

TOUR025

FOOD TOURISM IN THE TOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT POLE OF THE WESTERN REGION – PORTUGAL

Simão Oliveira

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal

Anabela Elias-Almeida

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal

Cátia Ferreira

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal

Graça Ezequiel

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal

Paula Cabral

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Currently, tourism is characterized by significant changes in its supply. These changes are motivated by the need of adjustment to the actual demand, which seek new types of experiences, different sensations and new destinations. Regarding tourist behavior, we can identify that there are profound changes, today, in comparison to previous years. Tourists travel more annually (but with shorter stays), are more knowledgeable about the destinations and products offered (playing, in this case, the internet a very important role) seeking new sensory experiences that are compelling, often to release accumulated labor stress resulting from a competitive urban society. As a result of these changes, niche tourism (also called thematic tourism), has gained an increasing interest from the tourism industry (supply) as well as by the academic community, which particularly in the mid-90s, began to turn more of its attention to this new way of supplying and practicing tourism. Food tourism in academic terms only began to receive greater attention in the beginning of this century. However, it has been relegated, to a secondary plan, in comparison with other types of niche tourism, such as wine tourism, ecotourism or even sports tourism. Therefore, it is easy to understand that all the studies about food tourism are relevant to increment the state of the art. This article results from a research project in the Western Region of Portugal, which had the duration of one year (May 2010 to May 2011) with a team of five investigators and two full-time research fellows. This region is gastronomically rich, especially on fish, which attracts visitors to the area. Thus, among others, the following objectives were outlined for the study: Assess the potential of food tourism in the Western Touristic Pole; assess the local tourist agents' perception on food tourism and their sensibility of the same; to profile the food tourist that travels to the Western Touristic Pole; and identify key practices of those who travel, motivated by food. In terms of methodology, the case study approach was used, with field work that resulted in 863 questionnaire surveys on the demand side and 92 questionnaire surveys on the supply side, resulting in a very interesting sample. The conclusions of the project revealed that food can actually be an important factor as a primary attraction, as well as secondary; that although the local agents are aware, the non-structure of a concrete product, results in a predominance of day visitors; there is little promotion of this tourism product; and it was possible to identify the profile of food tourists that visit the region.

Keywords: *Food Tourism, Gastronomy, Tourist Destination, New Forms of Tourism, Consumer Behavior, Supply and Demand*

INTRODUCTION

With the growth of tourism worldwide, new niches are emerging, which are opposed to mass tourism, according to Poon (1993), it is a phenomenon of large scale, involving the

composition and sale of tourist packages at fixed prices for a wide number of consumers. However, niche tourism, in its various forms, seeks to meet emerging needs and interests of specific groups of tourists, who do not identify themselves with mass tourism. This approach, to niche tourism, may be quite advantageous to destinations regarding the promotion of a more sustainable tourism, less destructive and able to attract a type of tourist with a higher spending average (Robison & Novelli, 2005). Niche tourism may surge in different types, as varied as, ecotourism, dark tourism, volunteer tourism, sport tourism, (Novelli, 2005), among others, being food tourism a type which this article will focus.

Comprehending the relationship between tourism and each of its components, becomes crucial for understanding the phenomenon of tourism as a whole and for each particular type of tourism, taking into consideration that each region / country explores the types of tourism according to its available resources. In the particular case of Portugal, a country with great tradition and diversity regarding its gastronomy, there are conditions for a comprehensive development of food tourism, this is reflected in the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2007), valid until 2015, which defines, among other policies, ten strategic products. One of the products, named "Gastronomy and Wine", implies food tourism.

In reference to the National Strategic Plan for Tourism, regarding the implementation of the product "gastronomy and wine", the priority regions are defined being the Western Touristic Pole included in one of these regions (Turismo de Portugal, 2007).

The present study results from a research project in the Western Region of Portugal, which had the duration of one year (May 2010 to May 2011), with a team of five investigators and two full-time research fellows. The project was supported with internal funding by the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria and through an application of the Institute of Research, Development and Advanced Studies (INDEA).

The following section of this paper reviews the literature on food tourism and food tourist. The proceeding sections will describe the objectives of the study and discuss the results. In the final section of the paper we consider the main conclusions of our findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Tourism

To comprehend the concept of food tourism it is necessary to understand the behavior of those who practice it, in other words, it is the behavior of those in which their choices are directly influenced by food (Hall & Sharples, 2003).

