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## Gastronomy tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis

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### Turystyka kulinarna w czasie pandemii COVID-19

#### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest rozważenie szczególnego sektora turystyki kulturowej, turystyki gastronomicznej, w kontekście konsekwencji pandemii COVID-19.

Jest to praca przeglądowa, oparta przede wszystkim na krytycznym przeglądzie literatury naukowej i opublikowanych dokumentach, takich jak raporty i dyrektywy ONZ WTO, UN WHO, UNESCO, oraz danych statystycznych (dane ilościowe). Poprzez syntezę zebranych dostępnych danych, w tym opublikowanych wyników badań międzynarodowych ośrodków naukowych, niniejszy artykuł przedstawia ocenę obecnej sytuacji turystyki gastronomicznej wobec zagrożeń pandemii. W oparciu o zgromadzony w ten sposób materiał podjęto próbę sformułowania możliwych do wdrożenia rekomendacji dla kierunków rozwoju turystyki gastronomicznej po zakończeniu pandemii. Podkreślono potencjalną rolę turystyki kulinarnej w odrodzeniu całego sektora turystycznego.

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Pytania badawcze koncentrowały się na znaczeniu i tradycji turystyki gastronomicznej, konsekwencjach restrykcji sanitarnych i regulacji prawnych wprowadzonych w wyniku zagrożenia pandemicznego COVID-19 oraz szans regeneracji tego sektora.

W podsumowaniu stwierdzono, że co prawda nowe, kreatywne rozwiązania i technologie pomogły częściowo przewyciężyć niektóre problemy, ale zagrożenia, przed którymi stoi obecnie ta branża są nadal bardzo poważne. Rozwiązaniem najbardziej realnym w najbliższej przyszłości wydaje się być kulinarna turystyka krajowa, jej rozwój w oparciu o promocję lokalnej kuchni i lokalne produkty. Podkreślono konieczność dalszych badań oraz wagę dyskusji środowiskowych na temat inkluzyjnej i zrównoważonej turystyki gastronomicznej w przyszłości, w kontekście pożądanych kierunków odrodzenia turystyki krajowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** turystyka zrównoważona, turystyka kulinarna, COVID-19, ożywienie turystyki.

## Abstract

This paper aims to consider a sector of cultural tourism: gastronomy tourism (also known as food tourism, culinary tourism) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

This is a conceptual paper, based mainly on the critical review of academic literature and UN WTO, UN WHO and UNESCO documents. By synthesising available data and research results, this paper provides an assessment of the present situation of gastronomy tourism, and tries to formulate some trends possible to be developed in the future, once the pandemic is over (as a potential role of culinary tourism in the revival of the whole sector).

The research questions focused on the meaning and tradition of gastronomy tourism, consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and post-pandemic regeneration of the sector.

The paper concludes that trends seen in gastronomy tourism sector before lockdown are no longer applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The new technologies helped to overcome some of the challenges which this industry currently faces. Several potential trends might be developed after the pandemic crisis, serving as local food and local culinary tradition promotion.

Suggestions are provided for further research as discussion about more resilient, sustainable and inclusive gastronomy tourism in the future as well as recovery practices within the domestic hospitality are important.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism, gastronomy tourism, COVID-19 pandemic, tourism regeneration.

## Introduction

The term 'gastronomy' means discovering, testing, experiencing, researching and understanding about food and its qualities.

We can also explain this term, as 'the art of preparing delicious food' and undeniably one should notice close relation between cooking styles (cuisine) and culture.

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines 'cuisine' as: 'the foods and methods of preparation typical for a region or population. The major facts shaping a cuisine are climate, which in large measure determines the raw materials that are available to the cook, economic conditions, which regulate trade in delicacies and imported foodstuffs; and religious or sumptuary laws, under which certain foods are required or proscribed' [28].

Throughout the history of human civilization, world cuisine has been traditionally divided into regions, according to the popularity of available raw materials. For example, in northern Europe animal fats have been important, while in southern Europe olive oil has predominated. Different cuisine habits mean also different rules of eating and drinking [5, 13, 17].

