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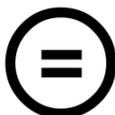
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## ANTHROPOLOGICAL ROOTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CULINARY TOURISM CASE STUDY IN ARGENTINA

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*Rural tourism is gaining new fans all the time, especially in those countries that have not been blessed with the natural resources necessary for a beach holiday industry, or that don't have a sufficiently significant cultural heritage to generate large waves of tourists. However the peacefulness of the countryside, the communing with nature and the chance to indulge in some traditional rural activities are not enough for a lot of people. As a result, people are increasingly turning to gastronomy as an important complement of this type of tourism and as a means of promoting rural development by offering traditional cuisine to tourists. This paper sets out a brief description of this phenomenon based on a study conducted in Tomás Jofré, in Argentina, of the risks which a tourist strategy, apparently risk-free and without any negative consequences, can create for a tourist destination.*

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**Keywords:** *rural development, culinary tourism, impacts, Argentina*

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

### INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the relationship between rural tourism and gastronomy, based on a study conducted in the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina and centred on the self-styled "gastronomic hub" of Tomás Jofré. The aim of this study was to determine the impact that food tourism can have on a destination where rural tourism already exists.

Rural tourism is not a new phenomenon, but academic interest in its study is relatively recent. Among the pioneering works it is worth mentioning those of Rödling (1974; 1975) who published a two-volume study of tourism in rural German establishments from the perspectives of both the tourist and the service provider. Since the work was not widely published in other languages, an excellent reference for later study was lost. Other early works restricted themselves to subjects such as the



analysis of visits to establishments offering participation in open-air activities in a rural setting, the staged presentation of typical rural work activities, and the different forms of accommodation in non-urban areas. This has had a bearing on the numerous treatments which the subject has since merited (Ascanio, 1997; Barrera, 1996; Bote Gómez, 1986 and 1993; Constabel, S. et al, 2008; Huber Novaes, 1994; Jensen et al, 2001; López Palomeque, 2008; Mondéjar Jiménez, J. A. et al, 2008; Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Náchér & Szmulewicz, 2001; McDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Opperman, 1996; Prieto & Prieto, 1997; Pulido Fernández, 2008; Salciccia, 2001; Solsona Monzonís, 2001 and 2008; Szmulewicz & Rivas Ortega, 1997; Knight, 1986; Kousis, 1989). In addition, the books edited by Page & Getz, 1997; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Hall, Roberts & Mitchell, 2003; and Hall, Kirkpatrick & Mitchell, 2005 bring together the best-known studies of this issue in English. Reference to the relationship between rural tourism and gastronomy is clear in these publications in papers by Hall (2005) and Bessièrè (2001).

Santana (2002) points out that the principal traits of a potential rural tourist are excitement at meeting other people, pleasure at finally seeing all the things they have imagined, spontaneity, and a spirit of traditionalism as regards anything considered exotic. These are people with a real interest, discoverers and explorers who consider themselves pilgrims to a time of nostalgia rather than tourists. Tourist products will be shaped by these people's characteristics, their expectations and their demographic stereotypes.

Rural settings offer peace and tranquillity at the same time as housing important cultural heritage, whether religious, architectural or related to the way of life of a society often seen as exotic by urban visitors. However, what is exotic in this sense, whilst having some differentiating features, is not totally different from daily life in the cities (Álvarez, 2009).

## **GASTRONOMY AND RURAL TOURISM**

Since the beginning of the 21st century, rural tourism planning has been strengthened by the inclusion of gastronomy (already considered an intangible heritage (Schlüter, 2006) either as a complementary tourist attraction, or through the development of structured and sustainable tourist products in the form of food routes or gastronomic centres (Navarro & Schlüter, 2010). As a result, natural and locally manufactured products have begun to form a central part of sampling the countryside and all it offers.

Culinary output can be seen as a feature of both natural and social environments, as well as something related to a region's output and its transformation. Gastronomy is becoming an important element in local production and in social development. Its particular characteristics can be used to identify social groupings, and to offer a representation of the local culture to visitors, who can sample part of the culture and learn about the local community in an interactive and participative way by trying typical local and regional dishes (Mascarenhas Tramontin & Gonçalves Gândara, 2010).

The study of culinary traditions is closely related to the creation of identity and the symbolic organisation of social groups. López Morales (2008) points out that cooking plays an essential role and is one of the central pillars giving sense and form to local culture by reclaiming traditions and reinforcing identity-affirming beliefs.