Bernier (2003), refers that there are tourists who "feed themselves" and those that "seek food". The tourists that "seek food" travel, at times, in a cultural perspective, but always physiological, seeking the pleasure of eating; however the tourists that simply "feed themselves", face a destinations' food just as something physiological, necessary for survival. In the authors' opinion, the food tourists are, without a doubt, those that "seek food" being in this case, food a principal attraction or, following Baptista (1990), the primary resource of the visited destination.

The way the tourist sees the food and the extent to which this affects his trip is crucial to understand food tourism. Consequently, a tourist that does not feel a special interest in the local food, and does not move with a primary or secondary intention to taste the food, will behave in the destination as a non-resident person who needs to feed during the time of residence in the location. For this tourist, feeding assumes a normal importance in his life, not going to interfere, being in a place with different food, change his eating and social habits.

Being food tourism, a type of niche tourism, it is evident that most tourists falls under the category of "tourists who feed themselves". For example, a tourist who goes to an amusement park, will certainly not have any food motivations underlying his visit, however, due to the fact that inevitably he will have to satisfy his physiological and survival needs, he will have to feed, searching to do it quickly, just to replenish his energies.

Although one can certainly encounter intermediate groups, an opposing group to the previously presented, we find the "tourist who seeks food", as the primary reason for

travelling, integrating this group are the food tourists, a group that has been increasing; the expansion of food tourism is supported by the gastronome Alfredo Saramago (2002, p. 17), stating that in the late 90's we observed the "beginning of a tourism that searched for restaurants and public places, where you could eat well, with the same enthusiasm with which the Romanesque churches were sought." According to the author, you can find a bit everywhere, people traveling to "try, taste, and savour new flavors," whether in restaurants, food fairs, medieval banquets and other events.

In academic terms, the most referenced definition of food tourism belongs to Hall & Mitchell (2001, p. 308), defining food tourism as "the visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel".

Following this definition, academic terminology has varied, aside from appearing the term food tourism in articles and books, other designations have surged such as culinary tourism (Horng & Tsai, 2010; Keken & Go, 2006; Long, 2004; Montanari & Staniscia, 2009; Smith & Xiao, 2008) and gastronomic tourism (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Fox, 2007; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Quan & Wang, 2004; Schlüter & Ellul, 2008).

Although the term culinary tourism appear sometimes associated to a visitor with very specific interest in the form of food preparation (Long, 2004; Xiao & Smith, 2008), and the term gastronomic tourism refers to, in some cases, to a better appreciation of food quality, in distinguished restaurants, gourmet spaces not accessible to all (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Santich & Bilson, 2009), the fact is that the terms food tourism, culinary tourism and gastronomic tourism are often used as synonyms. As referred by Ab Karim & Chi (2010, p. 532), "Tourism activity related to food has been labeled such as food tourism, culinary tourism, or gastronomy tourism. These terms have the same meaning: people travel to a specific destination for the purpose of finding foods".

Concerning the above mentioned, for purposes of this article and the study associated, the terminology food tourism was adopted to classify the typology of the tourism studied, using the definition of Hall and Mitchell (2001) as a main reference. However, in Portugal, food and gastronomy are commonly used as synonyms, being more common the word gastronomy.

The Food Tourist

Although in recent years the studies regarding the profile of food tourists have been increasing, in 2003, Mitchell and Hall reported the scant research in the area, leading to limited data on the demographic characteristics of the food tourist.

However, between 2003 and 2005, there are three studies that can be considered pioneers on the profile and behavior of the food tourist. One of these carried out by the Research Department Tourism Queensland in Australia (2003), another by the Ontario Tourism Ministry (2005), in Canada, and also the study by Lankford and Cella (2005) in Iowa, United States. Crossing the data and conclusions of the three studies, we can infer that the food tourist has between 18 to 45 years; can be either male or female; falls mostly in couples with or without children; have higher educational qualifications; and belongs to the upper middle class or higher.

Another interesting approach concerning food tourists, this one as motivational point of view, is presented by Fields (2002), which presents a "model" based on the popular model by McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie (1995).

Fields (2002), referring to food tourists, assumes that food is the main reason for traveling, there is however other motivations involved, such as physical, cultural, interpersonal and status and prestige associated with the trip.

For the author, the physical food motivations are associated with the fact that the act of eating is something natural to man and the food awakens our senses and causes various sensations. Thus, these motivations are identified, for example, as needs that are not met in full form in everyday life, such as the need to relax and desire to try new flavors. A

traveler, who goes only by the pleasure of tasting a particular food, travels due to a food motivation of a physical nature.

