

“Preferences of Erasmus Students Concerning Culinary Tourism”

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, the authors wanted to evaluate the degree to which young Europeans are both informed and interested in culinary tourism offer. Secondly, the question was is there a possible potential for future growth of this market segment based on their preferences. The specific group has been selected as the sample which were young Europeans taking part in Erasmus exchange programmes who have studied at one of two Wrocław universities during the last three years. A questionnaire was developed to examine the characteristics and behaviour of the sample selected. The first section of it gathered the general data concerning respondents, demographics included. Next section concerned the study in Poland period experiences, including first part about the eating habits manifested there, and the second one about knowledge of Polish cuisine. The last section of the questionnaire regarded general tourism and culinary experience of respondents encompassing their knowledge of culinary products and desired culinary destinations. Culinary tourism market in Poland displays potential which on the one hand is connected with cuisine and culinary traditions and on the other with behavior and approach of Poles. Nevertheless Polish cuisine and local culinary products are not well promoted yet. The respondents' adventure with the culinary tourism seems just to be being born. Linking the culinary experience to cultural and social values of their stay it offers opportunities to increase the popularity of the destination. Finally, in order to strengthen the regional identity of the destination there is a need to increase the profile of local foods in the promotion and marketing of the region.

Keywords: *culinary preferences; culinary tourism; Erasmus students; Polish cuisine*

Paper type: *Scientific paper*

Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, the authors wanted to evaluate the degree to which young Europeans are both informed and interested in the offer of culinary tourism. Secondly, the question was if there was a possible potential for future growth of this market segment based on their preferences. The authors presumed that there is a positive connotation between the general attitude towards travelling for specific cultural and adventure purposes and the openness to culinary experiments. Another hypothesis concerned the positive influence of such a travel on the tourists' proneness to novelty.

The specific group selected as a sample consisted of young Europeans taking part in Erasmus exchange programmes who studied at one of two Wrocław universities during the last three years. The schools in question were Wrocław University and the University of Business in Wrocław. The universities that were selected belong to the leaders in the country taking into account the commitment to Erasmus exchange programme. Wrocław University was ranked fourth in Poland in the academic year 2009/10 as concerns the number of students ac-

commodated through the programme which were 219 (<http://www.erasmus.org.pl>). That number has constantly grown each year since then. At the same time, the University of Business in Wrocław was ranked fourth in Poland as regards the equilibrium between students sent and accepted within the Erasmus exchange programme.

Undoubtedly, these students present a specific profile. They are going to belong to a higher-educated, affluent social class. Already they have a good command of at least one foreign language. Therefore, the authors have assumed that the psychological features of the respondents would also classify them as rather self-confident, open-minded, adventurous and curious. Therefore, we can take for granted that they would rather belong to the allocentric type of travelers as Plog labels them (1973). Altogether, the factors mentioned above mean that these former students also constitute the possible target group of new sorts of culture tourism, including culinary tourism.

Since the research concerning tourist behaviours typically involves the use of AIO (attitudes, interests and opinions) surveys and its main application used to be a complement to

the use of socio-demographic variables in market segmentation studies, a questionnaire was developed to examine the characteristics and behaviour of the sample selected. The first section of it gathered the general data concerning the respondents, demographics included. The next section concerned the experience during the period of stay in Poland, including the first part about the eating habits manifested there, and the second one about familiarity with Polish cuisine. The last section of the questionnaire regarded general tourism and culinary experience of the respondents encompassing their knowledge of culinary products and desired culinary destinations. For the study, an online survey was put in electronic form on the web-site and an e-mail request was made to former Erasmus students of both universities mentioned to fill it in. The research took place in October 2012. Finally, a total of 228 fully-filled questionnaires have been taken under further investigation.

Literature review

The paper regards consumer behaviours and attitudes as well as knowledge referring to food and culinary tourism.

Consumer behaviours consist of all the actions consumers take to acquire, use and dispose of products and services (Mowen and Minor, 1998). Behaviours are determined, to a large extent, by people's states of mind or feelings towards a subject, i.e. their attitudes towards the subject (Wilkie, 1994). These attitudes explain the type of decisions a consumer makes and the courses of action she/he adopts. An attitude is a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1987). One of approaches within the field of psychology views attitude as being made up of three components: the cognitive, or knowledge component; the affective, or emotional component; and the conative, or behavioural-tendency component (Yuan et al., 2008). The first one consists of the knowledge or beliefs, second one plays a key role in linking beliefs and behaviours whereas the last one is often viewed as the intention to purchase.

There is a range of theories concerning tourist motivations understood as 'set of needs and attitudes which predisposes a person to act in a specific touristic goal-directed way'. It can be then viewed as an 'inner state which energizes channels and sustains human behavior to achieve goals' (Pizam, Neumann and Reichel, 1978: 195). In the 1970s Cohen (1972) and Plog (1974) presented novelty-oriented tourism typologies based on sociological and psychological models respectively. These theories formed the basis for later tourism novelty research. Plog (1974) emphasized the role of the traveller's personality in his choice of destination and selection of travel experiences. Plog claimed that the travellers are distributed along the continuum from psychocentrism to allocentrism. While the 'psychocentrics' tend to be anxious, self-inhibited and nonadventurous, the 'allocentrics' are self-confident, curious, adventurous and outgoing (Pearce, 1986). Cohen proposed a similar division of tourists into four general categories based on the scale between novelty and familiarity seeking. He labeled tourist roles as 'drifter', 'explorer', 'individual mass tourist' and 'organised mass tourist'. Both theories have found many followers (Di-

manche & Havitz, 1994). Alongside general studies of motivations, attitudes and behaviours of tourists there were also the ones concerning motivations for specific types of tourism. One of the examples from within food and culinary tourism was a paper by Yuan et al (2008).

Notwithstanding the fact that tourism is an activity celebrating the bodily desires involved in a sensual existence of humans, it used to be perceived as a mainly visual experience (MacCannell, 1996; Urry, 1990). However, in the last decade there has been a growing comprehension of involvement of other senses of the body in the experience of tourism. E.g. Urry in the new edition of his book considers such sensescapes as soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes, geography of touch in addition to landscapes (Urry, 2002).

Only few researchers have related tourism to gastronomy as the search for tastescapes became the motivation to travel (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). However, the issue is quite complicated, since next to the defined group of visitors whose main motivation is food, there are also visitors whose main reason for travelling is not gastronomy but who are keen gastronomes, and who will seek authentic food. Gastronomy can thus be either a primary or a secondary motivator for tourists (Quan and Wand, 2004). For example, for tourists the satisfaction of nutritional needs is increasingly becoming a culinary-gastronomic experience (Meler and Cerovic, 2003) with some tourists such as those originating from Hong Kong quoting sampling local food as their most important activity (Law et al, 2004). So far a typology of these sorts of tourism has been developed, including culinary tourism referring to international tourists who plan their travels partly or largely on the basis of a desire to experience different and 'exotic' culinary specialties and traditions (Long, 2004). Hence, the primary goal of such tourists is to explore, experience, and enjoy the unique gastronomy (or cuisine) of a particular destination (Wolf, 2004). As Ignatov and Smith (2006) point out, culinary tourism may be defined as 'trips during which the purchase or consumption of regional foods (including beverages), or the observation and study of food production (from agriculture to cooking schools), represent a significant motivation or activity' (p.238). Culinary tourism is therefore one form of cultural tourism and it encompasses the direct experience of a certain area's unique culinary culture and 'local knowledge' (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). According to Mitchell and Hall (2005: 75) culinary tourism encompasses more general food ventures as part of a wider range of lifestyle activities such as visiting a local festival or market. In this subset, food is of secondary importance to other interests. In the remaining categories, there is low interest in food, for example, visits to a local winery or market are undertaken 'because it is something different'.

