POPULARISATION OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN LATVIA

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Abstract

Population travel habits are important for the tourism industry. The supply of tourism services is oriented towards the various interests of tourists and a broad target audience. Enjoying food in the country's municipalities is considered an essential component of authenticity of that setting, as it provides different experiences and an opportunity to develop gastronomic tourism and creates new, innovative tourism products and routes, the development and popularisation of which requires cooperation between private and public sector organisations. The research aim is to examine the popularisation of gastronomic tourism in Latvia.

Key words: *cultural product, gastronomic tourism, popularisation*

1. GASTRONOMIC TOURISM AS A WAY OF PRESERVATION AND POPULARISATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The renewed EU tourism policy focuses on sustainable development contributing to the understanding of the role of tourism. The European Commission's communication on sustainable tourism also stresses the promotion of cooperation, support for local and regional initiatives aimed at the development of tourism and the need to identify new approaches to tackling the economic, social and sustainability problems of tourism in a coordinated way as well as enhancing the viability and competitiveness of the tourism industry and estimating financial gains. To achieve it, in the regional economy too the focus has to be placed on particular sub-industries, areas and aspects of tourism, being aware of the uniqueness of small and micro-enterprises that is associated with the socio-economic viability of rural communities and environmental sustainability in the regions (Kaufmane 2011).

Changes in the travel habits of EU residents also play an important role in the tourism industry. At present, individuals travel less frequently, mainly preferring lower cost destinations, while their quality requirements for goods and services and the quality-to-price ratio continue rising. The demand for environmental authenticity rises, security and safety standards are higher as well as requirements for understanding environmental protection matters are also set higher. There are a lot of nations in the world, and they differ from one another in their specific culture. In Latvia, its tourism policy is made in a way to promote the development of domestic and international tourism, thereby increasing the competitiveness of the tourism industry and exports of tourism services. The supply of tourism services in Latvia is aimed at the interests of both domestic and foreign travellers and a broad target audience.

In the globalised world, tourists seek some specific, ethnical, cultural and historical features being characteristic of every culture. Ethnical factors are usually associated with cultural and historical ones, and they are among the most important geographic factors in the geography of tourism.

Cultural heritage and cultural values become, to some extent, stiff if not revitalised and kept alive. Cultural heritage could be learnt through upbringing, education as well as integrating cultures or cognition into tourism products. The scientific value of it is determined by the amount of information on the environment, human activity or an object that could be gained through getting familiarised with them. The social value of cultural heritage is derived from the role of cultural environment and its elements as a whole in an individual's life – how this environment is used or not used at all (Kaufmane & Zalane 2004).

The term traditional culture refers to the part of national cultural heritage that is associated with inherited collective traditions in the society or some social group of it. It encompasses the national

language, mythology, rituals, habits, festivities, oral folklore, music, dances, gestures, skills in crafts and cuisine, traditional medicine etc. Traditional culture is the part of intangible national cultural heritage that is preserved through inheritance, while nowadays it is transformed into a tangible form – written descriptions and books. In this way, an opportunity emerges to revitalise the traditional culture in the society (Kaufmane, Paula & Abele 2007).

Today in Latvia, the problem with the quality and attractiveness of cultural environment has become much more urgent both at municipal level and from the perspective of residents. Any municipality seeks ways and solutions both to preserve the quality of its cultural environment and to promote the development of its territory. One of the most often mentioned solutions and factors promoting development is tourism. Furthermore, it is very important for Latvia to develop tourism also because tourism in rural areas can contribute to employment. A number of aspects, which involve the preservation of cultural environment in rural areas and the integration of it into tourism products, are taken into consideration when planning tourism development in the rural areas. The focus is placed on such priorities as nature and culture. Tourism can serve as a way of educating on and popularising the cultural environment, yet it may not degrade the cultural environment.

Tourism depends on the attractiveness of primary sources of the destination:

- natural resources (climate, landscape and the ecosystem);
- cultural resources (urban archaeological heritage, arts, archaeological values, traditions, scientific values, national crafts and subcultural formations);
- social resources (potential tourism developers with their socio-demographic characteristics, abilities, financial capital, knowledge and security and safety systems for health, the environment and property, local public interests etc.).