Regarding the cultural food motivations, we must take into account the importance of food in the civilization's culture. According to Roden (2003), the food is an important part of culture, it is a link with the past, it is identity, reflecting people's lives. Therefore, some tourists look at food as a possibility to learn more about the culture of a place. It is not only the act of tasting the food that attracts tourists culturally motivated, but the possibility of knowing the habits associated with the cuisine of the local people, the chance to visit food museums or learn to cook delicacies. Whoever travels to increase their knowledge about food or learn to cook a certain food, they are traveling due to a cultural food motivation.

About the interpersonal food motivations, we must consider that although there are tourists traveling alone, mostly travel in groups and the act of the meal is of great importance for personal interaction. The majority of people associate a good meal with friends as a moment of pleasure, relaxation and joy, while socializing. Consequently, many tourists can take great pleasure in group meals in restaurants, food fairs, festivals and other food venues. Fields (2002) indicates also that, the act of eating out has an important social function, to strengthen relations, as well as create relationships and interactions with strangers.

The status and prestige food motivations are not unaware of the direct association of restaurants to the elite and high social classes. In general, the restaurants that are recommended by reference guides certify its quality and, moreover, are associated with individuals of high economic level; a meal in a recommended restaurant offers status to those who attend. Fields (2002) argues that the interest in referenced restaurants has become an important part of the lifestyle of the new middle class, for many, the fact that they can tell others that they had a meal at a prestigious place, or even at a little known place, mentioning all details and prices, is the possibility to achieve a higher social status and recognition.

This approach to food motivations is interesting; it can contribute, for example, in marketing of promotional campaigns targeted to a particular type of motivation.

The Study

The Western (or West) region (Figure 1), intervention territory by the Touristic Development Pole of the Western Region (also called Western Touristic Pole and Western Region Pole), is situated in the center-coast of Portugal, which extends from the Atlantic Ocean (west), to the mountains of Montejunto - Aire and Candeeiros (East), to the gates of Lisbon (South) and the Pinhal of Leiria (North). According to data from the National Statistics Institute of Portugal (INE, 2011) it has an area of 2220.2 km², 367 636 inhabitants and a population density of 165.6 inhabitants per km². This region consists of 12 counties: Alcobaça, Alenquer, Arruda dos Vinhos, Bombarral, Cadaval, Caldas da Rainha, Lourinhã, Nazaré, Óbidos, Peniche, Sobral de Monte Agraço and Torres Vedras.

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Figure 1
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The main distinguishing factors of the region, according to the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2007) are: castles, churches, monasteries, golf, food and wine, beaches and cross-selling with Lisbon. The document also states that this pole makes sense given the strong private investment in tourism (particularly in terms of resorts and golf courses), which supports the diversification of tourism in Portugal.

The twelve counties comprising the West have characteristics very different from each other, allowing visitors the opportunity to enjoy different environments in a short time and distance; from the coast varied in landscapes and microclimate, the existing architectural heritage throughout the region, and the diverse landscape with hills and small mountains and gentle slopes covered with vineyards (Gaspar, 1993).

In terms of tourist attractions, the cluster has a variety of beaches with recognized quality (among others Santa Cruz, Peniche, Foz Arelho and Nazaré), a natural heritage

varied in mountains, built heritage such as the Monastery of Alcobaça (classified by UNESCO), the village of Obidos or the Peniche Fortress, in terms of sports it has good infrastructures for practicing golf (with fields integrated in resorts), and the emerging of wave sports such as the annual Peniche World Surf Circuit.

In terms of food, the region has natural resources that allows the growth of excellent quality products and displays recipes and "ways of doing" with unique characteristics, which allows differentiation from other regions. Also relevant is the heterogeneity, from sea products, meats, pastries, fruits and vegetables, wines, etc. This variety is related to the geographical and cultural diversity.

It would be impossible to characterize exhaustively the food of the West in an academic article, however, let it be noted that the pastry has a strong presence in almost all municipalities, explained by the influence of religious orders; due to its extensive coastline, the food specialties of the region are based on fish and seafood, coexisting with these are the rural recipes; product certification has also been a concern and there are two certified products, the apple and pear, "Maçã de Alcobaça" and the "Pêra Rocha do Oeste" ; also noteworthy are the wines of the region, which led to the creation of the Wine Route of the West, and finally, mention that the West has the only defined region for the production of brandy in the country, Lourinhã.

