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Research Article

## TRAVEL AGENCIES AND GASTRONOMY TOURISM: CASE OF IATA MEMBER A-CLASS TRAVEL AGENCIES

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### ABSTRACT

This research was made in order to show to what extent IATA Member A-Class Travel Agencies, which operate in Istanbul, how benefit from the gastronomy tourism. Parallel to this aim data was collected via content analysis method from the 244 websites of the IATA member travel agencies, which are registered to TÜRSAB and operate in Istanbul, between November and December 2017. Maxqda program was used during the analysis process. In the wake of the data analysis it was detected that travel agencies do not directly organize gastronomy tours and they organize the travels related to the gastronomy tourism under culture tours. Moreover within the organized tours' content it was observed that the most distinguished gastronomic services are 'tasting' and the most distinguished products are respectively "wine", "çibörek", "Turkish delight", "lokum" and "meatball/köfte".

**Keywords:** Gastronomy Tourism, Food Tourism, Culinary, Travel, Travel Agency.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy tourism, which is also known as food tourism (Du rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003; Tikkanen, 2007; Kim, Kim and Goh, 2011; Wto, 2012; Shalini ve Duggal, 2015; Kim and Iwashita, 2016) or culinary tourism (Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Smith and Xiao, 2008; Horng and Tsai, 2012; Baltescu, 2016), is nowadays one of the fastest growing, dynamic, popular and attractive areas of the tourism industry (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Kim, Kim and Goh, 2011, p. 1159; Wto, 2012; Shalini and Duggal, 2015, p. 1) and it plays a significant role in the changing life (Yuan su, 2015, p. 17).

Gastronomy concept can be defined as the enjoyment of food (Gillespie, 2006, p. 2) and beverage or culinary art and eating well (Kivela and Crotts, 2006, p. 354). The pleasure that the individuals have from eating and drinking is closely related to the cultural, geographical and social relations of the society they are part of. This pleasure is a learning process and it keeps its continuity by cultural changes (Gillespie, 2006, p. 2). Gastronomy is the examination of the relationship between culture and food (Kivela and Crotts, 2006, p. 354). Gastronomical values are inseparable part of the culture of a nation (Draskovic, 2016, p. 153), they constitute the base components of each culture (Du rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003, p. 99; Pullphothong and Sopha, 2013, p. 3) and they are the indispensable component for getting to know the culture and life style of a region (Wto, 2012, p. 10).

To participate gastronomy tourism is to learn about the culture of the destination. Communicating with local people and guessing at which point of history they are positioned are possible with gastronomy tourism. Accordingly, gastronomy tourism presents the culinary culture of a country, region or zone (Pullphothong and Sopha, 2013, p. 2). What is more, gastronomy tourism is a significant tourism asset for the tourists who visit the destinations (Frochot, 2003, p. 78; Kim, Kim and Goh, 2011; Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez-Canizares, 2011, p. 70-71; Yuan Su, 2015, p. 17-18). They are also basic factors that encourage and motivate tourists to travel to a specific destination (Quan and Wang, 2004; Kivela and Crotts, 2006, p. 376; Tikkanen, 2007; Schmantowsky, 2008; Kivela and Crotts, 2009; Kim, Kim and Goh, 2011; Wto, 2012; Pullphothong and Sopha, 2013, p. 3; Baltescu, 2016; Shalini and Duggal, 2015, p. 8; Kim and Iwashita, 2016, p. 94). Schmantowsky (2008) states that gastronomy tourism let tourists have unique and unforgettable experiences at the destinations they go. Pullphothong and Sopha (2013) and Kivela and Crotts (2006) state that tourists visit the same places over again to enjoy the unique gastronomy.

