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Local Authorities' contribution on Gastronomy Tourism Development: the case of Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The role of Local Government (LG) in achieving tourism development is extremely important. A characteristic example is the province of Ontario in Canada, which managed with the assistance of the Ministries of Tourism and Culture and with the cooperation of the private sector, to create an effective tourism development tool promote the region through its gastronomy - Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA), a non-profit, industry driven organization which leads the implementation of the provincial Culinary Tourism Strategy. Specifically, the municipalities, the ministry and the enterprises assigned to OCTA to develop a comprehensive, Strategic Action Plan 2005-2015 for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism in order to make Ontario, firstly, the primary culinary tourism destination across Canada, and then worldwide. OCTA connects and coordinates successfully all food tourism stakeholders of Ontario

Keywords: Local Government, Gastronomic tourism, Canada, Regional development

Jel codes: O21, R58, Z32, Z38

1. Introduction

Given the existing recessionary economic situation in Greece and therefore the application of austerity policies, the basic objective of LG is to rationalize the public sector both in terms of expenditure, effectiveness but also at organizational level. In this context, LG should be a key part of the solution. Reducing unnecessary expenses, rationalization of LG services, the reconstruction of the collection mechanism, the use of European and national funding programs for substantial projects, cooperation with the private sector, partnerships with various institutions for environmental and social initiatives, are just some of the areas where the LG should focus in order to meet their current needs. At the same time they should be created competitive structures, at local and peripheral level in order to attract investors and promote entrepreneurship. These are just some of the tools with which the LG will be able, to emerge from the crisis through regional development. A basic assumption in this study was that local authorities are not effective in the implementation of their obligations and their role with respect to sustainable development of tourism in their areas of responsibility, either because of their own responsibility, or due to lack of distinctive administrative responsibilities. Based on this assumption, the objective of this study is to determine the extent and the type of intervention of Local Authorities (LAs) involved in the tourist development of a region (e.g. tourism promotion objectives of LAs, investment, tourism activities, cooperation levels with private investors, best practice of initiatives for alternative forms of tourism etc.).

The added value in this article is summarized firstly, to the contribution of the existing literature on the debate around the issue that we are dealing with and addresses the modern role and modus operandi of the Greek LG & LA with the objective, the development in conditions of economic hardship, and secondly in order to study in practice whether this particular model and development practices, developed by the LG of Ontario, could be an effective tool in the disposal of the local authorities in Greece and worldwide. In order to satisfy the above, our work uses as a case study, the province of Ontario in Canada, in order to present and discuss the potential role of LG in the development of gastronomic tourism as a growth driver. Gastronomy tourism constitutes one of the most modern and effective strategies to foster rural economic development and the regional development in general. Tourism creates jobs and generates income where the sustainable tourism development benefits the local community (Egbali, 2010; Eze-Uzoamaka, 2006). A clear understanding of the current situation in the LGs will assist considerably policy makers and tourism planners to design proper development strategies that will maximize, effectively, the LGs' involvement in the economic growth of the region, while achieving benefits for the local economy at first and for the national economy then.

In the following paragraphs we shall examine the role of LG to the recovery of the national economy. We will also examine the role of LG in tourism and we will focus on gastronomy tourism. In a separate section will present examples of similar tourism related development and practices around the world presented in tables as well. In sections 7 and 8 we will present Canada and the culinary tourism in

Ontario in particular. In section 9 we will examine the Strategy and Business Plan 2005-2015 executed in Ontario along with the historical overview and statistics related to Ontario tourism industry such as inbound and outbound visitors into Ontario from US staying overnight, the number of tourism establishments in Ontario by sector in 2009, the average tourist expenditures per establishment, and the capital investment intentions, of Canada and Ontario related to tourism and food. Our analysis will continue by examining the creation of OCTA, (achievements and activities) in order to lead the way for the development of gastronomy tourism in Ontario. In the last paragraphs we will examine the importance of education in economic & tourism development, policy recommendations and finally we will conclude with closing thoughts and recommendations.

2. Role of LG for the recovery of the national economy

The case of economic recovery, structural changes and economic reforms must be extended from the central government to the regions and the municipalities of the country. It is characteristic that in accordance with the global Doing Business Index (2012) of the World Bank (World Bank), among 185 countries, Greece ranks only in the 78th position with regard to facilitating business, to the 146th position in creating conditions for business, and in the 117th place for the "investor's protection". From the above mentioned, it is clear that Greece is too low in the "business environment indicators" scale. It is obvious that the "anti - business and anti- investment climate» prevailing in Greece, is the "main source of misfortune" for society and the national economy. Effective reversal of the extremely unfavorable investment and business climate and attitudes that affects the majority of the regions in the country could change significantly with the decisive intervention of LG. The LG should contribute to the recovery of the national economy and to the creation of the proper conditions for sustainable economic development, through a multilevel support of entrepreneurship and private investments in sectors such as tourism, which consist the heavy industry of the country. The solutions to the problems of the productive and economic potential (businesses and households) of the regions can be secured by policies that will create a very attractive business environment for entrepreneurship and potential investors (Maniatakeion Foundation, 2013). Among other things, the focus of LG's effort should be a strategy for the transformation of regions and municipalities into modern structures that will support the sustainable development and their wellbeing, by utilizing their comparative advantages. At the same time, they must promote the entrepreneurial activity of private investments that will be characterized by dynamism, openness, innovative business methods, respect to tradition, exploitation of the unique comparative advantages of the region, and a high degree of product and services specialization.