Study Objectives

To further the study, primary and secondary objectives were defined, namely:

Primary

- Assess the potential of food tourism in the Western Touristic Pole;
- Assess the local tourist agents' perception on food tourism and their sensibility of the same;
- Profile of the food tourist traveling to the Western Touristic Pole;
- Identify the key practices of these tourists.

Secondary

- Assess the motivations of food tourists traveling because food;
- Understand if in case of the Western Touristic Pole, food can be identified as secondary reason for travel.

METHODOLOGY

Initially a literature review was conducted on food tourism, proceeding with the characterization of the region studied, emphasizing on the supply side of food and its relationship with tourism. The following step was the development of the theoretical model as well as the delineation of the surveys to apply to the supply and demand.

After validation by conducting a pre-test in Peniche, the questionnaires were applied. The final format of the questionnaire of the demand side, resulted in a total of 23 questions, having 7 questions for the respondent's profile, 7 questions related to traveling to the West region on the tourist practices, and the other questions referred to food. The question relevant to food motivation was divided into twelve items. The survey of the supply side consists of 27 questions, having 4 questions for the respondent's profile, 9 referring to the overall operation of the establishment, 5 on tourism in the region and the remaining on concrete aspects of food.

A total of 863 surveys were responded on the demand side, through indirect administration. The questionnaires were administered to visitors of the twelve counties studied, mainly by tourism offices, historical centers, monuments, area surrounding beaches, hotels, and events, etc. The demand side sample is a non-probabilistic sample of convenience, occasional and not random. Considering that the goal intended, was the internal validity of the study, the sampling process responded to the outlined objectives.

The sample on the supply side was based on a restaurant list presented in the portal Online "Escape" organized by the newspaper "Expresso". A total of 92 surveys were responded by the supply side, through indirect administration, in restaurant establishments of the region.

The surveys were administered to both the demand and supply side between late July and mid-October of 2010, to benefit from the high season of summer, when most visitors are in this region.

Two databases were constructed, obtained from valid surveys. These were subsequently analyzed using the SPSS statistical software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demand

Descriptive statistics were calculated to ascertain the characteristics of the 863 surveyed visitors. Among the survey participants 48.1% were female and 51.9% were male. The average age of the respondents was 45 years. Most respondents were between 30 and 34 years. As for qualifications, 46 respondents did not respond to this question, however, of the 817 respondents, approximately 32.8% attended primary school, 27.6% attended or attends high school and 37.6% have a higher education.

Residents of 28 countries were surveyed, most respondents were from Portugal (65%), then from Spain (10.55%), France (6.38%) and lastly from the UK (3.36%).

In reference to tourism practices, the majority of respondents visited the West while on vacation (91%); of the respondents, 61.18% are tourists and the remaining, day visitors (38.82%).

Regarding food as a motive to travel to the Western region (Figure 2), the regions' food is cited by 8.9% of the visitors as the main reason for traveling, as an important reason but not the main by 57.7%, while 33.4% consider it not relevant. As a result, for 66.6% of the respondents, food is associated to traveling to the West region as a primary or secondary attraction, which reveals its importance in the tourism context.

Figure 2

Concerning the West food, respondents highlighted predominantly fish dishes (47.2%), followed by shellfish (19%) and thirdly the meat dishes (10.4%). In reference to acquiring food products while traveling, 30.7% responded not acquiring food products, 22% affirmed purchasing food products for own consumption, 12.2% purchased to give to others, and 35.1% responded for both situations. Concluding that more than two thirds (69.3%) acquire food products while traveling.

The visitors confirm that they spend on food up to 10 € (25%), between 10 € and 19 € (37.2%), between 20 € and 29 € (22%), more than 29 € (15.8%) per day and per person. With regard to the satisfaction of the regions' food, on a scale of 1 to 5, the average is 3.84, with a standard deviation of 0.7.

Although Fields' (2002) "model" is directed to food tourists, it was decided to allow all respondents to answer the question about food motivations, which permitted to analyze their interest for food. Thus, a cluster analysis was performed to classify the responses. Using the K-means cluster, two clusters were created with characteristics of responses, that had similarities in each of them. The Cluster 1, with 380 respondents, presents a low average in the 12 items; however Cluster 2 consists of 483 respondents revealing a higher average. The first group was named "Moderates" and the second group "Interested". Correlating these two groups with the socio-demographic variables age and family size, using the simple T-test, the study concluded that there is no relationship between belonging to cluster 1 or 2 or age and family size.