To Ciselli (2002:140), identity is a symbolic construct, a form of classification that creates belonging. Different positions produce different perceptions of reality and other values, leading to disputes over symbolism between different sections of a society over the meanings, values and boundaries that separate them.

People also express identity through gastronomy, reflecting their likes, dislikes, affinities and prejudices, and when they emigrate they take it with them and reinforce their sense of belonging to the place they left behind. This creates an ethnic cuisine, much used in tourism to highlight the characteristics of a particular culture, which in rural settings, according to Diez Peña (2008), is passed on by successive mothers to their daughters.

In a study of the expression of Italian heritage in the south of the state of San Catarina, in Brazil, Savoldi (2002:74) noted that food is used in traditional celebrations to reinforce their Italian identity. Roast beef is replaced by chicken, pasta or polenta, which always goes hand in hand with a good wine. Polenta (once considered food for hard times), accompanied by chicken, became the symbolic dish of the Italians in Nova Veneza. It is still prepared in the old style, in large pots that allow the participants to watch and taste, as they try to “exorcise” the typical steaks characteristic of traditional south Brazilian celebrations.

One tends to associate pasta with Italy, rice with South East Asia and beef with Argentina. Just as Buenos Aires represents tango, the rest of the country is seen as a vast plain known as the *pampa*, where, despite the increase of vegetarian cuisine and the use of other foods in regional cuisine, cattle still happily graze to acquire the best flavour for the world's most demanding palates.

The social and cultural aspects of gastronomy resulted in it being incorporated into the "complex framework of heritage policies" (Estévez González, 1999) and through this different countries seek to incorporate their cuisine into UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Schlüter, 2006). The most prominent application to date was by Mexico, who was unsuccessful due to presentational difficulties (Lopez Morales, 2008). An interesting feature of traditional culinary practices is the close link with the production of utensils and other items of kitchenware and tableware. This can be witnessed just about anywhere in Mexico: the food and the cookware are inseparable (Lopez Morales, 2008: 47).

Use of heritage for tourism purposes has given gastronomy greater importance in promoting a destination and catching tourist trends. According to Azambuja (1999), the tourist's main motivation is to seek pleasure through eating and travelling, but eschewing the standard fare for authentic dishes.

Food tourism can be defined as that kind of tourism in which the activities and behaviour of those who participate in it, and even their choice of destination, are influenced by cooking. Hall and Sharples (2003:10) point out that, as a consequence, food tourism can be defined as visits to primary and secondary food producers, gastronomic festivals, restaurants and specific places where sampling of the signature dishes of a food-producing region is the main reason for making the trip.

In this context it is important to bear in mind a series of advantages in particular that: those who participate in this way spend on average more than the ordinary tourist; that they have high expectations of the products offered; and that because they tend to come from very specific sectors of society, it is easy, and therefore less expensive, to target them (Torres Bernier, 2003). Nor should one forget that food tourism can act as a complement to both generic tourist activities and other specialised forms such as golfing, winter or water sports, business, art and event tourism, and so on.

According to Torres Bernier (2003) it is possible to distinguish between the tourists who eat because they are travelling and the tourists who travel to eat. In the first case no particular interest is shown in the local gastronomic offering, although in holiday destinations they want it adapted to their needs and preferences. In that case, it is important to pay sufficient attention to making tourists feel satisfied with their journey and their stay.

*One could say that a badly fed tourist is a dissatisfied tourist. In fact, food frequently represents a permanent memory when one tries to recall*

*distant trips. Thus they will say "...that little town in the Tyrol where we had excellent sauerkraut, or that dreadful trip when we almost died of hunger on the boat"* (Torres Bernier, 2003:306).

Generally, those who travel share eating places, and their corresponding culinary habits, with the local population, to which they add additional factors such as preferences, age, religion, fads and state of health. When one is dealing with mixed demand (local population plus tourist population) it becomes difficult to serve both groups adequately, producing imbalances that in the end affect the tourists' level of satisfaction and, as a direct consequence, the image of the destination.

To make the local cuisine popular and attractive in its own right, it must be channelled through a gastronomic establishment aimed at tourists. Local food, like local handicrafts, becomes popular among tourists only after being transformed to a certain degree and in a certain way. Changes of differing degrees, and to various different aspects, are made to satisfy the tourists: foreign dishes are introduced into the local cuisine and adapted to local tastes. From this meeting of native and imported cuisines, new dishes, and even new styles of cooking, can emerge. This is not simply a fusion or hybridisation of foreign and local elements, but actually includes an element of innovation or creation (Cohen & Avieli; 2004:767).