Furthermore, tourism destinations have also secondary resources:

- the accommodation sector (hotels, motels, campsites, guest houses etc.);
- the catering sector (cafes, restaurants, bistros etc.);
- the tour organiser sector (travel agencies, tour operators etc.);
- the transport sector (airliners, ships, trains, busses etc.);
- the entertainment sector (gambling, discotheques etc.);
- the information sector (tourism information networks);
- extra services, equipment and service infrastructure (Kaufmane 2011).

The more numerous and diverse tourism resources are, the greater opportunities are to create a new, innovative supply of services for tourists. Gastronomic tourism is associated with both the primary and secondary resources.

Under favourable conditions, culinary heritage may serve as a resource and a generator of ideas for creative industries that directly contribute to the national economy of Latvia and tourism activity through developing cultural goods and services, as small and medium businesses, which particularly contribute to the socio-economic viability of rural communities and environmental sustainability in the regions and promote innovation and the use of creative approaches, are boosted through integrating the elements of cultural heritage into tourism products.

The kinds of tourism are classified according to tourists' motivations or travel purposes, i.e. why they do tours and what they want to acquire in their destinations. Today in every country, enjoying national dishes is considered an essential component of any kind of tourism, as it provides experiences different from those in other countries.

According to a study by the Barcelona Field Studies Centre (n.d.), there are five key trends that drive food tourism.

1. Increase in the standard of living and trading up. More often and more money is spent on prepared food, gourmet food, eating out and foods having some special benefits, e.g. healthy, organic foods.
2. Demographic and household changes. An ageing population and changing life styles have driven demand for increased eating out and food tourism opportunities.
3. Rejection of "MacDonaldisation". Tourists increasingly reject fast food; instead, they prefer local, fresh and high-quality foods that reflect local national traditions.
4. Increase in the number of multi-cultured consumers. Multiculturalism is an everyday phenomenon driven by immigration, globalisation, the Internet and other factors. Foods that were exotic before today are the foods of first choice.
5. The role of celebrity chefs and the media. The popularity of TV programmes, magazines and websites on how to cook increased. A successful TV show hosted by a celebrity chef or a blogger's article can attract tourists to a particular place.

Food is part of the unique cultural and historical heritage and different identity of every country. National dishes are prepared from fresh produce grown in the territory populated by the nation, and the dishes have specific names that cannot be often translated into another language. Foods prepared in countryside are usually associated with fresh, good, tasty, healthy local food grown without chemicals.

Food is a vital necessity for any traveller; therefore, catering is one of the integral and key elements in the supply of services by the tourism industry. Culinary heritage is one of the ways how tourists get familiarised with some region or country, recommend it to other tourists or return to it to enjoy the specifics of national cuisine again.

Gastronomic tourism has gradually become one of the sub-kinds of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism experts B. McKercher and H. du Cros too refer to gastronomic tourism as a sub-kind of cultural tourism, as a form of tourism, the key purpose of which is to enjoy different, often nationally or locally specific foods and drinks (McKercher & Cros 2007). Gastronomic tourism is one of the new kinds of tourism with only a few decades long history. Gastronomic tourism is defined by the International Culinary Tourism Association as the "pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences". This means that some portion of the population prefers doing tours with the purpose of enjoying national foods and drinks. The World Food Travel Association (n.d.) suggests a similar definition of gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic tourism is also known as food tourism, tasting tourism, gourmet tourism and culinary tourism. For this reason, gastronomic tourism is often associated with such terms as gourmet, cultural tourism and national cuisine.

Historically, gastronomy is associated with advice and recommendations on what to eat and drink – where, when, in what way and in what combinations. It could also be understood as an 'art of living', the possession of skills and knowledge relating to food and drink and to their choice, which enhances the pleasure and enjoyment of eating and drinking (Santich2004).

A dictionary of tourism and hospitality terms defines gastronomic tourism as a kind of tourism, the key purpose of which is to enjoy high-quality foods and drinks of national cuisine and high-quality dishes cooked by chefs. Gastronomic tourism is a component of cultural tourism and focuses on gourmets. Gastronomic tourism is usually organised in historical and ethnographical regions where local household and cultural traditions are kept alive (Berzina 2008).

