic tourism offers a fundamental alternative to local and regional development in the province of Chimborazo, with the potential to strengthen cultural food identity and improve environmental appreciation, cultural heritage regeneration and the economy. Likewise, the growing demand for distinctive local products has encouraged the renewal of traditional festivals and inspired the emergence of alternative attractions for tourists.

Finally, this exploratory study suggests that local gastronomy offers a means to improve the development of tourist destinations and increase tourist spending, favoring the economy of the province.

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