## **GASTRONOMY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS**

Many attempts have been made to develop tourism in rural areas through the creation of food routes. Based on European experience, almost every country in Latin America, from Mexico to Chile and Argentina, has organised its rural tourist offering around itineraries centred on a food type or typical dish.

Scuta Fagliari and Raduan Masano (2003) point out that food routes are in fact complex products which group together both gastronomic activities and other activities based on history and culture, ecology and sport. As a result of such complexity, food routes end up being perceived as a complete product that satisfies both different types of tourist and the widest range of tourist requirements, thus increasing the chances of a positive experience. In addition, concentrating attractions and facilitating the interrelation between them in a logical itinerary represents a psychological benefit for the modern tourist constantly burdened by time pressures. No food route uses gastronomic attractions only. They all seek to use other types of attraction as well, with the aim of adding value to the

product they offer. There is a tendency to use attractions of a historic/cultural nature to complement the gastronomic attractions, and in some cases the accommodation, due to its location, the services offered, the type of construction and so on, can also act as an attraction.

Although developed privately, the vast majority of these routes receive substantial support from a variety of government bodies, whether at the highest national level, as in the case of Argentina in the framework of the National Rural Tourism Plan, or through overseas initiatives related to the heritage of the country where finance is being provided, as in the case of Italy in relation to the Strada do Imigrante or the Caminho das Pedras, in the south of Brazil, where they highlight the gastronomy and wine production introduced by the early immigrants (Brambatti, 2002).

In Chile, the Institute of Agricultural Development (INDAP) has a series of programs for developing rural areas while preserving traditional cultures and promoting their culinary traditions. One of them is the small farmers program, in which many Mapuche women participate. Every year since 1998, under the name Expo Mundo Rural, it has united 130 businesses selling more than 2,300 products to approximately 150,000 visitors (Cassin, 2008). Created in 2001, Tastes of the Country: Rural Specialities Project is also run by INDAP, and is a registered trade mark which acts as a large umbrella organisation for all rural enterprises. Two of the many projects supported by INDAP, with the aim of promoting culinary-based rural tourism, are the National Rural Tourism Program and the Farm Tourism Committee.

In Argentina, an agreement was signed on 11 May 2000 between the Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food (SAGPyA) and the National Tourism Secretariat (SECTUR) to record the commitment of both parties to the creation of a Rural Tourism Program with the following aim:

*.... to make more efficient use of the human and material resources available to both parties. These efforts will be aimed at the rural sector, in particular at small and medium producers who traditionally produce raw materials, but with the possibility of carrying out other activities to diversify their investment: for example, Rural Tourism offers significant prospects through the incorporation of commercialisation and provision of services sustained by nature and rural culture (SAGPyA, 2000).*

One of the undertakings in the agreement is the implementation of a National Program of Rural Tourism. This was made the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, because the Department realised that its

jurisdiction covered both the problems affecting rural producers and the means to implement measures aimed at regional rural development. By rural tourism, the following is understood:

*All those activities that can be developed in rural areas and which are of interest to city dwellers due to their exotic, traditional or romantic characteristics or simply for being different from their daily routine.*

This definition incorporates almost all categories of tourism, including tourism based on ecology, gastronomy, business, religion, adventure, study, ethnicity, culture and sport.

*[...] rural tourism is practised both by those people who stay in farm premises with a view to discovering, enjoying and participating in some agricultural activity (agro-tourists) and by hunters, fishermen, scientists, students on school-leaver trips, tourists passing through, businessmen taking part in an event or retreat, and so on.*

On the back of two European experiments the Department of Agriculture also points out that the activities offered by farmers and cattle breeders in their establishments differ from conventional tourist activities. This is because it is the farmer himself who provides the services and, therefore, *one can consider rural tourism an agricultural activity*. From this point of view, another factor to bear in mind is that the rural producer uses tourism as a way of selling what he produces by manufacturing the food he provides to the visitor. Some producers even accept tourists only with the aim of selling their products (SAGPyA, 2000).

The products placed in the market may be fresh (for immediate consumption, such as butter, milk, fruit, vegetables and so on) or may have been processed to be placed in the market as souvenirs (jams, sausages, preserves and so on).

