

GASTRONOMIC BRAND OF ST. PETERSBURG: HAUTE CUISINE, CREATIVITY, CULTURAL TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

The report focuses on the problem of creating gastronomic brand of St. Petersburg on the basis of cultural and historical heritage. The authors conducted a series of studies that include statistical analysis of the restaurant business, an expert survey on the development of various models of the city's gastronomic brand and a case study devoted to experience of creative activity of one representative of the restaurant business. The result of this study is rationalization of the prospects for a comprehensive approach to promoting St. Petersburg as a tourist center with gastronomic brands that emphasize the cultural and historical traditions.

Key Words: gastronomic brand, cultural heritage, creativity, cultural tourism.

Being one of the major cultural and tourist centers of Europe, St. Petersburg needs an improved marketing strategy to achieve the goals set up in the program of development of St. Petersburg as a tourist center for 2011-2016 adopted by the city government.

One of the main directions to improve tourist destination marketing is to increase the satisfaction level of the tourist product supplied which corresponds the principles of modern approach to meet the customers' demands on the basis of impressions economy conception (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Gastronomy is an important component of tourist attractiveness within a specific territory. A tourist is interested in food consuming both for satisfying physiological needs and learning more about traditions, history and culture of a destination as local cuisine is one of the sources for territorial identity formation (Richards, 2002). Studying interaction between gastronomy and tourism scholars note that gastronomy is not only an important part of a tourist trip, but also a determining reason for it (Henderson, 2009; Hjalager, 2002; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Pearce, 2002). Munsters (Munsters, 1994) defines gastronomy as a component of cultural tourist product. Gastronomy is a competitive advantage of a territory, its resource (Fields, 2002), and a powerful tool in the fight for customers in the international tourism market (Boyne & Hall, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2002).

Where can a tourist dine in St. Petersburg?

The authors aim at the following – to develop a system of suggestions related to the creation of complex touring product, which would meet both cultural and gastronomic demands of tourists visiting St. Petersburg in a harmonious way.

To achieve the goal the first stage of the study was devoted to the research of the state of gastronomic market focused on tourist servicing to specify gastronomic offers supplied by cafés and restaurants to tourists. The

first stage conception was based on the idea that foreign tourists may be interested in the Russian cuisine in the first place. Focusing on the Russian cuisine research line the authors proceeded from the fact that the Russian cuisine is considered to be a well-recognized national gastronomic brand featuring a set of widely-known dishes with well-established recipes and servicing rituals.

All St. Petersburg restaurants specializing in the Russian cuisine were divided into two groups:

1. Restaurants combining the Russian menu and some other national cuisines with the Russian cuisine being a priority of a restaurant.
2. Restaurants offering exclusively the Russian cuisine due to a restaurant conception that represent directly or indirectly the Russian flavor in general.

The analysis of several websites devoted to restaurant business in St. Petersburg and web-sites of individual restaurants helped to find out that the first group may include 1300-1700 restaurants (out of 3700 – 4000 represented on Internet sites). However, the second category covers only 80-100 restaurants. The results of the analysis allowed making a conclusion that only a few restaurants directly focus on foreign tourists offering them authentic Russian cuisine.

The authors also analyzed public catering facilities functioning in main St. Petersburg's museums. One can pitifully state that there are virtually no cafés and restaurants, which reflect the spirit of an exhibition's epoch or art movement. Majority of those locations are faceless. An exception can be found in the Peter-and-Paul Fortress, where the restaurant "Austeria" was open. Another positive example is café "Great Hall of Columns" in the Pavlovsk Palace located in the suburb of the city.

It is necessary to emphasize that there are no gastronomic goods representing authentic culinary image available in museum's shops, and in general in gift shops. St. Petersburg's food souvenirs offered for tourists, such as boxes of chocolate and sweets or dry cakes selections, are in the best case scenario have St. Petersburg's symbols imaging commemorative locations of the city. Thus, we deal here not with promotion of unique gastronomic brands as elements of the city's culture and traditions rather than with promotion of main interesting architectural sights by the means of gastronomic souvenirs.

The analysis resulted in the classification of St. Petersburg restaurant market on the basis of the following parameter: the correspondence of gastronomic offer to the tourist image of the city.

Prospects of St. Petersburg's gastronomic brand formation

The next stage of the research was an expert survey aimed at design of gastronomic brands which would be attractive to tourists. About 30 experts in restaurant and tourist business, art, advertising, and territory tourist branding participated in the survey. According to the experts, St. Petersburg cannot boast of its own unique gastronomic brands of international standing. Branding of food and alcohol products which are the most popular among foreign tourists can be qualified as a generally accepted set: caviar, vodka, pancakes that do not reveal regional specificity. Another point complicates the matters – the Russian cuisine does not have its own image on the gastronomic map as it is to a great extent derivative of the French cuisine which exercised a significant influence on the Russian cuisine in XVIII-XIX centuries.