Possibly, the eldest public catering establishment was developed in Ancient Egypt around 500 BC, serving customers only one dish. Catering establishments were popular in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, offering food and drinks [6]. It means that tradition of dining out is more than 2500 years old.

The beginning of 'cuisine' appreciation is difficult to be recognized. Possibly, it was Anthem Brilliant de Savarin, the French lawyer, politician and sophisticated 'gourmand', who first gained fame as a founder of 'gastronomy knowledge and art'. In 1825, he published his famous book *Physiologie du gout*, a study of food and cooking styles, being a precursor promotion of an 'art of the table' (gourmet cuisine) [1].

As gastronomy is the art of preparing and eating food as well as knowledge of relations between food and culture, it is obvious that cultural tourism includes experiencing regional cuisine, which is a part of local heritage (culinary tourism, food tourism, gastronomy tourism). In the last decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century, culinary tourism became an important part of cultural tourism, as 'cuisine' is recognized as a crucial part of regional culture [3, 8, 14, 15, 21, 29].

Given its character and meaning to tourism, culinary tourism has been formally recognized by the UN WTO as an important segment of cultural tourism [21].<sup>1</sup>

France is believed to be a country strongly associated with culinary tourism, having a long 'cuisine' tradition, with its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when own national style was developed. Today, it is based on famous French cheese and wine, *foie gras*, *croque monsieur* and *croque madame* dishes. In 2010, French gastronomy was added to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, as a gesture of appreciation of the values and meaning of French national cuisine [29].

The famous and popular series of guides, *The Michelin Guide Green*,<sup>2</sup> published annually by the French company 'Michelin,' is treated as a reliable source of tourist information. *The Red Michelin Guide*, offering precious knowledge about

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<sup>1</sup> According to the definition of cultural tourism adopted by the UN WTO general Assembly at its 22<sup>nd</sup> Session in 2017, 'Cultural Tourism' could be defined as 'A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourist destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, **culinary heritage**, literature, music, creative industries. And the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions' [21].

<sup>2</sup> *The Michelin Guide Book Green Star* has been introduced recently (2021) to assess and underline the value of sustainable tourism destinations [19].

restaurants, is a 'Bible' for food connoisseurs around the world. Since 1904 it has been reviewing restaurants, providing opinions on food, interior arrangement and staff proficiency. Today it helps culinary tourists to get better knowledge about 'cuisine' in many countries around the world, promoting many dishes of also rural origin. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *The Michelin Guide Red* introduced a separate listing of pubs (Ireland) and street-food establishments (Hong-Kong) – answering the needs of both tourists and local community members [19].<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays gastronomy industry is believed to be a core segment of the hospitality sector. Most scholars describe 'gastronomy' as an integral part of this industry, related to preparation of meals and beverages served to guests within a given establishment or taken away [3, 4, 15, 15, 21]. Simply, for all travellers (participants of all forms of tourism, not only culinary tourism), dining out is not only a pleasure and an interesting experience - it is an essential and everyday need.

Gastronomy establishments of different kind (restaurants, bars, buffets, fast foods) are all considered as a vital segment of hospitality: food supply for travellers is as crucial as securing the safe shelter to stay overnight. Many countries have a long tradition of successfully promoting their culinary heritage and treating it as an important tourist attraction: France is known for cheese and wine, Italy for pasta and pizza, Japan for sushi.

Today, there are many types of gastronomy establishments: restaurants, pubs, bars, *tapas* bars, sushi trains, buffet restaurants, automated restaurants, fast food facilities, cafes, food trucks. In Poland, gastronomy industry includes not only permanent but also seasonal establishments, where meals and drinks are prepared and sold only during selected periods (for on-site consumption or as takeaway). Those places which operate no longer than six months in a calendar year are treated as seasonal establishments. Mobile retail services and vending machines are not recognized as catering establishments. In Poland statistic data includes restaurants, bars, canteens, food stands employing more than 9 persons [27].

A relatively new form of tourism is eno-tourism (known also as oeno-tourism, vini-tourism, wine tourism) referring to these travels which include the tasting, consuming or purchase of wine. It is often connected with visits in wineries (vineyards) and even active harvesting there, treated by tourists as an escape experience and a leisure activity (Napa Valley, California, Spain, Italy, Argentina) [21].