According to World Tourism Organization; among the tourism revenues gastronomy has 30% share and 88,2 of those who participate world tourism activities indicate eating and drinking have high importance while choosing a destination (Wto, 2012, p. 12-14). According to Tursab gastronomy tourism report in the year 2014; the share of gastronomy within the expenditure of the tourists made in Turkey is around 19-20%. On the other hand, with the Turkish people traveling from Turkey to abroad this share is around 28-30% (Tursab, 2015). Schmantowsky (2008) states, that almost all the tourists eat outside during their holiday and frequently, one of the three most popular tourist attraction is related with eating. Moreover, tourists spend \$1,194 for touristic tours related with food and one third of this expenditure is separated for activities about food. Similarly, Pullphothong & Sopha (2013) and Suanpang, (2015) indicate that significant amount of touristic expenditure is made on during eating or consumption of food and beverage while traveling.

The gastronomic services, which a destination has, increases the image (Quan ve Wang, 2004; Okumus, Okumus and Mckercher, 2007; Horng and Tsai, 2012; Wto, 2012; Kim and Iwashita, 2016) and the competition level of the destination (Du rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003; Boyne, Hall and Williams, 2003; Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez-Canizares, 2011; Horng and Tsai, 2012; Draskovic, 2016) and enforces the identity of the destination (Telfer and Wall, 1996; Du rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003; Frochot, 2003; Boyne, Hall and Williams, 2003; Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez-Canizares, 2011; Wto, 2012; Horng and Tsai, 2012; Kim and Iwashita, 2016). *Identity is an indispensable component for developing countries to grow. The countries which are not strong have to be 'interesting'. If they have to have an appeal, the source of this appeal should be their 'uniqueness', 'culture', 'identity', 'history', 'land', 'traditions', 'brilliance' and 'imagination'. Competitive identity consists of this* (Anholt, 2011: 47). There are a lot of institutions and enterprises which can promote this identity to national and international spheres. Travel agencies are one of them. Travel agencies can be defined as the institutions which bring together touristic products (logistics, accommodation, food-beverage and other products) with consumers, who provide consulting and information to the consumers, who support the promotion the country and generate new travel destinations (Demirkol and Zengin, 2004, p. 47-48; Hacıoğlu, 2006, p. 43; Akman,

2012, p. 53-55). Another aim of these enterprises is to inform the consumer and direct their purchasing decisions (Hacıoğlu, 2006, p. 43-44). If you think of the importance of eating and drinking among the touristic products, big tasks fall to travel agencies to bring together gastronomy tourism and consumers and to offer experiences. Accordingly, in this research to what extent travel agencies benefit from the gastronomy tourism during the process of bringing together touristic products and consumers was tried to be detected.

## **2. METHOD**

In the scope of the research websites of the IATA member travel agencies, which operate in Istanbul are examined. With the examination to what extent gastronomy tourism, within the tours made to Turkey, is offered to visitors was tried to be detected. The reason why the websites were examined was that they are seen as a tool which effects the decision-making while travel planning of the visitors (O'Connor, Wang and Li, 2011, p. 225). The reason why Istanbul was selected as the research area relies on the fact that in Turkey travel agencies operate the most in this city. In total 244 IATA member travel agencies were detected (Tursab, 2017). IATA is an institution which determines the flight standards so that consumers can make safe travels. It works in coordination with airline companies (IATA, 2017). As it is possible that consumers can fulfill the needs about safety of their flights and reliability with IATA member organizations; during the implementation of the research IATA member travel agencies were preferred. Data collection period occurred between the dates 15th of November and 10th of December 2017. Complete inventory method was used in the research as all of the agencies mentioned above were aimed to be reached. During the qualitative data analysis, Maxqda program was made use of. Maxqda program is a program which is used in coding, breaking into themes, and categorizing (Sosyoloji Derneği, 2017). It also enables utilization of mixed methods as well as analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (Maxqda, 2017). During the categorization of the data, the words which corresponds the gastronomy terms in the past researches. When the researches which were made in the past were analyzed it is seen that gastronomy concept is related with 'food-beverage festivals', 'fairs', 'events', 'baking shows', 'food tasting', 'wine and other liquors', 'authenticity' and other concepts about food events (Gheorge, Tudorache, Nistoreanu, 2014: 13; Brokaj, 2014, p. 327; Guzmán, Mogollón and Di Clemente, 2016, p. 2).