Food neophobia can be perceived as a barrier for culinary tourism development. Local food might not be an attraction to many tourists because they are afraid of experimenting with novel foods and of ingesting something strange (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Another concept explaining the positive attitude towards culinary tourism is the concept of variety-seeking borrowed from the consumer behavior literature. It is defined as the consumer's inherent desire for variety due to factors such

as changes in tastes, changes in constraints, and changes in feasible alternatives (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982). In general, this concept explains proneness to the consumption of hedonistic products like food, vacations, entertainment gadgets, and the like (Ratner, Kahn and Kahneman, 1999). According to Shortridge (2004), the diversity of opportunities provided to the tourist to experience varieties of food is seen as the hallmark of food tourism. The culinary tourists are also characterized by their openness to variety (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). A tourist's variety-seeking tendency with respect to food is manifested in a demand for a variety of culinary traditions, and/or a demand for a variety within a culinary system (Molz, 2004; Reynolds, 1993).

Some basic determinants of food attitudes include socio-cultural and economic ones. Familiarity versus novelty seeking in tourism mentioned above can be compared to the concept of food neophobia which has been used widely in the food and nutrition literature to understand why people have the inclination to avoid or approach novel, unfamiliar, and foreign foods. Following Otis' (1984) findings that a person's willingness to taste new food is positively related to how adventurous one thinks he is, Pliner and Hobden (1992) defined food neophobia as 'the reluctance to eat and/ or avoidance of novel foods'. People with neophilia are more likely to accept new and unfamiliar food while those with higher neophobia scores tend to avoid or reject new foods. Among the factors influencing one's food neophobia are socio-demographic characteristics such as culture, age, gender, education, economic and social environments (Asperin et al., 2011). For example, the more exposed an individual is to diverse cultures, the more likely he/she will have higher neophilia. E.g. younger people and men are more food neophobic than older people and women respectively, men being more food neophobic than women, and older people more neophobic than younger people (Hobden & Pliner, 1995; Otis, 1984; Pliner

& Hobden, 1992; Tourila, Lähteenmäki, Pohjalainen & Lotti, 2001). Generally, exposure, familiarity and positive experiences increase food neophilia and decrease neophobia (Asperin et al., 2011; Otis, 1984). The latter also depends on the directions of the tourist travel, in more exotic, remote and dangerous destinations travelers are more reluctant to try local food which can be perceived as constituting a risk for their health. But still, tourists on a trip are usually eager for new experiences and willing to take greater risks than in their everyday life. The trip may thus stimulate their neophylic treats, motivating them to try novel and strange food.

In tourism studies the distinction between recreational, experiential and existential tourists has been proposed by Cohen (1979), adapted by Kivela and Crofts (2005) who proposed existential and experimental food tourists segments. Recreational tourists do not expose themselves to the strangeness of the host environment, showing neophobic tendencies, looking for well-known food in tourist destinations. In contrast, experiential tourists seek to experience the authentic local dishes and food habits and taste local cuisines out of curiosity, but still they might be reluctant to expose themselves directly to the local cuisine and will prefer to eat in the safe, tourism-oriented environments. The second category of existential tourists will patronize local establishments and subsist on the local fare as part of their experiment with local life.

The studies in wine tourism (Carmichael, 2001; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Williams & Dossa, 2001) have explained socio-demographical determinants of the wine tourist constituting a relatively well-educated person belonging to the professional or managerial class.

Results and discussion

228 questionnaires were fully answered and selected for analysis.

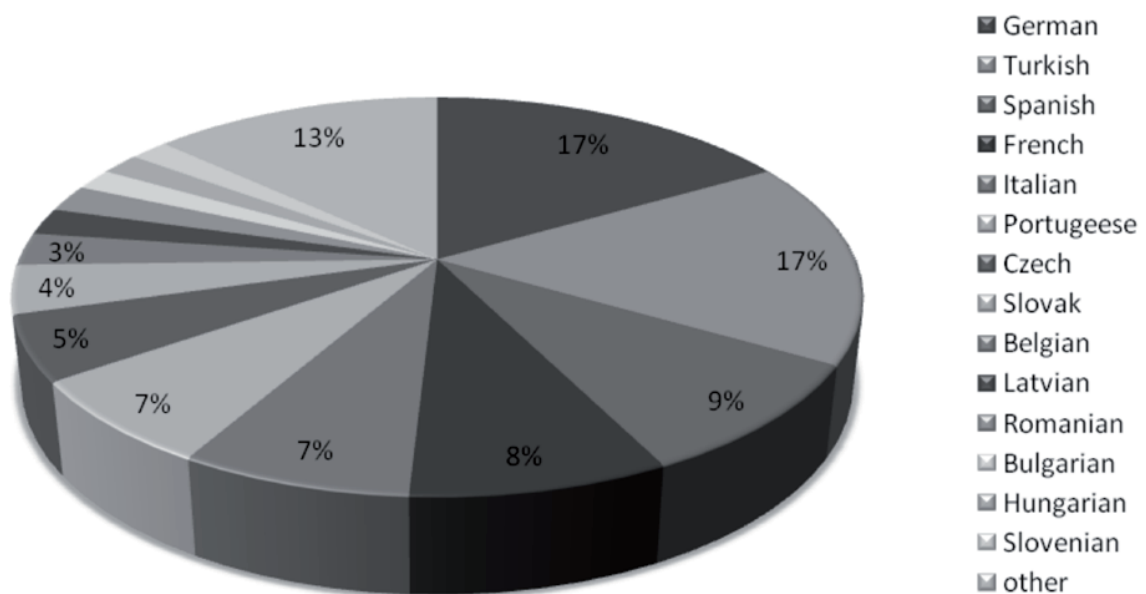


Fig.1. Nationality of the interviewees

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

The nationality spectrum was very wide, with the four largest groups (Germans, Turkish, Spanish and French citizens) constituting one half of the whole. Therefore, the countries with largest populations except Great Britain were represented as major groups in the research. This structure also corresponds with the structure of frequency of Erasmus visits to Poland according to the nations, which in 1998- 2011 were as follows: Spanish, German, Turkish, French, Portuguese and Italian students on the top (www.erasmus.org.pl). Among the minorities

were students from Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Cyprus, Albania, Moldova, Azerbaijan. Therefore, out of 50 European countries 25 were represented in the research (<http://www.countries-of-the-world.com/countries-of-europe.html>).

The majority of the respondents were males (65%) whereas the age structure mostly corresponded with the type of the respondents who were mostly in their M.A. programme or had probably just graduated (22-23 and 24-25 years of age respectively).