## Tourism and gastronomy

Today culinary tourism (known also as food tourism, gastronomy tourism, tasting tourism) refers to experiencing other culture and tradition through food

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<sup>3</sup> In 2021, *The Michelin Guide Book Red* recognised as much as 34 restaurants in Poland (mostly located in Warsaw and Cracow) [19].

[13, 8, 17]. In other words – the primary motivation to travel is to explore regional (local) cuisine, to dine there and learn more about culinary tradition and regional farming.

The UN WTO Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC) states that ‘Gastronomy Tourism’ has a much broader meaning than ‘Culinary Tourism’ as it is ‘a type of tourism activity, which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities when travelling. Along with authentic, traditional and/or innovative culinary experiences, Gastronomy Tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking class’ [21].

The UN WTO CTC defines ‘Eno-tourism’ (Wine Tourism) as a part (sub-segment) of Gastronomy Tourism, where ‘a sub-type of Gastronomy Tourism, refers to tourism, whose purpose is visiting vineyards, wineries, testing, consuming and/or purchasing wine, often at or near the source’ [21].

The controversial issues of gastronomy tourism are authenticity, ecological, social and cultural sustainability. These implications between culture and tourism, between tangible and intangible heritage, are often challenging issues, requiring social justice, engagement of local authorities and NGO institutions [13, 15, 17]. Most scholars underline the important role of local resources and supplies, local farmers’ activities and local culinary festivals in establishing sustainability in culinary tourism [3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 18].

Nevertheless, with their ‘cuisine values’ (not all tourists are interested in culinary nuisances), food and beverages constitute an important segment of the hospitality industry, along with the travel, lodging and recreation. The food and beverages sector (known also by its initials as F&B) is believed to be the largest segment of the hospitality industry. Today it includes catering establishments engaged in preparing meals, snacks, beverages for immediate consumption on the premises or off it (as take away). Although many restaurants, cafes and bars are part of a hotel establishment primarily intended to fulfil the needs of its guests, often due to their excellent food, location and diligent customer service, they are also popular with local community members, as a place to dine out, relax and leisure [20]. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in many countries dining out became a style of living. There are many rankings on the global gastronomic trends (Michelin, Live Enhanced, Open Table, Trip Advisor, British Magazine Restaurant), evaluating food, service and interior arrangement of restaurants. Each of these polls has its own restaurant critics, chefs and gourmands; the final decision could be always disputable, as it is based on subjective values [20].<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 2020 the list of the top 10 restaurants released by the British Restaurant Magazine included: EL Bulli (Catalonia, Spain), the Fat Duck (Berkshire, England), The French Laundry (Yountville, California), Noma (Denmark), El Celler de Can Roca (Girona, Spain), Osteria Francescana (Mod-

The hospitality industry is an essential sector of the tourism industry, employing millions of people and contributing to the global economy. Simply, every tourist eats on average about three times a day. It makes food and beverages (F&B) along with lodging, the basic economic drivers of tourism. The World Food Travel Association estimates, that F&B expenses are up to 35% of all expenses spent by tourists at the destination [24].

Hospitality tourism segments (hotels, transport, gastronomy) are extremely vulnerable to the natural hazards and severity of pandemics, such as the COVID-19 crisis [2, 3, 4, 7, 21, 20]. The UN World Health Organization reported that the COVID-19 global pandemic spread rapidly worldwide and in July 2020, in 195 countries as many as 12 million cases were confirmed and nearly 600 000 deaths were reported [22]. The outbreak of the pandemic affected the gastronomy industry globally due to closed borders, travel restrictions and social distancing. In 2020 – 2021, governments in many countries introduced sanitary restrictions to stop the virus contamination and in consequence the number of guests in restaurants, bars, pubs, fast food establishments and coffee shops dropped significantly [11, 23, 21]. For the gastronomy sector it meant an unprecedented loss of revenue, similar to losses in other segments of the hospitality industry [3, 7, 10, 21].<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, travel restrictions and closure of international borders have drawn a greater attention to domestic destinations and revealed new opportunities for domestic tourism re-development [4, 5, 7, 21].