Gastronomic tourism may be classified differently – according to seasons, regions and food groups. All the categories are present in the gastronomic tourism map of Latvia, which is easier available to tourist groups rather than individual tourists. Latvia has always been proud of its beer making traditions; therefore, tours to breweries are quite popular. There are a lot of producers of dairy products in Latvia. There are also good cheese production traditions, and tasty yogurts are produced in the country. A broad assortment of smoked fish is available along the coast of the Riga Bay. In the municipality of Roja, tourists may also take part in fishing. In Latvia, tourists can enjoy sweets, meat and poultry products, fruits, berries and vegetables as well.

The Latvian Tourism Marketing Strategy 2010-2015 refers to gastronomic tourism as one of the most competitive kinds of cultural tourism. In 2004, the region of Latgale joined the European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage, which covers more than 20 regions across Europe. A very great number of products for gastronomic tourism are available in the municipalities of Dagda and Preili.

In 2017, Riga together with the region of the River Gauja (by means of the brand "Enter Gauja") became a European Region of Gastronomy for the first time, attracting a lot of attention among gastronomic and other tourists. The purpose of producing tourism products is to engage tourists, encourage them to participate, enjoy, taste and cook dishes, develop the slow food movement, gourmet tourism, innovative gastronomy and creative tourism, contribute to cooking national dishes and serving the dishes in a modern way being attractive to the tourists. The following tourism resources with potential for development are considered to be the most important: Latvian national dishes, their preparation traditions, organic and natural foods and a setting – manor houses, palaces, restaurants and farmhouses – where one can enjoy these products and participate in their preparation (Latvian beers, home-brewed strong alcohol etc.).

Small enterprises and local municipalities, considering the economic development of their territories, are particularly interested in developing gastronomic tourism. Local food producers, farmers and fishermen are also interested in it, as this activity provides them with more opportunities for sales and a greater number of consumers in their municipalities.

2. POPULARISATION OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

The term popularisation is not clearly defined, yet its nature is associated with being aware, contributing to recognition, holding events and attracting participants; therefore, the authors define popularisation as a creative process that involves advertising, distribution and sales. To some extent, this term may be used as a synonym for advertising, which represents announcements or events of any kind and form related to economic or professional activity aimed at promoting the popularity of goods or services or the demand for them. The usual purpose of advertising is to enhance the image of an enterprise and give information about the product.

The media are most often used for advertising, while in recent years an increasing role in the business of advertising has been played by the Internet and various related elements – smartphones, social networks and websites.

To analyse the popularisation of gastronomic tourism in the private sector, a pilot study that involved seven partially structured interviews was conducted, questioning home producers and providers of gastronomic tourism services. The social network analysis approach was integrated in an analysis of the interviews, creating an ego network of each interviewee. All the interviewees admitted that the most effective way of popularising their goods or gastronomic tourism services for them was the Internet and the most popular websites: tourism portals and the websites of municipalities. From the perspective of the private sector, the popularisation of gastronomic tourism services may be characterised as cooperation with public and private sector organisations.

Figure 1 shows that all the sectors are involved in the popularisation of gastronomic tourism services, and information can better reach addressees if it is available at various sites. Visiting some place, tourists could use the website of the municipality and find information about available tourism services in the vicinity. Government sector organisations and regional tourism associations give information about tourism services also on their websites and at tourism exhibitions and international tourism fairs.