For analyzing gender, qualifications and income a chi-square test was conducted. Regarding gender, with a P-value (0.14), the fact of being "moderate" or "interested" is not relevant, although the percentage of men interested is slightly higher. In relation to the

income and qualifications a relationship can be established, as seen in the values of the Pearson Chi-square and P-value (qualifications: Pearson Chi-Square = 46.8 and P-value = 0; income: Pearson Chi-Square = 13.23 and P-value = 0.004). With the increase in qualifications, there is a decrease in the percentage of "moderate" growth and an increase of the "interested". The results showed that the "moderate" group has lower qualifications, and the "interested" group has more qualifications, concluding that motivation and interest in food is greater when qualifications are higher. The same goes with the household income the motivation towards food is higher when income is higher.

Food Tourists

Food tourists can be classified as (the use of the term does not distinguish tourists from day visitors) 8.9% of respondents, as those who traveled westward with food as the main reason for their traveling. Their profile can be characterized as follows: average age was 47 years (46.8% have 50 or more years old), slight male predominance (57.1%), and of Portuguese nationality (87%). The vast majority (89.6%) travel by car, is familiar with the region (84.4%), and is a day visitor (76.6%), the majority (62.33%) spends daily per person 10 to € 29 on food, and only 27.3% do not acquire gastronomic products. In general the respondents reveal satisfaction with the food of the region and visit.

Findings were also statistically significant tested, based on the variable food as the motive to travel to the West region (in this variable, the food tourists responded that food was the main reason for traveling, the remaining respondents answered that it was an important reason but not the main reason for traveling or not relevant motive to travel to the region), crossing this variable with others. Since the data are qualitative, the chi-square test was used. Beginning with the correlation of the gender variable, no relationship among the variables was shown (Pearson Chi-Square = 2.78 and P-value = 0.249), i.e. gender is not a determining factor for the purpose of travelling, being or not related to food. The same applies in relation to qualifications (Pearson Chi-Square = 9.9 and P-value = 0.129). However, regarding the type of visitor (tourist or day visitor), a strong relationship with food as motive to travel to the West region (Pearson Chi-Square = 56.8 and P-value = 0.000), i.e. regarding the chi-square test and analyzing the data, food is the main motive of traveling for the day visitors. Finally, to perceive the relationship between food and the age variable a mean comparison test using a One-way ANOVA, was performed, obtaining a P-value of 0.159, i.e. no relationship can be established.

Regarding food motivations, analyzing the data of the 12 items related to this question, for the food tourists of the present study, the most relevant food motivations are the cultural, second, the physical, third the interpersonal and fourth and last, status and prestige.

Supply

The majority of the analyzed food establishments, in terms of typology, are restaurants (76.09%) and hotels (11.96%). The groups of workers are generally small, with 42.4% and not more than 4 employees, and 41.3% have between 5 and 9 employees. Overall, the food establishments invest in training their employees (76.09%). Regarding the advertising of business, the use of new Technologies of Information and Communication is common in 62% of the food establishments, using the internet as for promoting business. However 23.9% stated that the promotion of the food establishment is made by "word-of-mouth" which means that this type of promotion is still very important and entrepreneurs are aware that customers tend to comment their experiences (positive and negative). The food establishments are concerned in supplying regional food (76.1%), although this concern is concentrated primarily in main dishes and wines, since in terms of desserts only 32.61% of the food establishments claim to have typical regional pastries.

About the demand side, the majority of restaurants highlight, as expected, the summer season to be more relevant, stating that their customers are mainly from Portugal and Spain; from the supply perspective demand flows are not presented in a concentrated specific period, being divided between lunch and dinner. Consequently, in reference to the

most ordered dishes, according to the food establishments surveyed, the preference is for fish delicacies which are related to the vast coastline of the region and the main concentration of population and visitors along the coast.

Almost all establishments, 95.65% consider food as an asset for tourism development in the West region. In terms of the importance of the development of food tourism, 78.26% of the food establishments surveyed are aware of its importance, and support this type of tourism, suggesting further promotion, events, and creating a food tourism circuit, among other suggestions.

Lastly, it should also be noted, in a negative sense, that 75% of the respondents perceive that the development of "food tourism" does not have great support from relevant institutions, particularly public administration.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has presented that food serves primarily to satisfy a physiological need, that is hunger, but it can clearly be used as a tourist attraction.