## Research methods, questions and first results

The tourism hospitality sector has already experienced diverse, unpredictable natural disasters, including disease outbreaks, but the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its global scale, has resulted in very severe implications and immense slowdown of the tourism industry. This paper is aimed to consider a very special sector of cultural tourism: food tourism (also known as gastronomy tourism, culinary tourism, wine tourism), in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the research theme, it is mainly a conceptual paper, based on the critical review on academic literature, UN WTO, UN WHO and UNESCO documents.

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fena, Italy), Eleven Madison Park (NYC, US), Gordon Ramsey (London, UK), Le Louis XV (Monte Carlo, Monaco), Pierre Gagnaire (Paris, France) [26].

<sup>5</sup> Some scholars underline that along with government restrictions there are job losses, as sanitary safety guidelines might directly affect employment. For example, when a restaurant is allowed to remain open only for takeaway (as an alternative service for customers), only a few staff members are necessary to serve a decreased number of customers and be involved in the limited activities of food preparation and serving [3, 7].

By exploring, analysing and synthesising available data and research results of other scholars, this paper provides an assessment of the present situation in gastronomy tourism, as well as tries to foresee some future trends, once the pandemic is over. The latter are considered in the perspective of a potential role of culinary tourism in the economy revival. A systematic review of resources was chosen for this study, to select, identify, analyse, understand and synthesise the topic outcomes. Most of the analysed articles and reports were published between March 2020 and July 2021, all were selected and reviewed based on their applicability to the aim of the research. The review, analysis and conclusions drawn from the research material enabled the authors to present some immediate responses of the gastronomy sector to the pandemic crisis and changes implemented by the industry to effectively overcome it.

The research questions were focused on the meaning and tradition of gastronomy tourism, consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic to the hospitality industry, response of business to the crisis and post-pandemic chances of sector regeneration. There is also a question on how sanitary restrictions have changed the consumption patterns and whether we can predict customer demands after restrictions are eased.

This paper concludes that several trends seen in the gastronomy tourism sector before lockdown are no longer applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, mostly due to the sanitary restrictions. Possibly some of the new management strategies which helped gastronomy to survive during lockdown (such as broader implementation of IT technologies) will remain after the pandemic: online culinary classes, social media promotion and online presentations of famous chefs cooking.

Furthermore, several newly developed trends might be 'en vogue' (popular and appreciated by customers) after the pandemic crisis. These include local food, local products and regional culinary tradition promotion.

The presented study has serious limits, as only few reliable statistic data were available on the gastronomy industry situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Suggestions are provided for further research, as discussion about more resilient, sustainable and inclusive gastronomy tourism in the future is very important, considering the context of tourism policy directions once the travel restrictions are lifted.

## **Gastronomy tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic**

For the last decades, food tourism, like other tourist sectors, has been growing globally. It has created millions of jobs places, both in food production and

gastronomy, and was regarded as an important steamer of regional development all over the world [3, 4, 5, 7, 21].

In 2020, gastronomy, like the whole hospitality industry, faced the severe challenge of the COVID-19 crisis. In consequence, food producers, restaurant owners and other stakeholders saw a sudden drop in income. To slow down the spread of the pandemic, self-preventive practices (such as social distancing at public space) were suggested and applied in many countries. Furthermore, travel restrictions and regional lockdowns introduced by governments led to a devastating impact on the economy. The tourism industry and the hospitality sector, including gastronomy, saw a significant decrease in revenue [21]. In most EU countries, government restrictions included complete lockdown in the hard-hit regions, transport suspension, closure of entertainment and leisure venues (including catering establishments), wearing face masks and the body temperature control, disinfection and sanitation rules, limits of people at public space, physical distance of at least 2 metres indoors.

For the hospitality industry, including its gastronomy sector, these sanitary safety restrictions were devastating in the meaning of revenue decrease. The hospitality industry is particularly vulnerable to a long crisis. In these regions where the lockdown lasted more than 6 months, the number of bankruptcies in the gastronomy sector was estimated to be about 85%, but in those regions where the duration of the crisis was up to 1 month it was only 28% [7].