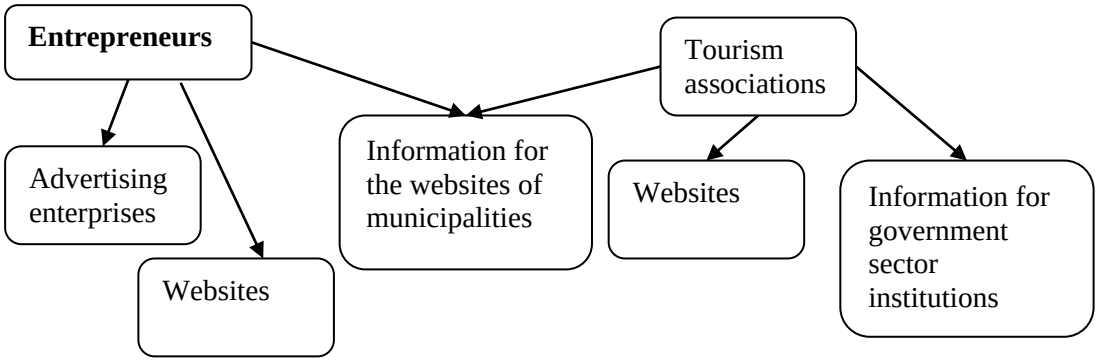

Fig. 1. Opportunities for the private sector to popularise their products

Content analysis was employed to analyse the popularisation of gastronomic tourism services. An analysis of publications gives insight into the awareness of this matter and the kinds of popularisation. The method employed allowed identifying what kind of information about gastronomic tourism services are provided on the websites of public sector organisations: tourism associations, municipalities and the Tourism Department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia. The authors identified the terms that were used to popularise gastronomic tourism. The terms were as follows: gastronomic tourism, culinary heritage, culinary tours and catering.

Latvia is divided into five planning regions and 119 municipalities, which are administrative territorial units. It was easy to find the tourism section on the websites of 111 municipalities. This section had information about the most interesting objects, tourist routes and hospitality services. In the context of gastronomic tourism, the following designations were most often used: “catering or catering facilities” (64) and “where to eat” (22). Less frequently used designations were as follows: “meals” (6), “enjoy meals” 92), “taste foods” (2), “for gourmets” (2), “feasts” (1), “eat and enjoy” (1), “sweats and tasty foods” (1). No direct link to available catering services was available on the websites of eight municipalities.

The websites of municipalities contained web page sections entitled “countryside goodies” and “home-produced foods”. Information about products related to gastronomic tourism was provided by 23 municipalities. For example, 12 farms in Dundaga municipality offered degustation and meals; their assortments contained smoked fish, farmstead dishes and herbal teas, as well as they offered an opportunity to participate in cooking their meals (Tourism Information Centre of Dundaga municipality n.d.).

Tourists were offered a “lunch at a farmstead” in Kandava municipality, a “sweets tour” in Saldus municipality and “farmer goodies” for gourmets in Tukums municipality.

Gastronomic specialties of municipalities or towns, their descriptions and association with the history of the place were highlighted on the websites of 11 municipalities. Jelgava city has its own specialties, and their names are associated with the history of the capital city of the once famous Duchy of Courland – Duke’s Sail and Charlotte’s Kiss – that were created according to a special recipe and now are offered to tourists.

The local authority of Jekabpils city, in cooperation with the city’s restaurants and cafes, has developed a special catfish dish. The dishes cooked according to the recipes of Jekabpils city chefs are presented in the booklet entitled A Delicacy of Jekabpils – Catfish from the River Daugava. The websites of municipalities had information about various specialties to be enjoyed by both domestic and foreign tourists:

- a special menu of Aluksne;
- countryside goodies of Ape municipality;
- a dish of Bauska and historical dishes;
- the Cafe Week of Bauska;
- Carnikava lampreys;
- Dinaburg lunch;
- a special menu of Gulbene municipality;
- RojaGreat Plaice;
- special dishes and a cocktail of Liepaja;
- dishes and drinks of Tukums.

In addition to the above-described examples, 23 municipalities published tourism booklets, in which gastronomic specialities were presented, on their websites, while two municipalities had booklets for gourmets. Their tourism services also included special excursions and the degustation of sweets both at home producer places and at local food production enterprises.

Some festivals that are attended by a lot of tourists – the Apple Festival, the Milk, Bread and Honey Festival, the Lamprey Festival and the Festival of Sounds and Tastes – are associated with gastronomic tourism services.