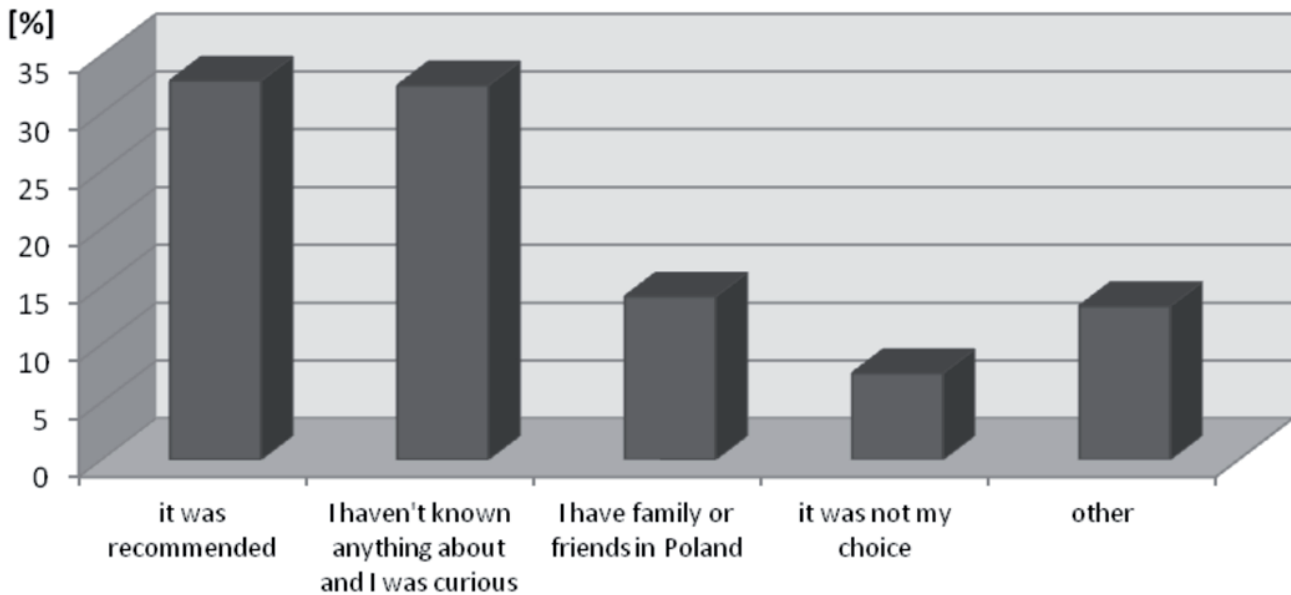


Fig. 2. Motivations to choose Poland as scholarship destination

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

The question concerning motivation to choose Poland as a scholarship destination was expected to show also the respondents' psychological and their openness towards novelty. The majority have pointed either at recommendation or curiosity as the main reason for their choice (Fig.2). Especially the latter answer indicates that every third person from the group has a rather outgoing and open personality, and so is closer to the category of allocentrics according to the Plog model. Some responses from the 'other' category imply deeper cultural motivations, either already related to the former choice of studies (e.g. Slavonic language and literature studies, Polish language and literature studies) or just mentioned as interest in Polish language or culture, whereas three persons mentioned the economic motive that is low costs of living in Poland.

The participation in culinary tourism depends on the eating habits since on the one hand, they explain the strength of interest in food itself by an effort put into its preparation or experiencing, while on the other hand, they influence the degree of possible contact with local cuisine. Six possible

modes of eating habits were distinguished and the respondents chose answers to the question of frequency of their habits with never, once a month or less, 2-3 times a month, 1-2 times a week or almost every day (Fig.2). As concerns the eating habits of the respondents during their stay in Poland, the majority of them used to prepare their own meal from raw ingredients almost every day (more than a half). Eating out either in the bar and similar establishment or in restaurants was mentioned as the second most popular way of preparing the dinner (40-60 per cent did it either on daily basis or 1-2 times per week). However, similar share was again indicated by students declaring preparing their own meal from ready-to-cook products. Hence it seems that economic reasons underlie decisions of eating at home rather, while eating out seems to constitute a much easier way to try local food. The least frequent answer was either home delivery or heating up ready-made dishes, a phenomenon which can be perceived as a positive factor since such choices indicate the smallest effort devoted to eating.

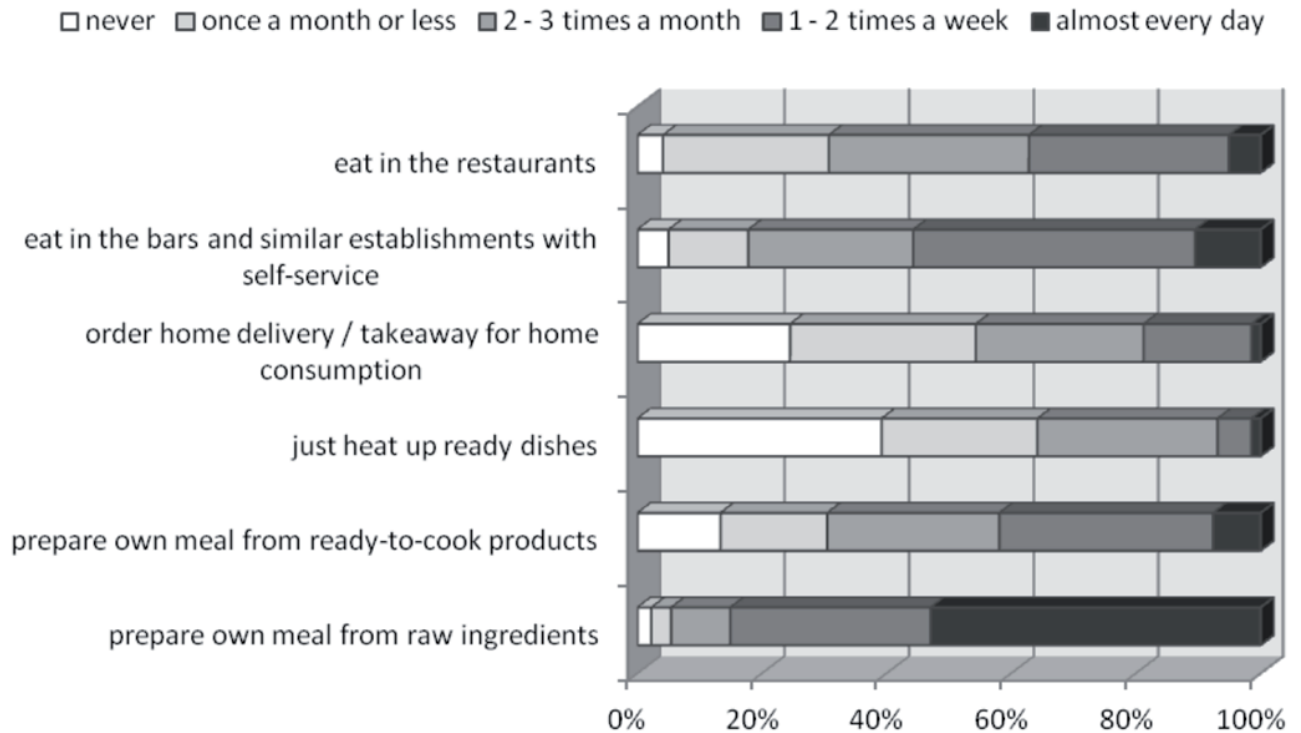


Fig. 3. Eating habits of the respondents during their stay in Poland (way of eating the dinner)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

The question concerning national cuisines preferred by the respondents has revealed that most often they kept to their own traditions (one third eating the well-known national cuisine almost every day), while second most popular cuisine was either other European one or Polish one (60 per cent preferring one of those either almost every day or 1-2 times per week). Less popular were both American and other cuisine, whereas Asian

food was selected as the rarest one since every third respondent has never even tried it. Therefore it seems that although the interviewees were quite open to try Polish cuisine, they were not too open for novelty such as exotic Asian cuisine notwithstanding the existence of restaurants with such an offer in Wrocław. The answers do not sum up to 100 per cent since more answers than one were allowed.