3. Focus on Tourism and the role of LG

Tourism is a globally recognized industry and indeed one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Like any global industry, so the business tourism activities can have a

significant impact on local development trends. The local effects of the tourist industry vary and they start from the transfer and hosting of the tourism consumer in a local community where the tourism product is consumed (Godfrey, 1998). At this point, it is worth noting the unique characteristic of tourism, since no other kind of global industry has structured itself in such a way that the consumer is transferred to the product instead of the product delivered to the consumer and even in his community or residence (Ruhanen, 2012).

The sustainable development has recently emerged as a key pillar and precondition for the development agenda for the tourism industry in many developing countries, (Tosun, 2001; Helmy, 2004). Because of all previously mentioned, it is now extremely important to endeavor with all our power to design our tourism development and the types of tourism we desire, with deep knowledge and environmental awareness, based on documented studies. Of course, the coexistence of a variety of stakeholders in the process of this development is one of the defining characteristics of the common development of a tourist destination that should be carefully considered during the design process (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Laws, Scott and Parfitt, 2002; Aas Ladkin and Fletcher, 2005).

By “stakeholders” we may include the government of any level the (international, national, peripheral and local tourist organizations), construction and other tourism companies, tour operators and workers, non-tourism businesses that have legal interest and are affected by the potential tourist development of a region. Finally, “major stakeholder” is considered the community, including local social groups, indigenous groups as well as the residents themselves (Freeman 1984; Simpson, 2001). A key challenge for LGs, both now and in coming decades is to steer external and global powers to local development in a constructive manner, in order to achieve sustainable development for the local population (McKercher, 1993a). In cities and villages around the world, the primary responsibility for the development of this developmental direction belongs, mainly, to the institution of local government and to the different levels of LG (Johnathan, 1994). As genuine providers of social benefits and services, shapers of a place’s economic infrastructure, regulators of the local economic activity, and managers of the natural environment, the local authorities have too many direct and effective tools to influence “targeted local development” (McKercher, 1993b). However, apart from their direct role in the development process, perhaps the most important role may be played by LGs in a global economy, is that of “mediator” between the different and sometimes disparate interests that seek to influence the direction of local development for their own benefits, ignoring the public interest (Tourism Alliance Victoria, 2006).

The role of LGs as “intermediaries” in the development process may be enhanced further through the institution of international cooperation of municipalities, “Municipal International Cooperation” (MIC.) Connelly, G. (2007). Even before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, but especially after the adoption of Agenda 21, many LAs have focused on major challenges of governance for sustainable development (WTO, 1996; Huyber and Bennett, 2003). There is a growing international recognition that in many tourist destinations, current management practices

can lead to undesirable consequences, rather destructive to the environment and the local community, which, in turn, can threaten both the sustainable tourist development itself and the economic viability of communities and by extension even the same host nations. These problems may be worsening when there is lack of well-designed development model and efficient management of the forthcoming tourism development (Huybers and Bennett, 2002). The search for a sustainable tourism model with the best possible balance between economic benefits for local communities and little or no negative environmental impact is now the key challenge for many governments around the world (McKercher, 2003). In any of our potential planning, we should also need to understand that tourism is one of the many external forces that can decisively influence the direction and options for local development. The question to be examined in each case is whether tourism can be “sustainable”, which means if and how tourism can contribute to sustainable development.

The real proof of "sustainable tourism" should be the sustainable development of the specific local communities that function as tourist destinations (Tosun, 2001). This is why LGs around the world welcomed the UN initiative of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as the interest of the tourism industry for the reduction of any negative impacts of tourism and the increase of the potential positive contribution to the local sustainable development, is a fact (Harris, 2000). Many governments around the world have tried, in various ways and with different degree of success, to integrate "sustainability" in their tourism. Much of this effort has been performed at a national, state or regional level, however, the LG's participation is crucial, given the influence that it possesses in its arsenal, such as land use planning and environmental protection (WTO, 1996). The maintenance and promotion of an attractive tourist destination depends to a large extent to three main factors:

- a) The positive overall image of the destination and experience that it offers
- b) The safety that inspires and offers
- c) The overall quality of the environment

On this basis, the role of LG can have a profound effect on the success of local tourism development and plays an essential role in maintaining the environment on which depending the future of the local community (Cameron, 2001). In the end, it is the LAs who bear a large part of this responsibility, since they are closer to many of the problems associated with the tourist development of a region and control most aspects of development planning related to tourism (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007). Also, LGs knows in detail the natural resources and the available human capital, so that through their careful assessment can plan the future and assist the community in terms of employment, local entrepreneurship, and infrastructure. Another competitive advantage is that LG receives information about the problems facing the local community very quickly while is called upon facing a number of challenges related to the effective planning and management of tourism at destination level. The most significant challenge indeed, is the integration of tourism management with other functions and LG activities. The following Table 1 highlights some categories of LG responsibilities related to tourism.