The Secretariat of Agriculture and the Secretariat of National Tourism have agreed that tourism can be used as a development tool due to the support it provides to regional economies. According to them, the benefits it creates include the following: (a) it diversifies investment, thus putting idle workers back to work and avoiding production subsidies; (b) it creates further employment and fosters rural roots; (c) it provides an opportunity for women and young people to take leading roles in rural tourism businesses; (d) it increases the value of cultural and environmental heritage; (e) it improves the commercialisation of raw material production and adds value to it; (f) it promotes cooperatives; and

(g) it widens the tourism offering.

Within the framework of the Argentine Rural Tourism Program various sub-programs have been developed, of which Food Routes Argentina and the Municipal Rural Tourism Project are worthwhile to be mentioned.

In addition, a program entitled “Rural Tourist Towns” has been set up in the province of Buenos Aires – the most important province in the country from a farming and economic point of view – through its Department of Tourism and with the collaboration of the Banc of the Buenos Aires Province and the Centre for Territorial and Environmental Research (CITAB). Its central idea is to promote and encourage the development of tourist activities and enterprises that are sustainable in small communities, generating identity, sources of employment and authentic resources, and strengthening roots (Navarro & Schlüter, 2010),

Numerous towns in Buenos Aires province have seen tourism as a way out of a crisis which has deepened in recent decades, accentuated by the disappearance of the railway, in many cases the only means of transporting local produce to the major centres of consumption.

The development of tourism activity was able to halt the migration of young people to other regions in search of work and in many cases made it possible for people in search of work to settle, to some extent achieving the revival of these small towns of no more than 400 inhabitants.

Many of these towns, particularly those not more than 200 kilometres from the city of Buenos Aires, have focussed on offering themselves as day trip destinations with no requirement for an overnight stay. Others have managed to complement their attraction with accommodation and entertainment.

The common element in all of these cases, however, is undoubtedly gastronomy, which after having been considered historically a complementary service that visitors could enjoy in a destination along with other activities, has managed to position itself as a genuine principal attraction. Many destinations have been developed as gastronomic centres. The revival of the countryside as a place of tradition, tranquillity and culture has caused the people of the big cities to turn their attention to smaller locations in the province, where one can have a personal encounter with the cultural identity that the town has been hiding, unchanged, within it.

The growing demand for this type of location results in a constant search for new places in which to swap the city for the country. Those who always lead the way belong to particular sectors of society in the big

cities, being the first to look for these locations, but the destinations become increasingly overcrowded and these people move on to other locations, enabling class and status differences to be maintained. This leads in the long term to the destruction of many sites with valuable natural and cultural heritage.

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF AN ARGENTINE TOWN**

A study carried out in Tomás Jofré (Schlüter & Thiel Ellul, 2008) revealed a serious deterioration in the town, resulting in a later project of research and development to establish indicators of sustainability. The project envisaged the extension of its findings to neighbouring towns that were still in their initial stage of development, in order to give them ideas for achieving a balanced growth. This led to the compilation of a set of indicators that would enable the monitoring of tourism activity in the town under study in order to observe the true impact of tourism on it. The design of an analysis model for towns with similar characteristics was also attempted.

Tomás Jofré is a small community which lies approximately 150 kilometres from Buenos Aires and which, according to the National Census of Population and Dwellings in 2001, had 153 inhabitants and 60 houses spread over 22 blocks. It is notable for its strictly rural atmosphere, in which cows graze by the side of the street, separated only by a wire fence that indicates the start of a farm property. It lacks attractions of a heritage nature: if there are any, they are well hidden – there is no church, which is unusual in Argentine towns, and no police station and, depending on the time of year, a variety of farm vehicles from the neighbouring fields, such as tractors, seeding machines or combine harvesters, drive through the streets. There is a marked contrast between the peace and quiet during the week and the hustle and bustle of weekends and holidays due to the numbers who visit the town to eat.

Gastronomic activity in Tomás Jofré started in a general store, opened in 1924, which fed the rural inhabitants of the local area and at the same time served as a social meeting point for local celebrations such as weddings, baptisms, birthdays and so on. The fame of the only dish on offer, *raviolones* (kind of big ravioli) in a butter sauce, spread beyond Mercedes, the nearest main town, and word attracted diners from other places. The general store became a restaurant and the business steadily grew, and other establishments were also soon converted into restaurants (Schlüter & Thiel Ellul, 2008).