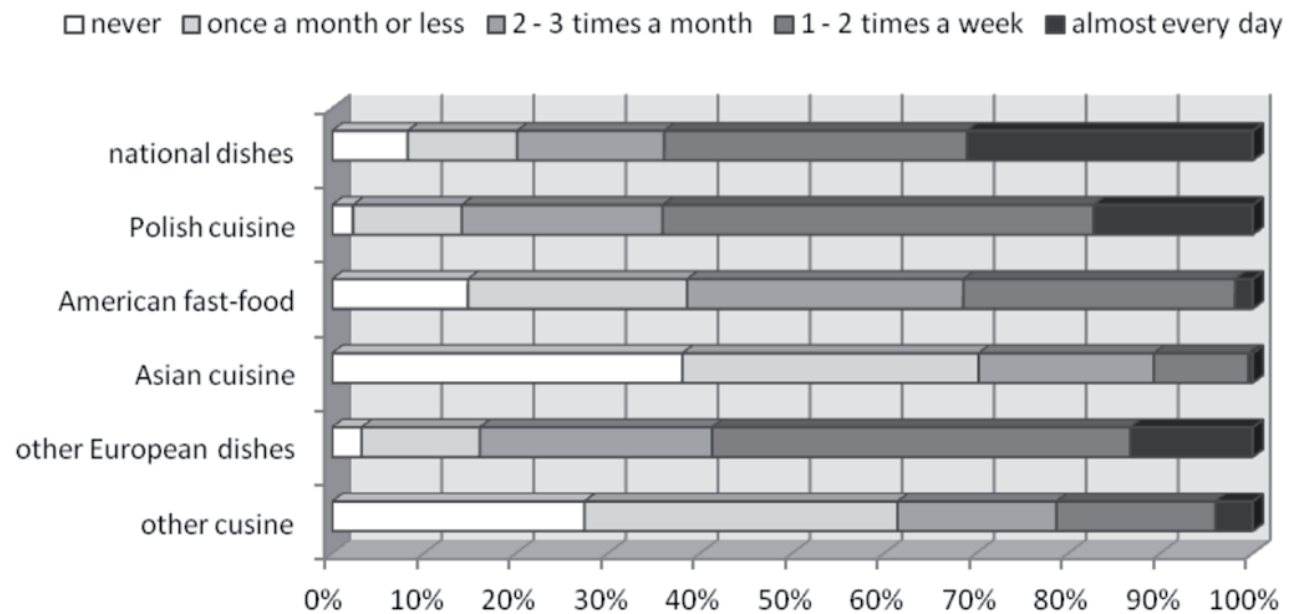


Fig. 4. Eating preferences of the respondents concerning national cuisines

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Almost all respondents have tried Polish cuisine, although in different ways. Only four persons have not tried it at all. Usually more ways were mentioned. Most often the respondents sampled Polish food in bars and similar establishments with self-service which is quite reasonable, since in such a case one can at least see what one chooses to eat. The second most frequently-mentioned group were other establishments, such as traditional Polish food inns. Half of the interviewees were treated by Polish friends in their homes, which is connected with a feature often mentioned

by guests to Poland, that is hospitality of Polish families. This is an old national custom to invite guests home for a traditional meal. Also, every second respondent has tried Polish cuisine at a restaurant which offered different ones. The smallest group have prepared a Polish dish on their own, following a recipe. Taking one of the former questions into account, it seems then that a large group declaring preparing their own meal from raw ingredients at home has only in part tried to do Polish tidbits. But still, every third student has done so, which is a quite high share.

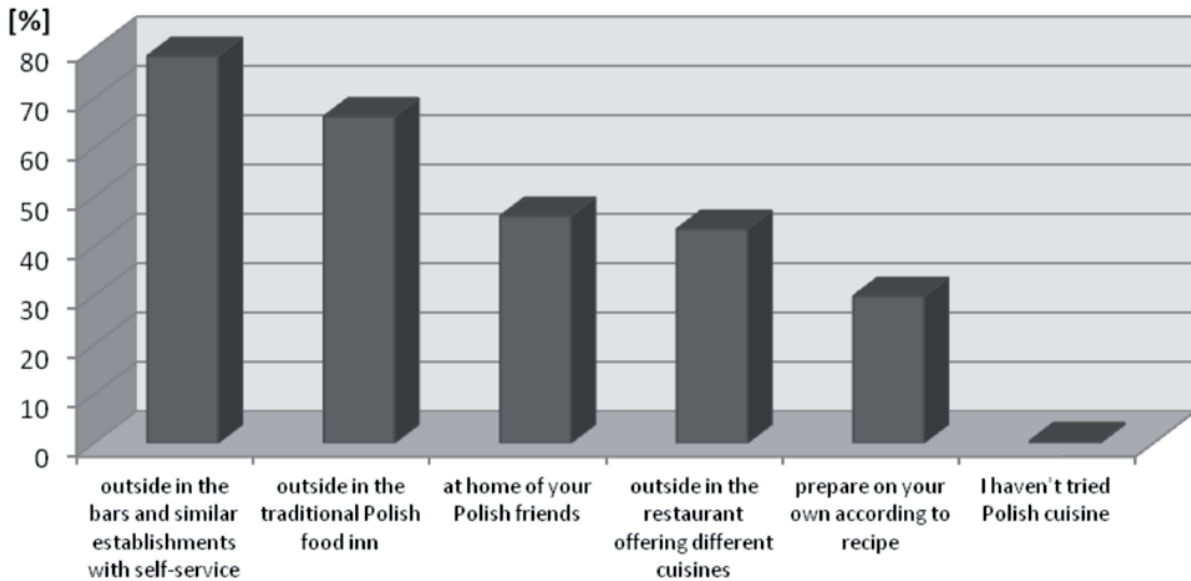


Fig. 5. Way of trying Polish cuisine

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Can you name any traditional Polish dish which you have tried?