## **3. FINDINGS**

The findings of the research are like this:

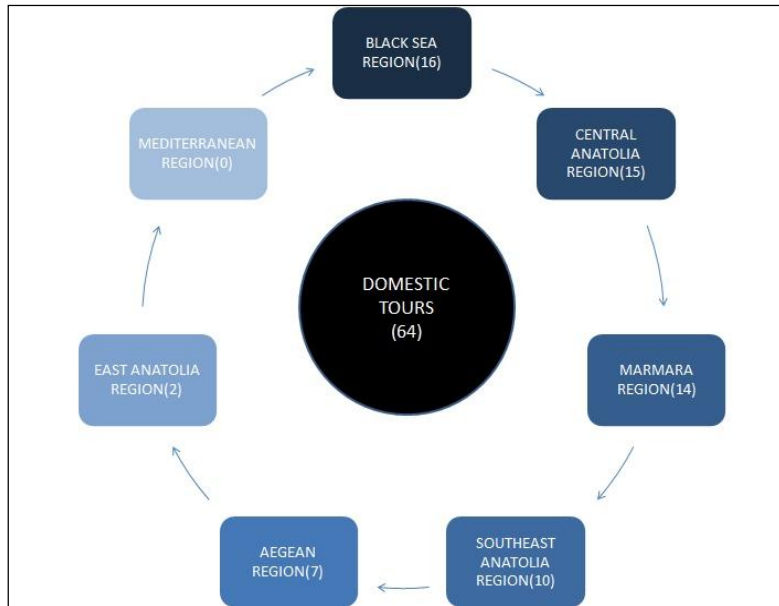
Data about the promotion and presentation of gastronomic services was found in the 53 of the travel agencies. The fact that the remaining 191 (78.28%) travel agencies lacked "information" and "reach" was detected.

When the websites of the IATA Member A-Class Travel Agencies, which operate in Istanbul, were studied, it was seen that there is a problem reaching the websites of many agencies. As customer would be in favor of trust based relationship, it is assumed that it would be beneficial in terms of customer satisfaction and trust feeling if the mentioned agencies reach and serve customers with their modern and wide-range content.



**Figure 1.** Informations on Promotion and Presentation of Gastronomic Services

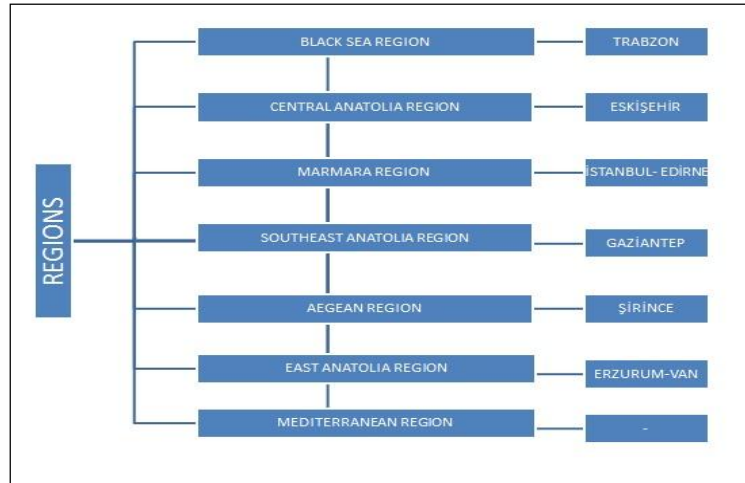
The fact that some of the agencies, which was examined in the scope of the research, do not include gastronomic services because of their roles in the market was observed. For example, the travel agencies, which organize Hajj and Umrah tour, Jerusalem tour or Mediterranean tour, highlight the services that is at the focus of the market they operate in instead of offering gastronomic services.



**Figure 2.** Regions Where Gastronomic Tours are Organized

The most significant situation during the research phase is that there is no directly a gastronomy tour. Mostly these travel agencies offer gastronomic services within the culture tours.