Several scholars underlined that one could notice remarkable regional differences (some provinces and cities were totally locked down, in some several business and tourist branches could operate), but generally, fast-food restaurants and standing buffets suffered much less than luxury establishments [3, 4, 5, 21].<sup>6</sup>

It is worth underlining that some scholars dispute this, arguing that more internationalized gastronomy establishments, especially these being a part of a popular gastronomy chain (e.g. McDonald's, Starbucks, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken), were more resilient to the pandemic crisis [16]. Some scholars stress that especially large-size, internationalized gastronomy establishments did not implement visible changes in their management strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis [16].

It did not mean their bankruptcy as the resilience of those catering establishments and their surviving chances depended on many factors, mainly on their pre-pandemic financial condition, corporate strategy, ownership structure [11, 16].

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<sup>6</sup> Similar observation was made by UN WTO reports, when the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was considered in the aspect of various accommodation segments: luxury hotels suffered more, whereas budget establishments survived in a better condition (hostels, motels, B&B) [21]. Similarly, in Poland, small, family-owned catering establishments employing fewer than 9 persons survived in a better condition as well [27].



To overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, some restaurateurs sought new opportunities based, paradoxically, on the willingness of customers to dine out and the expansion of takeaway services was significant. Scholars underline [11, 16] that for some restaurants the decision to re-think an offer was easier than for others: fast-food, fast-casual, food stands, buffets with limited menu items were already acquainted with carry-out delivery and takeaway services. It was much more difficult in case of luxury establishments, where fine connoisseur dining, extended menu offers and diligent waiting service were an integral part of their business model.

In Poland, very soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, some easy to be immediately introduced changes were applied: further restaurant automation (automating the major operations), online cooking sessions, watching famous chefs preparing a meal, live guided testing, virtual reality tours, expansion of takeaway and delivery services (often in cooperation with a third party – e.g. Uber EATS). As the customer behaviour changed, small-circle family and group online meetings (remote eating and drinking), sharing gourmet experience through the Internet (via Zoom, Duo or other applications) became popular [Table 2, 3].

As one could notice, in Warsaw, as soon as in March 2020, many restaurants eagerly developed their takeaway segment (even if this offer was not practised before the pandemic crisis). It was a perfect solution, assuming that people preferred to stay home, on the ground of fear of infection and self-preventive measures. These catering establishments were mainly small-scale, family-owned, flexible and ready to introduce changes and novel offers. The closure of public dining places forced restaurant owners to re-arrange their dining space in a way to maximize efficiency. Restaurant tables, used by customers before the pandemic, became now a space to store food products and prepare takeaway parcels. This new model of a restaurant which no longer has customers dining in, is seen all over the world [4, 11].

Nevertheless, in 2021 as many as 11% of catering establishments in Poland were closed, and the loss of income was estimated at about 26%. In 2020, about 64 450 catering establishments were open, in 2021, almost 8 000 stopped operating: 2400 bars, 2300 restaurants, 1000 canteens and about 2000 kiosks [27].

In many hospitality sectors the pandemic crisis has been a catalyst of managing strategy changes, introduction of new technologies and innovative offers. In 2020 – 2021, food business all over the world tried to adapt and explore some IT novelties, and restaurateurs saw in novel applications (such as online ordering, virtual vineyards tours, online cooking classes) some chances to repair their income.

Several of these technologies had been known and developed before the COVID-19 pandemic. The IT innovations of different kind had already been pop-

ular as a source of information and promotion of gastronomic offer. For some decades, catering establishments have successfully developed company websites, explored social media opportunities to contact their customers and food product suppliers, as well as effectively performed online advertising. During the pandemic time the role of new technologies increased and internet service channels were improved and enriched with new applications, strategies and alternative offers: online delivery orders, discount systems, quality reviews, online culinary classes, chef cooking presentations, etc. Possibly, many of these innovative activities will remain longer, also after the COVID-19 pandemic, considered as responding well to the needs and expectations of customers of the 'new normal' epoch.