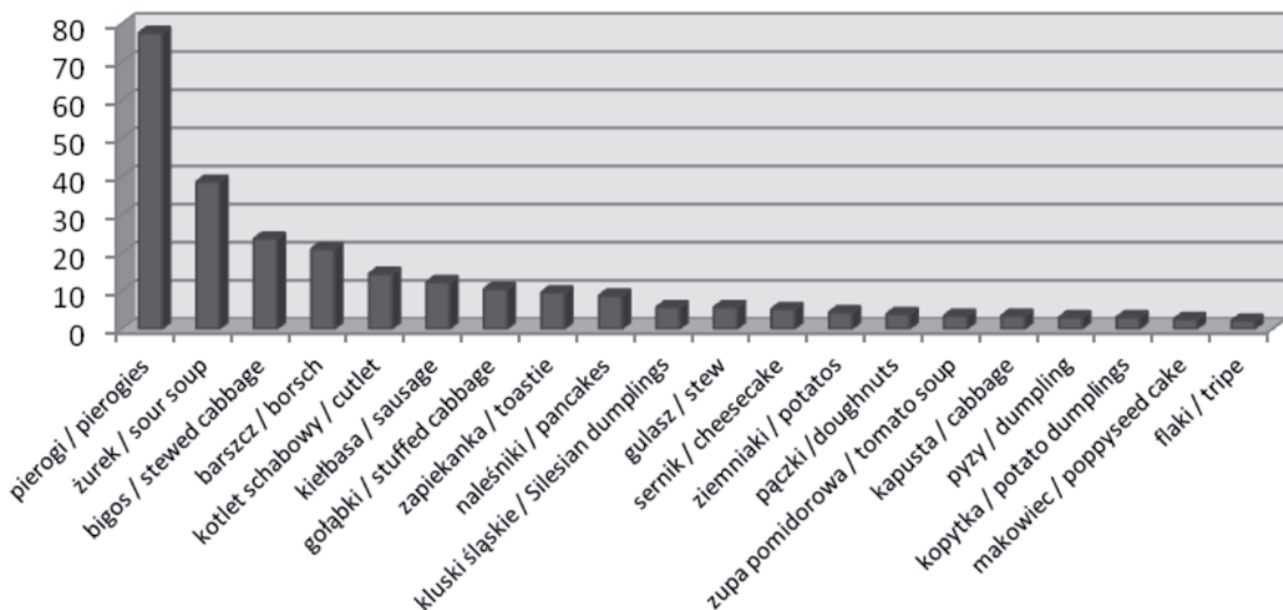


Fig. 6. Knowledge of Polish national cuisine among the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Another question put forward by the authors concerned the possible raise in the respondents' awareness of Polish national cuisine due to their stay in Poland. However, the results seem to be rather disappointing. Although it was only 23 persons who were not able to give any example of Polish national cuisine the majority knew only few ones. 'Pierogi' which really belong to the most popular dishes in the country and are also promoted through new kind of catering establishments which are 'Pierogarnie' specializing in them, are the most commonly identified by respondents (almost 80 per cent). Also two kinds of soup: żurek and barszcz have also been mentioned by every third or every fifth interviewee. Nevertheless, all others were mentioned

by small groups of respondents (each of them – except for bigos and kotlet schabowy – by less than 10 per cent). The things mentioned included dishes (bigos, kotlet schabowy, gołąbki, naleśniki, kluski śląskie, gulasz, pyzy, kopytka), other soups (zupa pomidorowa, flaki), ingredients (kiełbasa, ziemniaki, kapusta) and also cakes (sernik, pączki, makowiec). The reasons for that low level of knowledge can be that the recognition and promotion of Polish national cuisine is not very much developed yet, although the tendency towards its development has been recognizable on the market for the last decade. Therefore, besides the openness and readiness of foreign students to try it, there are still deficiencies on the supply side.

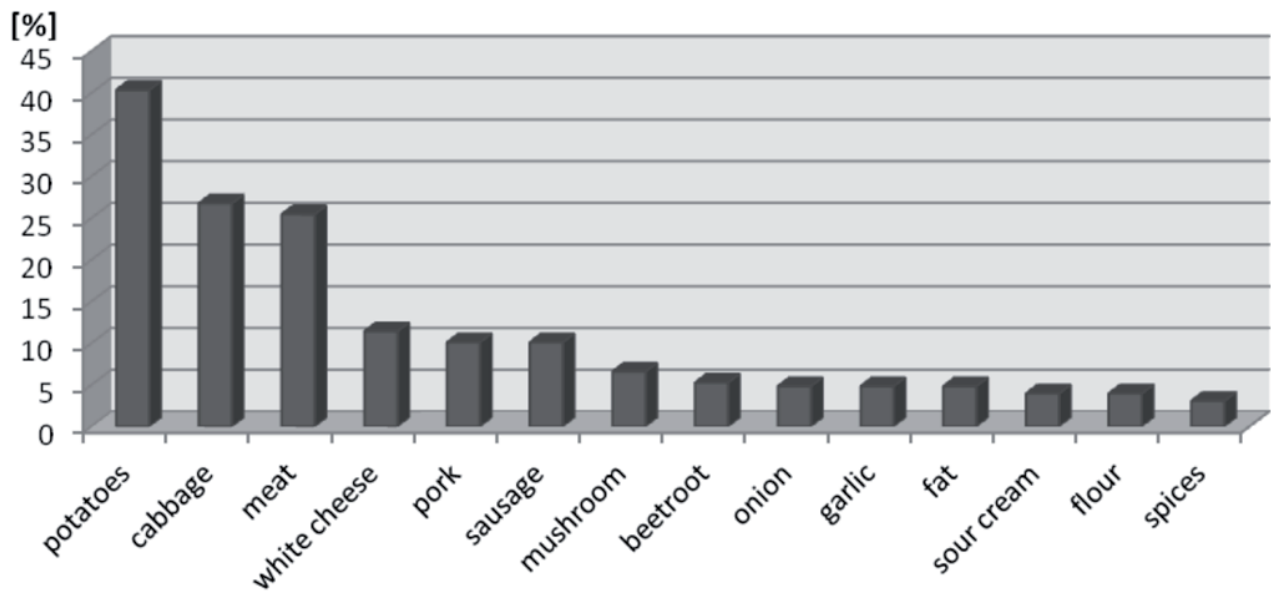


Fig. 7. Ingredients associated with Polish cuisine by the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

The results of the latter question are confirmed by the recognition of not many ingredients associated with Polish cuisine by the respondents. Again, only three such constituents were indicated by at least every fifth interviewee, which were potatoes, cabbage and meat (the last not very revealing), while others were mentioned by less than 10 per cent of the respondents (Fig.7). Among them one can find types of meat like pork and its parts, or finished products like fat or sausages. Also mushrooms and vegetables like beetroot, and garlic were indicated.

The last question from the group checking the knowledge of Polish national cuisine exhibited by the respondents concerned its typical alcoholic beverage. The majority (67 per cent) recognize vodka in that role and only one third beer. It coincides with the national tradition, although mead, which used to be

a unique Polish beverage, has not been mentioned by anybody. However, this can be explained by the break in tradition during the 50 years of communist regime. Recently attempts have been made to revive the custom of producing and drinking mead, but the process is quite difficult as it is fashionable, especially with young Poles, to drink wine – one of the results of the introduction of the open-market economy after 1989.

The opinion-question has revealed that those respondents who have tried Polish cuisine would in majority recommend it (87 per cent). Undoubtedly, the experience was in most cases good and they liked it. Taking that into account, it seems that it will make them more open and welcoming for next attempts of this kind in the future.