Food tourism is one of the ways to consolidate and develop tourist destinations, and in Portugal the growing interest in food has been increasing in recent years. It is significant that for many tourists, the food is not the main reason for choosing a destination, but it is taken into account when making a decision.

Regarding the study of Touristic Development Pole of the Western Region, its objectives were achieved highlighting the following conclusions:

- First, the potential of food tourism in the destination was analyzed during one year, having conducted a broad survey of tourism in the region, of its food, and the most important products, verifying that the destination clearly has conditions to offer quality food tourism;
- Second, from the supply side analysis, it was concluded that local actors perceive the existence of food tourism and are sensitive to the same, suggesting ways to streamline the product (further promotion, events, and creating a food tourism circuit); and show a desire for greater interest from public administration;
- Third, the profile of the food tourist of this region was identified (as shown in Results and Discussion), compared to other types of tourists visiting the area, as predominantly day visitor. It is evident that the food tourism product needs to be worked on, especially now since it is obvious that the day visitor is the main traveler in what regards to food tourism. It is essential to retain these visitors, turning them into tourists, which in economic terms, will be very beneficial; also the overall profile of the visitors to the region was identified and their relationship with food, concluding that in our sample, the interest is more significant in individuals with higher education and income;
- Fourth, assessment on food visitors motivations, led to conclude that the cultural motivations are the most relevant, which leads to understand that food visitors of this region are sensitive to the cultural dimension of food;
- Fifth, food was identified as a secondary reason for traveling to the Touristic Development Pole of the Western Region by 57.7% of the respondents, which further emphasizes the importance of this connection with tourism.

Finally, the information mentioned in this article refers to the most relevant data of the study, since the original report has over 100 pages. As further research indications, given the importance of food tourism development, it would be interesting to replicate similar studies in other regions. Additionally, develop a reliable and valid scale to measure food tourism and include additional variables that are likely to influence tourists' behavior.

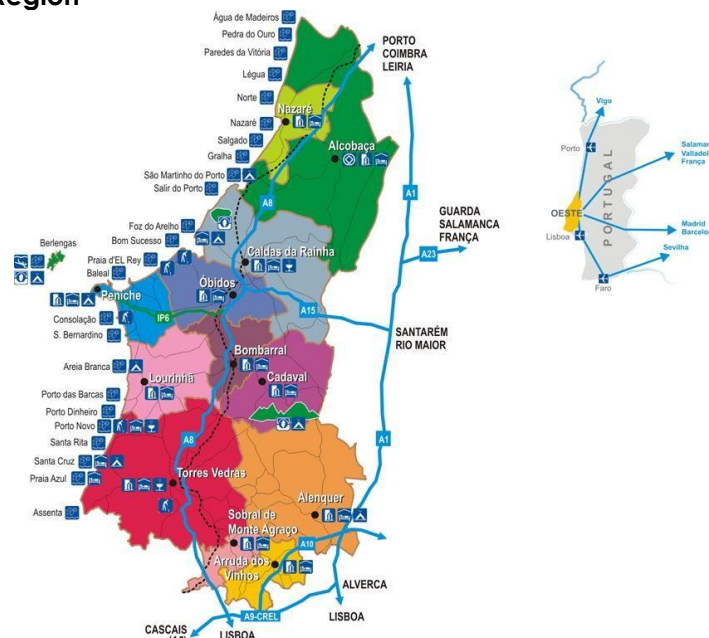
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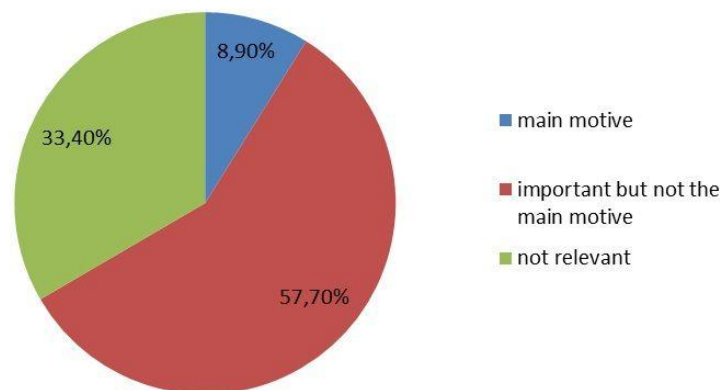
APPENDICES

Figure 1: Western Region



Source: *Touristic Development Pole of the Western Region*

Figure 2: Food as motive to travel to Western region



Source: *own elaboration*