

Tourism, gastronomy and food security

Concept Note 5

OBJECTIVE

Tourism has the potential to become a powerful engine of regional development when it integrates local gastronomy and strengthens food security. By connecting tourists with authentic culinary experiences rooted in territorial identity, regions can generate economic opportunities, preserve cultural heritage, and build resilient local food systems.

This session will explore how regional governments can leverage gastronomy as a strategic asset to enhance tourism competitiveness while ensuring sustainable food production and equitable access to nutrition for local communities.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Gastronomic tourism represents one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, as travellers increasingly seek authentic culinary experiences that reflect local culture, traditions, and landscapes. For regional governments, gastronomy offers a unique opportunity to differentiate their tourism offering while simultaneously addressing food security challenges and supporting local agricultural economies.

The relationship between tourism, gastronomy, and food security is multifaceted. When properly managed, tourism can create sustainable markets for local food producers, fostering agricultural diversification and preserving traditional farming practices. Short food supply chains that connect producers directly with restaurants,

hotels, and tourism experiences can increase farmers' incomes, reduce food waste, and ensure fresher and more nutritious products for both visitors and residents.

However, tourism development can also threaten food security if not carefully planned. Rapid tourism growth may drive up food prices, divert agricultural production from local consumption toward tourist preferences, or place pressure on natural resources essential for food production, such as water and arable land. For this reason, regional governments must adopt integrated approaches that balance tourism development with the nutritional needs and economic well-being of local populations.

Successful gastronomic tourism strategies prioritize territorial identity and authenticity. This includes promoting indigenous ingredients, traditional recipes, and seasonal products that tell the story of a region. Geographical indications, protected designations of origin, and gastronomic certifications can help regions build brand recognition while protecting small producers from unfair competition.

Regional governments play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for sustainable gastronomic tourism. This includes investing in agritourism infrastructure such as farmers' markets, gastronomic routes, and culinary festivals; developing training programs for chefs, gastronomic guides, and hospitality workers that highlight local ingredients and culinary techniques; and establishing quality standards and certification systems that ensure food safety without compromising artisanal production methods.

Partnerships between tourism stakeholders and the agricultural sector are essential. Collaborative platforms bringing together farmers, restaurateurs, hoteliers, tour operators, and regional authorities can facilitate knowledge exchange, coordinate supply chains, and develop joint marketing strategies. These partnerships can also drive innovation in areas such as urban agriculture, organic farming, and climate-resilient food systems.

Climate change poses significant risks to both gastronomy and food security by threatening traditional crops, altering growing seasons, and increasing water scarcity.

Regional tourism strategies must integrate climate adaptation measures, supporting farmers in transitioning to sustainable practices and diversifying production to preserve culinary heritage in the face of environmental change.

The principles of food sovereignty should guide the development of gastronomic tourism, ensuring that local communities maintain control over their food systems and benefit equitably from tourism-generated income. This involves protecting indigenous knowledge, supporting small-scale and family farming, and avoiding the commodification of food culture in ways that exclude local populations.

This approach aligns with multiple Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 15 (Life on Land), recognizing that gastronomic tourism should contribute both to visitor satisfaction and to territorial well-being.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

- How can regional governments create gastronomic value chains that benefit both tourism and local food security?
- What mechanisms can ensure that tourism-driven food demand does not compromise residents' access to affordable nutrition?
- How can traditional culinary knowledge and indigenous ingredients be protected
- and promoted through tourism?
- What innovative partnerships between the agricultural and tourism sectors have proven successful in other regions?