The intense tourist/gastronomic activity that occurred during

weekends and especially on Sundays when visitors exceed 3,000 are what permitted the economic development of the town when the railway closed and many people were forced to abandon the once small but thriving community. What was once a hub for grain stores and dairy farms was left completely deserted when the residents had to leave in search of work.

Today, the Tomás Jofré *Gastronomic Centre* has fifteen restaurants spread over nine of the twenty-two existing blocks of the town. The old traditional eating-houses mingle with modern-built restaurants. Since the mid-90s the town has become a huge centre of attraction. Restaurants vie to gain the attention of the visitor with different typical delicacies. Menus generally include a starter of locally made beef or pork sausages, homemade pastas, grilled meat (either beef or pork) and traditional desserts.

After lunch in Jofré, one can enjoy the country air, have an after-lunch conversation under centuries-old trees, walk through the dirt streets, ride bicycles or do some horse riding. Children's games are an option offered by a small number of restaurants. The town also has other establishments linked to gastronomy and one especially dedicated to the sale of sausages, jams, farm produce and other traditional foods. Furthermore, in the vacant plot originally designed to act as a main square, stalls are erected on Sundays and holidays for artisans and sellers of regional and antique products and other articles.

Tradition may hold that women should be in the kitchen and men in front of house, but men play an important part in the gastronomy of Tomás Jofré, thanks to their traditional role in preparing the barbecue, even if women have slowly begun taking charge of this task occasionally. The female role was reduced to setting the table and preparing salads. In addition, the slaughtering of "large" animals such as cows and pigs is generally a male role, as a result of which the present-day preparation of sausages is strongly influenced by the men folk.

Nevertheless, a study conducted by the National University of San Martín (UNSAM) (Navarro & Schlüter 2010) discloses that men dedicate more hours to work activity, whether because they have jobs that demand more time or because they do have a second occupation. 42.9% of them work more than 40 hours weekly, whilst among women the corresponding percentage is 28%. A substantial percentage work between nine and fifteen hours a week, from which one may infer that this relates to weekend activities associated with the town's gastronomy, such as waiting, preparing food on the grill, or barbecuing meat. The distribution of women according to number of hours per week dedicated to work is

more equal. This may be related to the type of work they do, some of them being involved in weekend gastronomic activities (such as waitressing or assisting in the kitchen) and others having more regular work but only a few hours of it each day.

Interviews revealed that men are more inclined to pass on their culinary knowledge. This was observed in the way salamis, hams and other cold cuts commonly consumed in the restaurants of Jofré, are prepared. One interviewee also confirmed that a similar thing happens in winemaking.

For their part, women no longer appear content to remain in the kitchen. Part-time availability at weekends enables young women to help in the running of restaurants, giving them the financial resources needed to study in Buenos Aires during the week. Although they say they want to continue helping in the family business, they don't exactly expect it to be in the kitchen. Alternatively, there are other young women who have started a family and contribute to their household economy by preparing a range of products such as jams, sauces, preserves and so on for sale to tourists, and who had to resort to TV programmes and the Internet in order to familiarise themselves with different cooking techniques because, as one respondent put it, "[...] *to mummy, cooking is double dutch*". Nonetheless, an interviewee in her forties stated that she had learned everything she knew about cooking from her mother, while another lady in her seventies indicated that as a result of her granddaughter's interest she had decided to pass on her cookery secrets, and in particular the preparation of preserves, to her, rather than to her daughter, who "[...] *was of no use at this*".

Having witnessed the success achieved by Tomás Jofré, various small towns close to Buenos Aires sought different strategies for positioning themselves as tourist destinations as well as day tripper destinations. The majority, instead of opting directly for gastronomy, tried to develop their mostly railroad and religious heritage, complementing visits for that purpose with a traditional gastronomic offering. A clear case of marked growth is the town of Carlos Keen, to which have been added other small neighbouring rural towns (Arnaiz Burne & César Dachary, 2007).

## FINAL COMMENTS

In gastronomy, rural tourism found the perfect partner for attracting visitors and benefiting the local population. This power of attraction results from gastronomy's many different aspects, particularly its strong

links with heritage and its capacity to create identities which people can take away with them regardless of where they are going.

However, despite gastronomy appearing to offer so much as a component or complement of rural tourism, there may be very negative consequences without resort to careful planning and constant monitoring of its impact. It is easy to achieve over-saturation of these locations, with the direct consequence that they start to lose visitors because the establishments that opened in anticipation of more business ultimately have to close due to a lack of customers.

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