On the websites of the travel agencies it was observed that 25 gastronomic tours were abroad and 64 were national. In the tours to Black Sea Region gastronomic services are offered the most and this region is followed by Central Anatolia Region, Marmara Region, Southeast Anatolia Region, Aegean Region and East Anatolia Region respectively. No gastronomic tour was detected in the tours to Mediterranean Region. The agencies that offer sea-sand-sun tourism prefer not to offer any gastronomic services. If we examined Mediterranean Region, it is seen that the tours, which are sold, are in the all-inclusive concept. That is the reason in this research it is observed that services which are far from “locality”, “tasting” step forward.



**Figure 3.** Popular Gastronomic Destinations in the Regions

It is detected that travel agencies take the gastronomical dynamics of the destination into consideration when they prepare the tour programs. The destinations which are prepared on the gastronomy base are; in Marmara Region İstanbul and Edirne, in Black Sea Region Trabzon, in Aegean Region Şirince, in Southeast Anatolia Region Gaziantep, in Central Anatolia Region Eskişehir and in East Anatolia Region Erzurum and Van were observed as the distinguished destinations.



**Figure 4.** Gastronomic Services Organized by Travel Agencies

When the content of the tours, which the travel agencies organize domestically or to abroad, were analyzed “food tasting (63 times)” was distinguished the most. This statement was followed by “wine and other drinks tasting (28 times)”, “culinary (13 times)” and “festival- fair events (5 times)”. The tours where the term gastronomy was directly referred were only 3. We should indicate the possibility that as a case in an agency, it may benefit from” food tasting” it may also benefit from “wine tasting and other liquors-tasting” in the same tour or another tour it organizes at the same time.



**Figure 5.** Frequently Highlighted Items During Tours

Tour programs may vary according to the unique gastronomical values of the destinations. In this respect, some destinations step forward in terms of food, beverage and other services. In domestic tours, in terms of beverages it is observed that wine, tea and coffee tasting are popular. In terms of food, çibörek, lokum (Turkish delight) and fish have an important place. When other gastronomical services are examined; it is seen that “locality” point is frequently emphasized.

Another subject which was significant during the research is very small number of destinations use gastronomical values in terms of the promotion of the tours. In the tours prepared for Istanbul Turkish coffee and tea are distinguished. In Edirne tours “tava ciğer”, in Safranbolu tours “Turkish delight”, in Şirince and Cappadocia tours “wine”, in Eskişehir tours “çibörek”, in Trabzon tours “Vakfikebir bread” and “rice pudding”, in Giresun and Rize tours “tea”, in Gaziantep tours “baklava and Menengiç coffee”, and in Antakya tours “künefe” draw attention as gastronomical tasting factors.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In general, the individuals, who are likely to participate to tourism, make decisions primarily taking into consideration to fulfill the needs like resting, entertainment, eating-drinking, education etc. They may prefer to fulfill both resting and having an education needs or being entertained and having eating-drinking pleasure at the same time. In this regard it is possible to say gastronomy tourism is a sort of tourism which meets the many needs of the individuals. Eating-Drinking is one of the compulsory activities for which time should be spared in every aspect of life. These activities, whether in all-inclusive tour packages or in special interest tours, are important as the increaser of the motivations and destination selection of the consumers, they also have a significant role in the countries’ revenues. When the civilizations are promoted to different individuals and societies, it is an advantage that a destination has gastronomical values especially for the destinations which are competitive in domestic and international arena. However, research results show that the travel agencies in Istanbul that operate national and international activities does not directly and enough space to gastronomical values.

Gastronomy tourism, unlike the other travel activities and tourist attractions, can occur any time or any weather condition. My field study paper shows that gastronomical products can strengthen the economy of a destination, is effective on the re-selection of this destination, increases the appeal of the destination, contribute to the authenticity of the destination and differentiate it from the others, strengthen the brand identity of the destination, alter the image of the destination, contribute to its sustainability and increases the competition level of the destination. As a result, every day more and more tourism supplier place the products related to gastronomy within the tourism products and focuses on them.

In this context, it is assumed that would provide important advantages to related destinations and the businesses in these destinations if “Gastronomy Agencies” that shows gastronomy tourism activities are founded and if these agencies put forward the gastronomical values while focusing on them. For future studies, how could organized and planned of a gastronomic travel agency are advised to research to the authors.

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