The object of the research was degree of influence of gastronomic factor on tourist attractiveness of the city, strengths and weaknesses in gastronomic brand development. To analyze data received in the study specialized software for qualitative data analysis Atlas.ti was used.

Experts point out that there are a number of problematic issues aggravating the situation among which they emphasize lack of individual image characteristic to many catering outlets, lack of Russian chefs who would be keen on the national cuisine, lack of available information about restaurants in general and about Russian cuisine in particular.

Within the expert survey some specialists proposed promotion of smelt as a tourist brand; it is a small fish popular among the locals that habitate in the Neva, Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland. The majority of the

citizens consider this fish to be also indigenously from St. Petersburg, and its consumption (during very short time of two months in spring) became a ritual in some sense and has been widely reflected in the urban folklore.

However, within the research conducted by the authors on regional gastronomic brands aimed at increasing tourist attractiveness of territories (over 500 websites of tourist companies, inviting tourists, in ten regions were analyzed on the issue of mentioning in their advertising some or other gastronomic brands, potentially “working” on this territory) it became clear that smelt is almost never used by travel agencies as an attractive tourist brand. Thus, one can speak about external and internal character of gastronomic brands; the above mentioned smelt is referred to the second type of brands and currently is not popular among tourists at all (Bessiere, 2001; Hall, Mitchell, 2002; Kim, Eves, Scarles, 2009).

Experts highlighted that acquaintance with the Russian national cuisine is a very important aspect of tourist consumption. It is a very special aspect with regard to those for whom it’s their first time in Russia. It’s worth mentioning that even such categories of tourists as Chinese and Korean who prefer their own national restaurants when on a tour include at least one visit to a Russian cuisine restaurant.

The experts justified the need to create gastronomic brand of St. Petersburg which would strengthen and complete the tourist attractiveness of the city as a cultural centre. At this moment St. Petersburg’s tourist brand is based on the following advantages of the city:

- St. Petersburg possesses one of the largest well-preserved city centres in Europe;
- the city can boast of major architectural ensembles, clear architectural plan and a core waterway;
- unique natural feature – white nights;
- a wide range of imperial palaces, mansions and cult buildings preserved from the period when St. Petersburg was the capital of the country;
- unique ring of imperial palaces around St. Petersburg;
- rich collections of art of international standing;
- world-famous creative groups of symphonic, opera and choreographic art;
- rich history (despite the fact that the city is relatively young) and wide reflection of the city in literature, music and painting well known all over the world (Gordin, 2009).

The expert survey allowed making up three models of St. Petersburg’s gastronomic brand related to the cultural and historical heritage of the city.

- “Imperial Petersburg cuisine” – haute cuisine, based on the impression of St. Petersburg as a former capital of a vast and rich empire;
- “ ‘Silver age’ café” – a bridge from bohemian cafes and restaurants of the end of the XIXth – beginning of the XXth centuries to modern artistic life;
- “Leningrad cuisine” which focuses on tourists interested in the Soviet period of St. Petersburg history, its image as the cradle of three revolutions.

Case of creative strategy for restaurant business development

Further on there was developed a case on the basis of the study of a company “Svoi v Gorode” (“Our people in the city”). The company came up with a creative development strategy of restaurant business which is closely related to a cultural tourism development strategy of St. Petersburg.

The company “Svoi v Gorode” is a restaurant holding that includes restaurants which are the company’s property and restaurants under the company’s management. The group is one of the most creative in the city and the head of the group, Leonid Garbar is chairman of the regional association of restaurant-keepers and hoteliers. The group includes restaurants which are hallmarks for the city: “Stroganoff Steak House”, “Fish House on Grivtsova”, “Russian Vodka Room No.1” and some others. It is exactly the creative nature of the holding “Svoi v Gorode” activities which made it the object for the case study.

The development of the case targeted at defining the role of creativity in providing competitive advantages at the haute cuisine market. Flyers, booklets, website content and interview with top managers of the holding served

as the informational basis for the study.

According to the company management, its creative activity is implemented within the conception of the holding, conceptions of separate restaurants, interior design of the restaurants, revision of recipes (including old St. Petersburg recipes).