The analysis of the websites of municipalities revealed that there were no direct links to "gastronomic tourism", while three websites had information about the assortment offered in the Year of Gastronomy:

- in 2017 the Riga-Gauja region became a European Region of Gastronomy. In cooperation among Riga, Sigulda, Cesis and Valmiera, a special concept – "wild at palate"– was created to get familiarised with the diversity of gastronomy of this region. Along with the Riga-Gauja region, the same title was awarded also to Aarhus and Central Denmark, as well as the region of Lombardy in Italy. The overall aim of the movement European Regions of Gastronomy is to unite diverse European regions where local foods are part of their culture and history and, in joint effort, contribute to the preservation of gastronomic traditions and the diversity of dishes. The programme of "European Region of Gastronomy" events in the Riga-Gauja region is implemented by the tourism industry, involving the best restaurant chefs, farms, vendors and organisers of cultural and art events. In honour of the Year of Gastronomy, new events and regional tourist routes are created, as well as gastronomy is stressed at well-known social events:
- an excellent European destination – EDEN "Tourism and Local Gastronomy" in the land by two seas – in Dundaga municipality;
- the Restaurant Week of Valmiera, which is one of the European Region of Gastronomy 2017 events in the Riga-Gauja region;
- to promote innovation regarding gastronomic souvenirs in the Riga-Gauja region, the foundation Riga Tourism Development Bureau (brand Live Riga) in cooperation with the municipalities of Sigulda, Cesis and Valmiera as well as the Gauja National Park tourism cluster held a contest Official Souvenir of the Riga-Gauja Region as the European Region of Gastronomy 2017.

The role of the municipality sector in popularising gastronomic tourism is associated with support for home producers and entrepreneurs through providing information about their products and popularising the territory of the municipality by means of festivals and gastronomic specialties and through participating in joint projects.

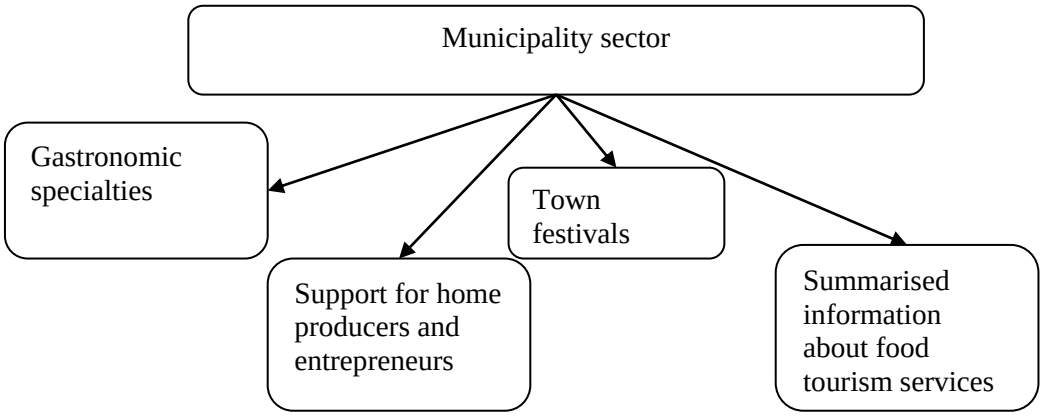

Fig. 2. Role of municipalities in popularising gastronomic tourism

The Tourism Department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia was analysed as a government sector organisation being responsible for tourism in Latvia. The Agency has two departments: the Tourism Marketing Department and the Tourism Product Development Department. The Tourism Marketing Department implements activities aimed at promoting tourism services in foreign markets (through holding advertising campaigns and familiarisation visits of foreign journalists and tourism industry representatives to Latvia and organising the participation of tourism service providers in international tourism exhibitions and in seminars). This Department provides the operation of the official tourism portal of Latvia, www.latvia.travel, and the social network Latvia.travel. The Tourism Product Development Department plans and organises tourism product development activities in cooperation with regional tourism associations and other partners (it analyses the performance of tourism service providers, gives recommendations, provides consultations and holds educational activities and tourism product contests. The Department promotes Latvian tourism products in the Baltic States and contributes to their integration into international tourism routes. It also provides regular communication with tourism industry representatives and produces informative materials and maintains a tourism information database.

Information about gastronomic tourism services is well-structured in the official website, and the services cover the entire territory of Latvia.