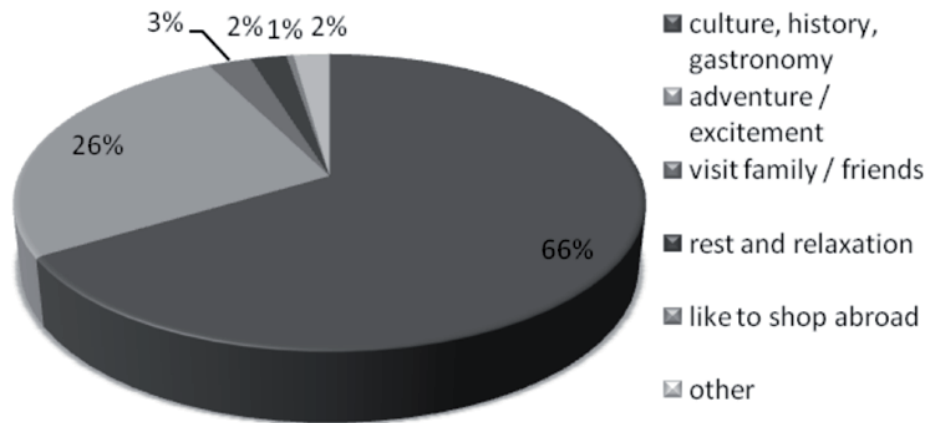


Fig. 8. Main motivation to travel displayed by the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Last few questions revealed general travel habits displayed by the respondents. Two-thirds of them exhibit cultural motives while taking up the travel, which corresponds with the results of the poll cited so far and confirms the assumption taken by the authors at the phase of choosing the sample. One-third of the group is more excitement- and adventure-oriented, which can partially explain the

choice of Poland as the destination as well. Moreover, it also means that they are very open-minded and adventurous during their travel, which makes them as welcome a segment from the point of view of culinary tourism development as the first one mentioned above. Altogether 92 per cent majority confirms the assumptions set forth by the authors at the very beginning of the paper.

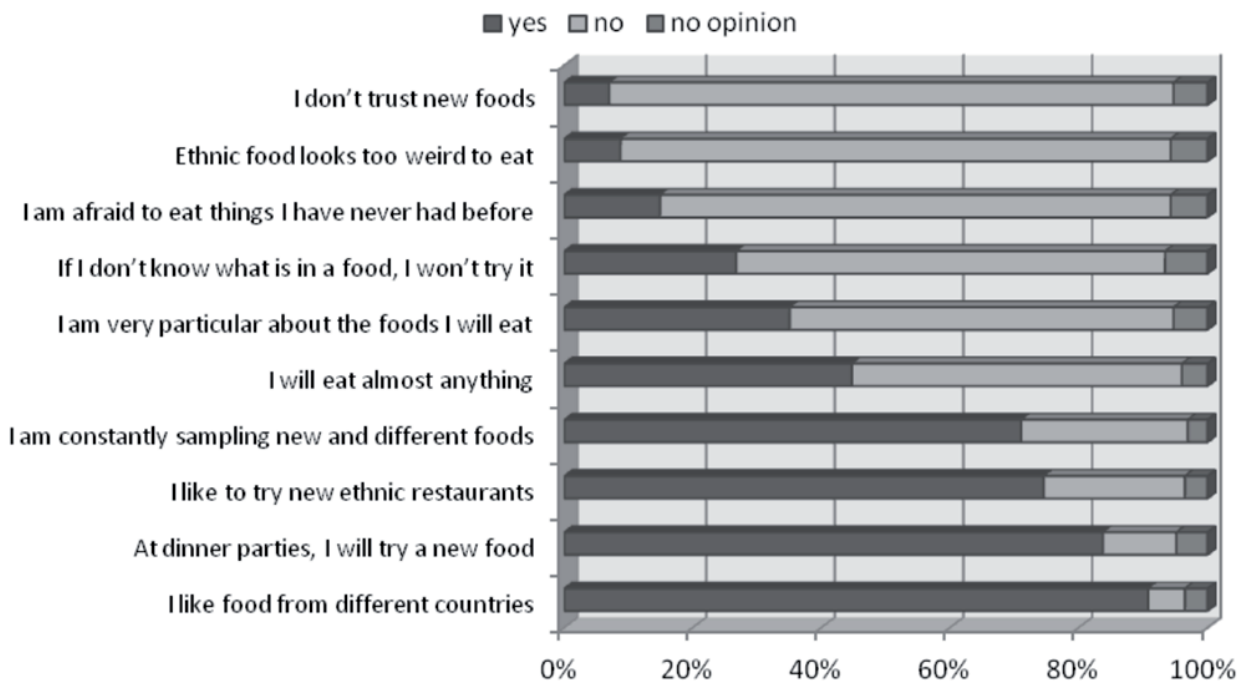


Fig. 9. Habits concerning food exhibited by the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Habits concerning food were measured using the food neophobia scale (FNS) constructed by Pliner and Hobden (1992). The FNS is a one-dimensional scale with ten items displayed in figure (Fig.9). The items are related by using unipolar scale. The poll results have fully confirmed the hypothesis assumed by the authors at the beginning of the paper. Circa 90 per cent of respondents have stressed that they like food from different countries, and 80 per cent would try new food at parties. Around

two-thirds like trying new ethnic restaurants and constantly sample new and different foods. This means that young Europeans who study and take risk of studying abroad are basically very curious and adventurous, which forms good prospects for future growth of new types of tourism, culinary one included.

Eating at places serving the local, regional or distinctive cuisine, followed by consuming local drinks, was mentioned as the main culinary habit by the respondents. Further positions were

taken by purchasing food related products in order to make it a part of daily life or as memorabilia and experiencing a particular type of food or a particular establishment. Visiting food festivals and specific locations together with visiting food producers

were mentioned least frequently. Since these habits respond to the six main categories of food tourism, it means that between 10 and 40 per cent of the sample are already culinary tourist implementing at least one dimension of culinary tourism.