The holding's activity is specific in that it proceeds from St. Petersburg cultural traditions. The "cultural bias" of the activities creates favorable prerequisites for the company to make use of cultural tourism advantages. The following projects were realized within the framework of 'culture-oriented' activities:

- Creation of the Russian Vodka Museum in the premises of "Russian Vodka Room No. 1". The Museum is organized on strictly professional basis and is one of the first museums of this kind in Russia. The museum exhibits unique showpieces related not only to the history of vodka, but to the history of the country. The exhibition is constantly renewed due to private collectors' donations.
- Restoration of authentic interiors of the beginning of the XX century in the Russian Vodka Museum and restaurants "Russian Vodka Room No. 1", "Stroganoff Steak House" which are located in the building where the Life Guard Mounted Regiment of His Imperial Majesty was deployed in the beginning of the XXth century.
- The Russian Vodka Museum and "Russian Vodka Room No. 1" participates in field-specific projects (days of national cuisines), organizes special events: gastronomic books launching presentations and exhibitions (for instance, the exhibition "Restaurant business").
- A gallery was organized in the premises of the Russian Vodka Museum and "Russian Vodka Room No.1" where regular gastronomic exhibitions, art and photo exhibitions are displayed.

The participation of the "Svoi v Gorode" holding in the creation and development of the project "St. Petersburg Museum Quarter" deserves special consideration. The project aims at creating an information-tourist zone in the historical centre of St. Petersburg (<http://vodkamuseum.su/>).

The analogous areas are National Mall (Washington DC), Museum Quarters in Vienna and in Amsterdam and some others.

Apart from "Svoi v Gorode" holding, six museums and two exhibition halls, two educational establishment and city municipalities take part in the realization of the project. Actually the project is the first institutionalized cultural-tourist cluster in St. Petersburg which would concentrate several attractive objects of cultural tourism and catering organizations on a relatively small territory.

The start of project was rather spontaneous, but eventually the participating organizations have coordinated their efforts when launching separate projects focused on attracting tourists. In particular, joint advertising and PR-programs related to the Museum Quarter promotion are under way. It's worth pointing out that "Svoi v Gorode" holding is the only commercial structure within the project while all the rest are state or municipal organizations. This makes a certain imprint on the nature of marketing strategy with regard to the whole cluster and the participants, creates brand new opportunities for cultural heritage employment, enables the organizations to carry out joint strategic planning. This kind of activities assists in resource preservation and competitiveness increase, in particular.

To the opinion of the holding top management interviewed during the case study, the fact that the holding is part of the cultural-tourist cluster provides specific opportunities for the company to add to its advantages on the highly competitive catering services market. Restaurants of the holding position themselves not only as restaurants of the Russian cuisine but as catering outlets preserving traditions of pre-revolutionary Imperial Petersburg. The restaurant are located on the former premises of the Life Guard Mounted Regiment of His Imperial Majesty, within walking distance from Imperial palaces, St.-Isaac cathedral, Imperial Mariinsky Theatre and many other institutions which formerly related to the Imperial court. Thus we may maintain that the activities of the company under

consideration – “Svoi v Gorode” holding – can be qualified as implementation of one of the proposed models of St. Petersburg cuisine – Imperial Petersburg cuisine.

The authors have already considered elsewhere the positive consequences of creating cultural tourist clusters which would make tourist flow regulation more expedient. The problem is urgent for such a cultural and tourist centre as St. Petersburg (Gordin, Matetskaya, 2011).

Within the case different problems related to correlation between creativity and maintaining high quality standards of services offered by the holding “Svoi v Gorode” were studied. This problem is an urgent one for the restaurants of haute cuisine. “Creativity in luxury industries has an additional requirement compared to other industries, as it needs to be combined with the imperative of zero defects of the final product (or/and service), with perfect delivery, and so on. Therefore, it requires very strict control mechanisms (Slavich, B., Cappetta, R., Salvemin, 2011:3). According to the experts interviewed during the survey creativity is acceptable at the stage of product creation and in the product promotion. Later the system of control is introduced which checks whether the product meets the preset standards. The system is characterized as “null defect” system or “zero error level”.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study include recommendations on implementing of the three models of St. Petersburg’s gastronomic brand. The models are based on its rich cultural heritage, long-standing gastronomic traditions and focused on meeting the demands of tourists by means of creating a more complex perception of the city. The creative approach to gastronomic branding offered by the authors makes it possible to interpret the attractiveness of St. Petersburg’s cultural heritage in a novel way and place an emphasis on the important aspects of cultural and social life which used to be underestimated.

In essence, in the absence of authentic cuisine typical for St. Petersburg the construction of gastronomic brands based on historical and cultural traditions and behavioral practices is proposed. The authors believe that revival and promotion of these elements of urban culture can contribute to the development of creative tourism in St. Petersburg as one of the fast-growing in popularity type of cultural tourism (Gordin, Matetskaya, 2010) creation of more comprehensive impression of the city for tourists and overcome of still existing barriers between "high", museum’s and theater’s culture, and "consumer" culture inherent in public catering facilities.

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