The information is available under the following web page sections:

- Ideas for holidays;
    1) enjoy a meal during the Restaurant Week in Valmiera;
    2) make your own caramel;
    3) taste “shmakovka” (a strong home-made alcoholic drink);
- Gastronomy, the description of which is part of the description of each municipality;
- Taste Latvia, which provides links to top 10 restaurants in Riga and eight top restaurants outside the capital city, six most popular restaurants in palaces and manor houses, top 10 hipster cafes, top 10 Riga bars, six most popular places for vegetarians as well as places for the degustation of wines and beers;
- Find the best place where to eat. This section provides tourists with links to cafes, restaurants, bars and pubs in all the regions.

The website also provides information to tourism industry professionals and information about opportunities to participle in exhibitions as well as blogger articles and photos showing experiences in Latvia.

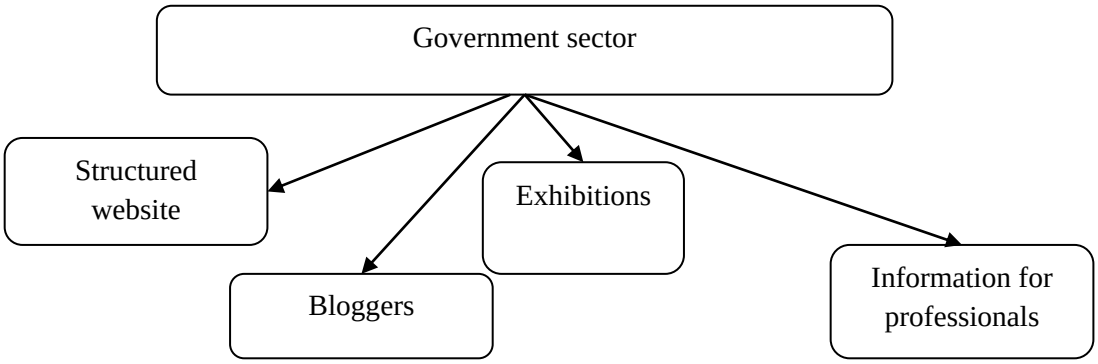

Fig. 3. Government sector instruments for popularising gastronomic tourism

In Latvia, marketing projects have been also implemented in the context of gastronomic tourism, e.g. the project Marketing Campaign for the Popularisation of Rural Tourism and the Development of Rural Tourism Products in all the Regions of Latvia" (2013 - 2014). The objective of the project was to hold a rural tourism marketing campaign, developing and popularising rural tourism products that were based on rural resources and traditional values: local and regional dishes, culture and rural crafts and rural producers. A new logo "Latvian Cuisine" was created for the purpose of making such products recognisable.

Professional associations, which represent the nongovernmental sector, actively engage in shaping the supply of gastronomic tourism services. Since 1993, an essential role in popularising tourism products has been played by the Latvian country tourism association Country Traveller. As a legal entity, the association represents the interests of farmers that are its members and are engaged in rural tourism business.

The association conducted a survey of travellers on their interest in national cuisine. It found that 93% of the travellers wished to taste national dishes at their travel destinations, and only 7% did not like to do it. The travellers considered the following Latvian dishes the most typical: grey peas (32%), stewed cabbage (11%), peas with bacon (10%) and rye bread (9%). The travellers also associated Latvia with such dishes as herring, potato, potato pancakes, sklandrausis (a sweet pie made of rye dough and filled with potato and carrot seasoned with caraway), bread soup, crescent-shaped baked bread rolls (filled with finely chopped bacon cubes and onion), blood sausage, sour porridge, Riga black balsam, porridges and cold beet soup. The travellers noted that in the countryside of Latvia they preferred enjoying home-baked bread, smoked fish and meat, home-brewed beer and home-made cakes and traditional deserts (Association Country Traveller n.d.).

The popularisation of gastronomic tourism was observed on the websites of five tourism associations: four regional ones and the association Rural Traveller. Two websites mainly focused on tourism industry professionals, while travellers were offered to use the website <http://www.latvia.travel>. Three associations placed special offers related to gastronomic tourism:

- Tasty Cheese Tour – summarised information on cheese production places in Latvia;
- Baltic Sea culinary tours – summarised information on delicacies in the Baltic Sea countries;
- where to eat – links to catering enterprises;
- foods produced in Kurzeme.