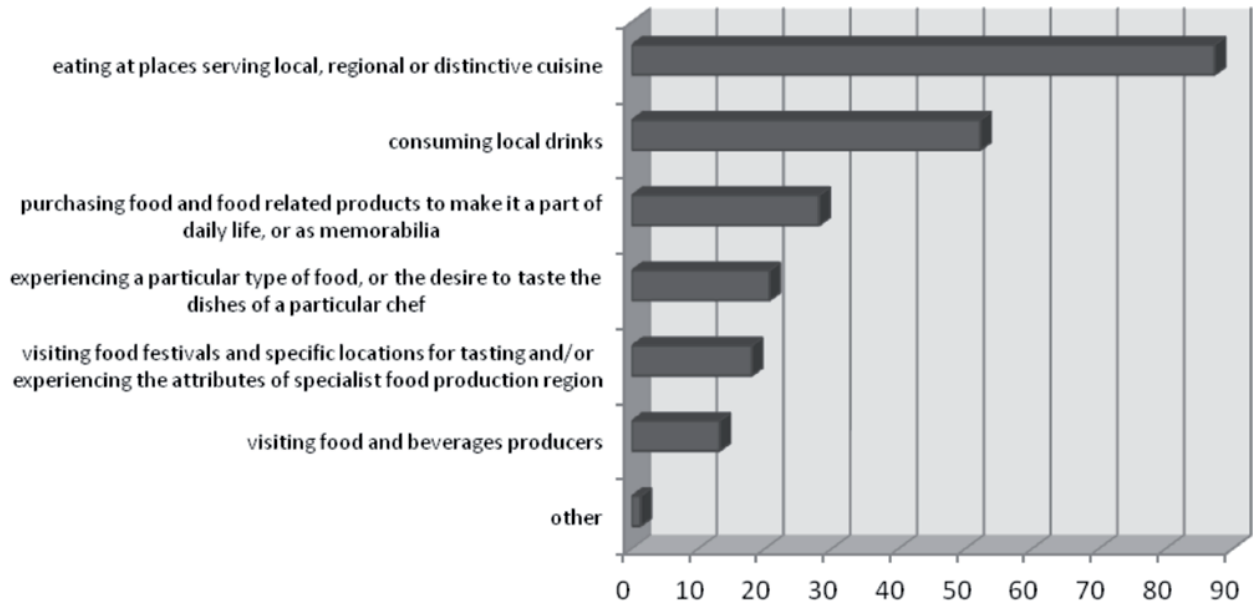


Fig. 10. Main culinary habits during the respondents' tourist travel

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Nevertheless, this seems to be a general approach only. When it comes to the detailed knowledge of the subject, the results are much poorer. The knowledge of culinary events or festivals in Europe is rather weak, since only 22 per cent of the respondents were able to mention at least one such example. The best-known is Oktoberfest in Munich, which was mentioned 21 times. Another one was the European food festival the fourth edition of which took place in Wrocław in June 2012 just before the Euro football games started, so the students were at that time in the city and this is why seven of them have mentioned it. Among others mentioned were Omnivore Festival in Deauville (France),

Merano Wine Festival and Naples Pizzafest in Italy, Wine Festival in Valencia, and Seafood Festival in Grove (Spain). Others events mentioned take place in London (Beer Festival), Prague and Nantwich (both Food Festivals), Brussels (Voedingssalon). The most typical was the Voss Sheephead Festival in Norway. The only culinary trails mentioned in the poll were wine trails in Alsatia (France). However, there were few such events mentioned altogether. The conclusion arises that although the young Europeans can already constitute a target market for food tourism treated as a part of their travelling experiences, they are in majority only a potential market for a specific culinary tourism.

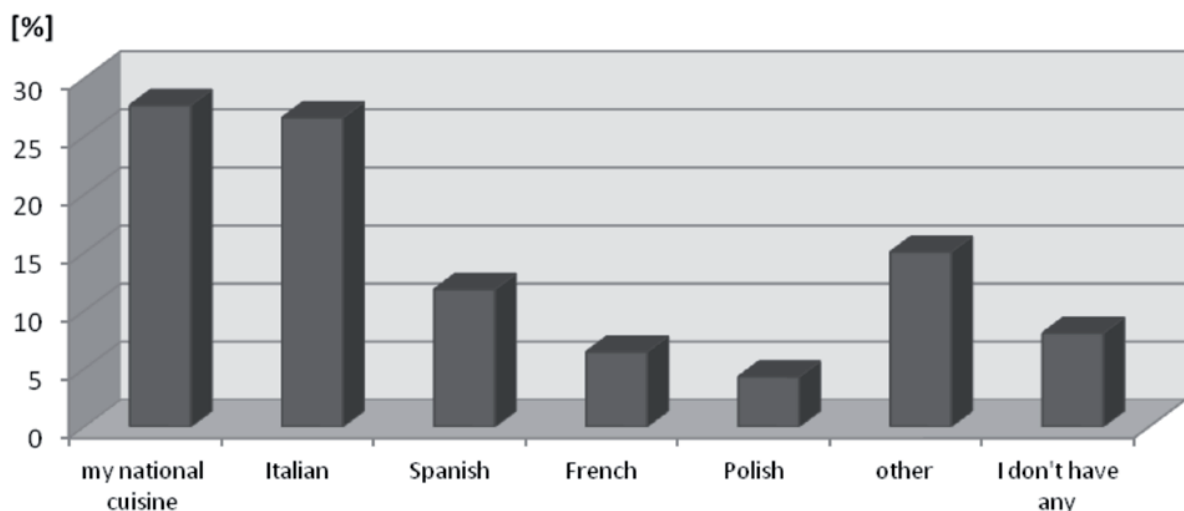


Fig. 11. Favourite cuisines of the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Final questions concerned the respondents' favourite cuisines and were supposed to confirm the thesis about growing consciousness of different cultures and cuisines resulting from travelling. The results seem to follow the prerequisites, which means that at

least few per cent of the group that was researched declare that Polish cuisine has now become their favourite one, although still the majority keep to their national one or prefer Italian or Spanish cuisine, thus representing the traditional approach to food.

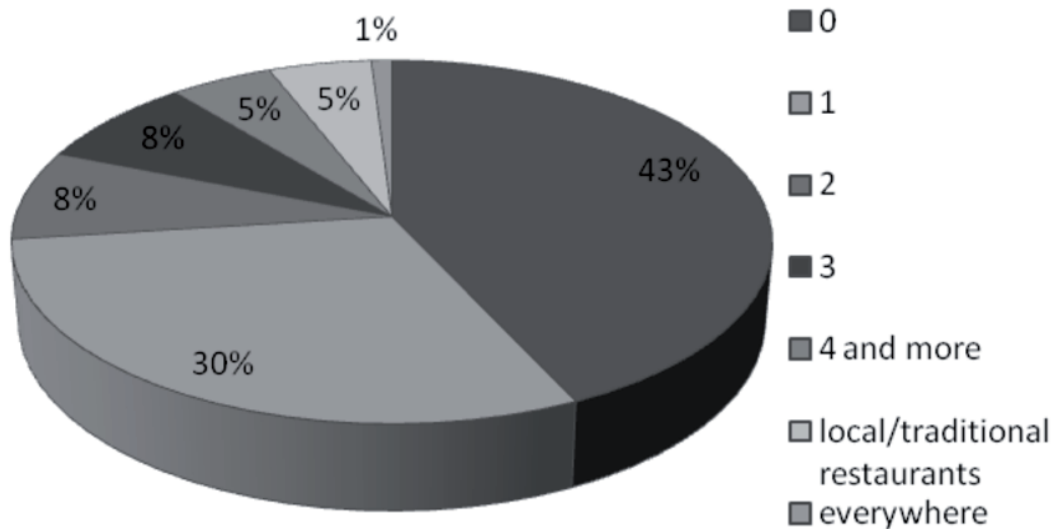


Fig. 12. Number of areas mentioned as preferred culinary destinations by the respondents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

The preferences displayed by the respondents as concerns culinary tourism can be demonstrated by their mentioning the culinary destinations they prefer (Fig.12). It is the way of measuring the behavioural intention. Still, the picture is not very promising, since 43 per cent of the respondents could not indicate any such area, while another 30 per cent have mentioned only one. Furthermore, another ten persons have only stated in general that they would look for a local or traditional restaurant, and three persons have said they would go everywhere so have not shown any specific tastes. There was only one person in ten who was able to define between 2 and 8 areas favoured in looking for culinary experiences abroad. Hence, these 21 per cent seem to constitute the strongest potential market for culinary tourism development. And we still need to keep in mind that the whole sample was probably the most dynamic and educated part of the European society.