For example, 'automated restaurants' i.e. robotic restaurants known before 2020, which use robots instead of waiting staff to deliver food and drinks to tables, and touch screen kiosks that could handle ordering and cashiering duties were a perfect solution during sanitary regimes to replace human labour and might remain longer, after the pandemic crisis is over, as a local attraction, without the sanitary safety context.<sup>7</sup>

However, it should be underlined that in the long-term perspective, the application of some innovative offers/solutions in the gastronomy industry could be even more difficult than in other segments of the tourism industry. It could be problematic in case of 'culinary tourism', dining out as a treat and pleasure time, when the personal experience of restaurant interior and diligent customer service, the feeling of real taste and smell matters the most.

The open question remains if all these new IT applications could replace the traditional culinary and wine tourism experience and satisfy customers' demands.

As it seems, new opportunities in providing 'virtual tours' in vineyards and a chance to purchase wine bottles online are possible as a short-time solution, as they miss one very important ingredient, namely a possibility to taste product samples, which is the clue of the 'taste a place' sensual experience. Gastronomy tourism deprived of this very personal segment has not the same value [1, 4].

In 2021, in Poland, due to the uncertainty and anxiety about sanitary safety, many were still reluctant to dine out. As they are remaining anxious about health issues and try to avoid exposure to virus contamination at public space, they might prefer contactless services (home delivery, takeaway) [Table 2]. It is clear, considering the present uncertainty and fear of infection, that the key issue in the recovery process of the tourism industry in Poland is building customers' trust.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2021, automated restaurants were opened in many countries around the world (the US, the Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, Thailand, Argentina, China, India). Furthermore, the new 'Digital Food' has future. In 2021, a team of engineers from the Columbia University School of Engineering and Applied Science developed a method of cooking 3D printed chicken with a software-controlled robotic laser [25].

After the pandemic outbreak, the food sector faced challenges similar to those seen in other segments of the hospitality industry all over the world: lockdown, severe sanitary restrictions, supply delays. In March 2020, the Polish government's response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was the 'stay home' directive, with the aim of eliminating the virus. Job losses were unavoidable and not only in the restaurant sector, trading partners such as wineries selling to restaurants, pubs and cafes were also severely impacted.

In some regions hit by pandemic restrictions, over-dependence on international tourism (like, for example, in Cracow) resulted in economic decrease. It shows the importance of domestic market at the time of an unpredictable crisis. In Poland, most of the gastronomy establishments are small (family) businesses, reflecting low-start-up costs of this industry, making a restaurant outing an option for people with relatively limited resources. It explains the serious wave of bankruptcy in this sector after the pandemic outbreak.

When dining out was not possible, many Poles decided to rely on takeaways or re-discovered the charm of home cooking. It is clear that the pandemic crisis and lockdown sanitary restrictions have changed not only eating habits. Many Poles have re-evaluated their life styles: now they search for opportunities to live more simply and slowly. They spend more time in the close family circle and devote more time to cooking meals from scratch, preserving and baking, following family special traditions and recipes. What is more, at the pandemic time, the phenomenon of nostalgic connection to home cooking was globally noticed [3, 4, 7].

What should be underlined is the fact that the appreciation of 'home made food' and interest in 'local experiences' over international travels are parallel to the concern of sustainability and ethics of food production, growing maturity of food culture.<sup>8</sup> The closure of international borders, inspired Poles to 'stay home', however, not literally, but in domestic destinations. In 2021, as many as 7.6 million Poles spent their summer holidays in Poland, while in the pre-pandemic time in 2019, it was 6.1 million [27]. Many Poles, taking into account health precautions, avoided overcrowded resorts, preferring remote rural locations offering unique cultural and natural heritage, including regional cuisine and local products.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this tendency has been observed globally: tourists want to explore their own country, want to learn about the history and tradition of different regions, want to discover local food and local environment and express their desire to live healthier and slower [4].

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<sup>8</sup> It should be underlined that long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was growing awareness of the need for more sustainable food production and discussions on the role of culinary tourism to support these efforts (i.e. responsible agriculture in contradiction to toxic farming practices, children employment and other exploitative practices) were taking place [Fountain 2021, Hall 2020, Pawlikowska-Piechotka 2014].