Gastronomic tourism was highlighted only on one website – with more than ten special offers in the region.

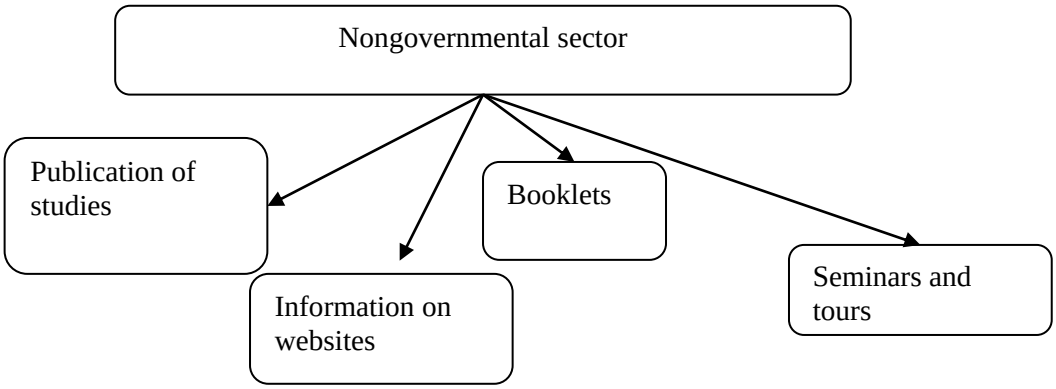

Fig. 4. Nongovernmental sector activities for popularising gastronomic tourism

The research found that gastronomic tourism could be popularised on the Internet in several ways:

- tours: culinary tours and master classes, Latvian cuisine;
- culinary maps and brochures – stories about traditional, popular and modern Latvian dishes;
- tourism popularisation movements: Enjoy Countryside, Open Days in Countryside;
- marketing projects;
- taster calendars with information for gourmets about the nearest gastronomic tourism events;
- the European culinary heritage network <https://www.culinary-heritage.com/>;
- booklets;
- blogger articles;
- information about catering enterprises;
- special dishes of cities, towns and municipalities;
- activities and festivals.

An analysis of the websites of municipalities revealed that the diverse culinary traditions were still kept alive across the municipalities. Residents cooked their traditional dishes both daily and for festivities. In Latvia, any gastronomic tourism product involves not only enjoying a dish but also educating the tourist. Growing produce itself under specific conditions and demonstrating the art of growing, processing and cooking the produce become a component of the gastronomic tourism product. Master classes for target audiences interested in preparing dishes and in various national cuisines integrate farmsteads into a tourism product as well.

CONCLUSIONS

There are a lot of nations in the world, and they differ from one another in their specific culture. Gastronomic tourism could be associated with such ideas as various tastes, phenomena and processes. Gastronomic tourism is also known as food tourism, tasting tourism, gourmet tourism and culinary tourism and is one of the components of cultural tourism.

The supply of gastronomic tourism services is shaped by entrepreneurs, while the municipality, government and nongovernmental sectors are also involved in the popularisation of gastronomic tourism on the Internet. Public and private sector activities aimed at popularising gastronomic tourism focus on cooperation, as many related websites are interlinked.

Internet information on gastronomic tourism is intended both for domestic tourists, arousing their interest in visiting the regions of Latvia during their short holidays and, at the same time, enjoying culinary heritage and for foreign tourists who are offered information about Latvian dishes and local products in an attractive way.

A search for information on gastronomic tourism services on the websites of municipalities is sometimes hindered by the diverse layouts of web page sections and designations, and the available information is mainly intended for domestic travellers, while the official government sector website is easy to view and use in various languages.

The ways of popularisation of gastronomic tourism on websites may be divided into two groups. Traveller-oriented ones are diverse (tours, booklets, gourmet maps etc.) and attractive. The information addressed to professionals is educational and conducive to innovation, and it is mainly placed on the websites of tourism industry associations.

The integration of special dishes of particular places of Latvia into tourism services can contribute to the diversification and originality of tourism services in the regions and, in its turn, increase the competitiveness of tourism services in the regions.

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