Another interesting pattern is manifested by the selection of areas mentioned in the above question. Taking into account regions, both Asia and its parts (South, East, Middle East) and Europe with its specific parts (Eastern Europe, Balkan Countries, the Alps) were cited eight times, followed by America (Latin, Central) and Africa (Maghrebian countries). However, when countries are considered, the largest number mentioned

represent Europe. The most often selected as culinary destinations were Italy, Spain, France, Greece and Turkey, whereas the largest number of voices were received by as follows: India, Japan, China and Thailand from Asia. They all are quite well-known for their cuisine. The exception here is Poland, suggested by seven respondents, although it is obviously the effect of Erasmus stay in this country. Next to other European and Asian destinations mentioned by three or two interviewees were Mexico together with Argentina and Morocco. The last one, together with Greenland and Angola, were the only specific African and American countries mentioned by the respondents. Again, these were European and Asian countries that were the most often selected even by individual interviewees. From Europe these were as follows: the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Serbia and Bulgaria, together with Switzerland, Sweden, England, Croatia, the Netherlands and Portugal. In Asia, Vietnam, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Nepal were mentioned. Therefore, the conclusion is that next to Europe, which is both already quite well-recognized for the diversity of its national cuisines and the closest market when the geography is concerned, the best known region is Asia, while America and Africa are neither known nor recognized as interesting culinary destinations. We might suppose that this map of perception is in accord with the general knowledge of world cultures.

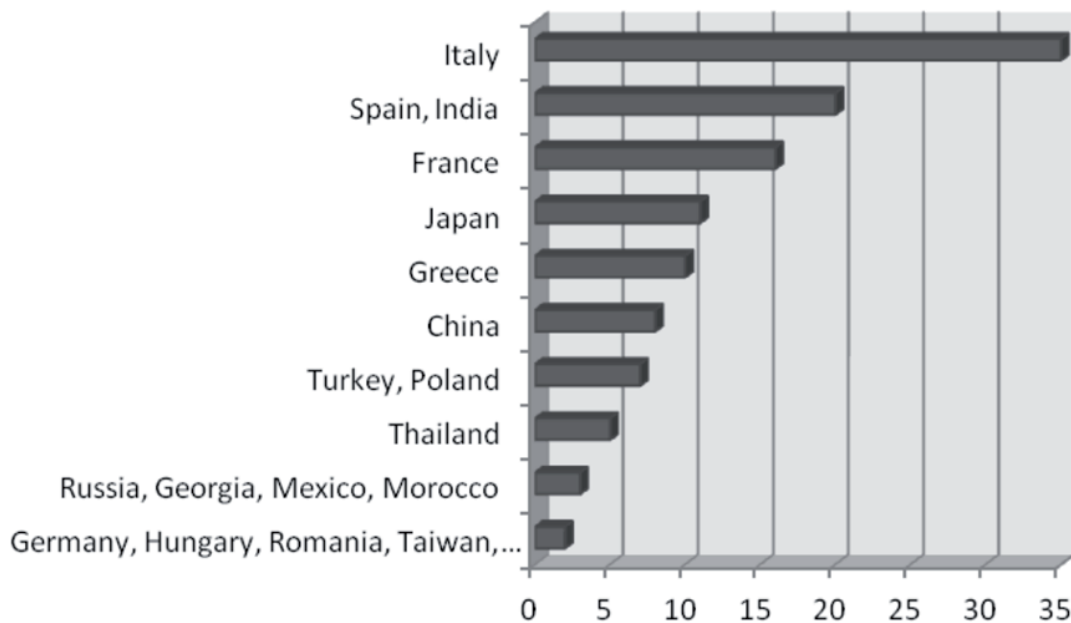


Fig. 13. Areas mentioned as the preferred culinary destinations according to number of votes

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the research

Conclusion

It is worth emphasizing that in the research the specific group has been taken into consideration. Young European students taking part in Erasmus exchange programmes are going to belong to a higher-educated, affluent social class. Their willingness to be mobile is getting stronger, which seems to be related to the social and cultural aspects of their stay abroad and their previous experiences, which influenced their decision to take part in the scholarship in the foreign country.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Erasmus helps to build a new generation of Europeans. Excursions during the Erasmus programme fulfill an important educational and social role. Spending an academic semester at the host university gives an experience which is unattainable for ordinary tourists. Aside from formal academic courses, an active informal experience takes place while students stay abroad. According to Erasmus Student Network Survey (Krzaklewska, Krupnik, 2005) the aspects of their stay abroad that students appreciate the most, apart from academic advantages, are:

- acquiring cultural skills and knowledge, such as: communication and work in international environment, open-mindedness, tolerance, language;
- maturity and self-development;
- social networks: creation of friendships, communication skills; value of discovery and exploring new possibilities; openness to the new, grabbing opportunities.

Erasmus scholars stay abroad from 3 months to one year. Therefore, they have close relationships with local people. Moreover, it is prevalent that host institutions create a "local atmosphere" for their incoming students, e.g. through meetings with local cuisine, sightseeing tours, mentors (a local student who, on a voluntary basis, agrees to help the exchange student throughout his/her stay in the new country).

Half of the respondents were treated by Polish friends in their homes. This high result seems to coincide with well-known Polish hospitality. This is an old national custom to invite guests home for a traditional meal. Food provides lifestyle and social identity with symbolic meanings, offering a greater understanding of a destination's culture, history and people (Mykletun, Gyimothy, 2010).

The market of culinary tourism in Poland displays high potential, which on the one hand is connected with cuisine and culinary traditions and on the other with the behaviour and approach of Poles. Already mentioned and well-known Polish hospitality is evident in the celebration of old customs and traditions e.g.: to welcome and treat a new-comer with bread and salt, or keep one place at the table vacant during the Christmas Eve supper for a casual stranger that could appear. Although the promotion of Polish cuisine and local culinary products has been growing over the last decade, it is still insufficient, and may be one of the main reasons for low level of knowledge about Polish cuisine and products. Therefore, besides the openness and readiness of foreign students to try it, there are still deficiencies on the supply side.

The knowledge about culinary products not only in Poland but also in Europe (verified in the question concerning knowledge of culinary events and festivals in Europe) was identified as very weak, despite the fact that most of the respondents are well oriented in the global and local culture and history and are going to belong to a higher-educated, affluent social class. Their experience with the culinary tourism seems just to be being born. However, previous studies attempting to identify the culinary tourist, are in the mixed aged groups (Lang, 2001, MacLaurin et al., 2006). The majority of culinary tourists is found to be older, better educated and more affluent than generic tourists (Mack R., Blose J., MacLaurin T., 2009). Another reason of

weak recognition and knowledge about the local cuisine may be connected with the particular region where Erasmus students were hosted. Dolnośląskie Province, just like the whole Western belt of Poland, is characterised by weak culinary affiliation, mainly linked with its rough history, which may make for weak recognition of the local cuisine.

Because of careful expenditures of Erasmus students they were more keen on eating home than in the restaurants. Regardless of the fact that most of them kept to their own culinary traditions, they were eager to eat and try new and different foods. Although the respondents were quite open to try Polish cuisine, they were not too open for the exotic one.

The students evaluation of their experience in Poland as positive is very hopeful. Students seem to be most satisfied with

social life and the atmosphere of the hosting city and country where the university was located. 96% of respondents declared they would recommend the country to friends and relatives. They have become Polish ambassadors in Europe and their word of mouth may be one of the most efficient ways of advertising the country.

The fact that they link their culinary experience to cultural and social values of their stay offers opportunities of increasing the popularity of the destination. Finally, to strengthen the regional identity of the destination there is a need to increase the profile of local foods in the promotion and marketing of the region. The clue may be to promote the quality of hospitality as a real bond with the local community and its specific features (City Tourism and Culture, 2005).

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