When asking about post-pandemic future of gastronomy tourism in Poland, it is important to focus on values that matter to domestic tourism, as in Poland the lockdown resulted in re-discovery of less popular destinations. Currently, the attractions of rural villages, the beauty and outstanding nature of some remote locations, the cultural tradition of a region, including its culinary style and local products are highly valued. Nowadays, it is clear that there is growing appreciation of living in harmony with nature, slowing down in order to be healthier, more ethical and environmentally concerned. This new philosophy includes an emerging desire for sustainable food and confidence about Polish culinary culture and local products along with curiosity to learn more about regional cuisine (re-learning skills lost in the stressful and busy life).

If these tendencies last in the post-pandemic epoch, tourists will possibly be eager to learn traditional cooking, baking, also fishing and gardening through special workshops. These customer preferences could be a base of various projects developed with the aim to attract a new wave of 'gastronomy tourists'. These tourists shall have a strong learning goal in mind, be ready to focus on local food, local products, a given place and its community, culture and identity.

As it seems, this customer trend expressed by the interest in the local culinary tradition and regional heritage, reflects a deeper philosophy, ideas focused on a slow pace of living, concern about environment sustainability and 'fair trade' practices in the hospitality sector.

Moreover, regional food culture could be a perfect instrument not only to regenerate economy, but also to reinforce the national pride of Polish history and tradition, as food is strongly connected with the authenticity of a given place. The role of regional food and drink festivals launched to reactivate local hospitality might be prominent to strengthen this project [12].

In Poland, these new tendencies in tourism, i.e. health concerns, hot pursuit of nature values, reconnecting with green spaces, interest in local food, escape from crowded towns, interest in the culinary tradition and learning reflect a 'new normal' attitude to travelling and hospitality offer.

It seems that in the post-pandemic times these consumer trends should be recognised and analysed by local authorities, seen as the solid potential of regional future development and new directions of the tourism policy, as a chance of revival for the hospitality sector and food producers. As the UN WTO documents highlighted, gastronomy tourism could strengthen regional identity, sustain cultural heritage and regenerate economy and social issues [21].

Furthermore, the future of gastronomy tourism should be part of a broader, interdisciplinary scholar discussion about wider concerns such as overcrowded popular destinations and environmental damage of cultural and natural resources caused by chaotic over-tourism.

## **Conclusions, discussion and recommendations**

In 2020, the global shutdown of tourist travels, caused by the COVID-19 crisis was sudden and unique in the hospitality industry's experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the tourism globally, but in the gastronomy sector the response of business was much more diverse: from pivoting to closing, from bankruptcy to launching new innovative offers and creative use of new technologies.

In Poland some gastronomy sectors have proven to be resilient and successfully tried to survive. However, for many catering establishments the key issue is government support (tax relief, bank loans granting) [Table 2, 3]. Nevertheless, as it seems, due to the current and possible future travel restrictions, it is important for this sector to focus on domestic customers, as domestic tourism is rebounding faster than international travels.

In many Polish regions, it is possible to enhance the gastronomy business by promoting local food and regional culinary traditions. During winter and summer holidays in 2020–2021, the observed tourist preferences proved that now this policy could be developed very satisfactorily. It is difficult to predict how customers' decisions will evolve in the post-pandemic future. The interest in domestic tourism could be intensified by financial insecurity and economy slowdown, concerns about incoming pandemic waves and borders closure. Today all these factors make travelling abroad highly risky and staying in one's own country more appealing. On the other hand, borders opening and mass scale vaccinations might immediately result in the pivoting interest in international travels.

In September 2021, in Poland pandemic restrictions were slowly eased, however, social distancing requirements, safety and hygiene protocols, limits of guests in the restaurant were still obligatory and possibly remain longer. The 'new normal' daily routine includes a series of sanitary restrictions at public space (both indoors and outdoors): physical distancing, wearing facemasks, disinfection procedures, limits of people at public space, etc.

The pandemic impact on gastronomy tourism is difficult to be evaluated accurately. In Poland the catering establishments suffered differently, depending on many factors, like their location and management strategy. The same situation is observed in other countries. Many scholars underlined that in some regions tourism tries to return to 'old paths', while in other regions stakeholders see opportunities in resetting tourism policy on a more resilient and regenerative path.

For example, in New Zealand one of the new directions for shaping future tourism policy is domestic tourism development, based on rural destinations. In this country, policy makers believe that both gastronomy and wine tourism could contribute successfully to the plans of tourism recovery, as an inclusive, sustainable and resilient sector of cultural tourism. It is also anticipated that

once the pandemic is over and the borders reopen, culinary tourism projects developed in different regions might appeal to the international visitors as well [4].

Recently issued (in July 2021), the UN WTO document “Gastronomy and wine tourism” underlines that for many destinations, food making and wine making might become the key element in the economy recovery, nation image brand promotion and a great attraction for tourists. It says as follows: ‘Gastronomy and wine tourism represents an opportunity to revitalize and diversify tourism, promote local economic development, involve many different professional sectors and bring new uses to the sector. Hence, gastronomy and wine tourism contribute to promoting and branding destinations, maintaining and preserving local traditions and diversities, harnessing and rewarding authenticity’ [21].<sup>9</sup> What this report also highlighted is the fact that such a policy might be especially important in the context of future tourism development in remote rural destinations, in less privileged regions, at the time of financial insecurity and economy slowdown.

In Poland, the future of gastronomy tourism should be connected with changes of our lifestyle and new meaning of wellbeing: slow pace of living, health, concern about the environment and sustainability. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused deep bruises to the tourism hospitality industry, but also has created some opportunities to rethink what we value in culinary tourism and how gastronomy tourism may become more sustainable and responsible.

It could be achieved by providing interest in regional, domestic cuisine, teaching culinary tradition, understanding and learning (and re-learning) new skills, as cooking, baking, preserving, gardening. At the time of economy recession, slowdown and financial insecurity, these traditional skills and knowledge about local products might be not only a nostalgic experience shared with children and grandchildren, but also a money saving opportunity.

Naturally, as gastronomy tourism participants are different and their expectations vary, there should be as well an opportunity for luxury food experience at exclusive tourist resorts responding well to demands of customers with higher income.

As the pandemic situation constantly evolves and even the near future is unpredictable, further research on this matter is important, as well as an interdisciplinary and broader scholarly discussion about more resilient, sustainable

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<sup>9</sup> The recent, 6<sup>th</sup> UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism, focused on advancing tourism to the centre of plans for recovery in rural communities after the COVID-19 pandemic, took place in October 2021 (Bruges, Belgium), while the recent, 5<sup>th</sup> UNWTO Global Conference on Wine Tourism, under the name ‘Wine Tourism – a driver for rural development’ focused on the contribution of wine tourism to social and economic regional integration and its great potential to generate development opportunities in remote rural destinations, took place in September 2021 (Alentejo, Portugal) [21].

and inclusive gastronomy tourism in the future, along with the need of re-evaluating the hospitality industry development and the tourism policy directions in the post-pandemic Poland.

**Table 1.** Gastronomy establishments in Warsaw and Mazovia Region (Poland) – pre pandemic time (2019)\*

	Specification	Total	Public sector	Private sector
1	Permanent establishments	2555	238	2317
2	Restaurants	536	30	506
3	Bars	1028	46	982
4	Canteens	462	75	387
5	Food stands	529	87	442
6	Seasonal establishments	96	37	59
7	Total	2651	275	2376

\* Notice: The revealed data concerns gastronomic establishments whose management seats are in the Capital City of Warsaw, employing more than 9 persons (data as of 31 December 2019).

Source: Central Statistical Office Warsaw (GUS) [27].

**Table 2.** Catering establishments in Poland as for March 2021 (response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis)

Establishments closed (in %)	Establishments temporary suspended	Establishments with radically changed offer	Establishments with only take-away offer	Establishments operating as before March 2020
8%	25%	5%	60%	2%

Source: Central Statistical Office Warsaw (GUS) [27].

**Table 3.** Gastronomy establishment structure in Poland as for December 2019 (pre-pandemic time) and in December 2020 (response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis)

Year (Total number)	Food stands	Restaurants	Canteens	Bars
2019 (72 400)	39%	28%	6%	27%
2020 (64 400)	40.5%	26.6%	5.5%	26.6%

Source: Central Statistical Office Warsaw (GUS) [27].

#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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