Table 1: LG responsibilities relating to tourism

LG roles and responsibilities and areas of planning and policy development	Potential influence on Tourism
Infrastructure provision and maintenance	Transport infrastructure may shape access to the destination and travel patterns within the destination. Basic infrastructure capacity may shape the destination capacity to absorb tourist and may limit development
Land use planning	Development assessment and strategic land use planning influences the built character and spatial integration of the destination
Environmental management	Protects and preserves unique environmental features of a destination and manages visitor pressures on natural resources
Open space planning and management	Protects and conserves open space, influences the character and amenity of the destination and helps create a 'sense of place'.
Public health and safety management	Protects and enhances visitor satisfaction, destination image and quality
Community development	Encourages a community supportive of tourism activity and enterprise
Local economic development	Encourages synergetic economic activity, the development of appropriate tourism business and support services.
Education, training and employment	Influences quality in the delivery of tourism services and facilities.
Tourism promotion and marketing	Fosters branding and destination imagedevelopment.
Arts and cultural development	Encourages the development of unique and positive sense of community and belongingness attractive to tourism
Human services	Encourages positive attitudes and improved service delivery

Source: Rezarta Brokaj (2014)

4. Focus on Gastronomic Tourism

The culinary tourism, defined as "the pursuit and enjoyment unique and unforgettable food and beverage experiences» (World Food Travel Association, 2012). Culinary tourism also refers to "any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition, or culinary techniques" (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, 2013). The United Nations World Tourism Organization has noted that food tourism is a dynamic and growing segment, and that over one-third of tourism expenditures relate to food (UNWTO, 2012). The culinary tourism has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the tourism industry (Smith and Costello, 2009). In 2012, expenditure of tourists for the food service in the US amounted to US \$ 201 billion representing almost one quarter (23.5%) of total travel revenue. This made the food service, top of class of travel costs for 2012 (US Travel Association, 2013).

Apart from the significant contribution to the economy, food, in the context of gastronomy tourism, implies the displacement of the central position of interest, of someone's tourist experience (Wolf, 2002), the uniqueness of the tourism product and the sharp increase in potential as a niche tourism

market (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010). Indeed, food can no longer be regarded as a means by which just meet our basic needs. Postmodern theorists have depicted the food and local cuisine as "embedded material culture" (Dietler, 2007), and suggest that our social and cultural identity can be expressed through food and gastronomy in general (Van der Veen, 2008). As part of a tourist destination, traditional cuisine interpreted as "basic manifestation of intangible cultural heritage of a destination" (Okumus et al, 2007) and this has been incorporated into various destination marketing strategies (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Du rand and Heath, 2006; Okumus et al, 2007). For tourists, food plays an important role in cultural tourism (Scarpato, 2002) and has become one of the main travel incentives in recent years (Boniface, 2003; Long, 2004; Quan and Wang, 2004). The inextricable link between food and tourism is now widely recognized by various researchers (Hall and Mitchell, 2000, 2002; Mak, et al, 2012; Quan and Wang, 2004).

Traditionally, local cuisine was seen as supporting component to the tourism, acting as a complement to the tourism attractions in a destination (Hall & Mitchell, 2000, 2002). In fact, the culinary experiences are extremely complex and linked inextricably with the experience of someone in a tourist destination. Quan and Wang (2004) found that the consumption of food, as an essential part of the travel experience, can lead tourists to unique experiences to produce a feeling of real enjoyment and genuine satisfaction. If designed and developed properly, the culinary tourism tells the story of the cultural heritage of people. It highlights the authenticity of each 'place' through the unique taste "terroir" of each region. It enriches the experience and can be a valuable tool for stimulating economic and social development. The gastronomical tourism is no longer an emerging niche market. The ability to motivate and attract visitors is given and documented. It is a huge, world class, business activity. According to Travel Industry of America (2006), 85% of Culinary Travelers enjoy learning about the local culture and cuisines, 66% want to try regional cuisines, culinary specialties and local wines and spirits and 70% of Culinary Travelers enjoy bringing back regional foods, recipes, wines from places they have visited to share with family and friends. In 2012, it was estimated that tourism related expenditure in the US related to food consumption and gastronomy, exceeded \$ 201 billion, almost one quarter of total travel revenue. This makes food services, as the highest category of travel costs, according to the report of the University of Florida: "A Flash of Culinary Tourism." The report estimates that 39 million leisure tourists in the US choose a destination based on the availability of food & gourmet activities, while another portion 35 million tourists, look for culinary activities as they have already decided on which will be their destination. All tourists consume food, including more than 42.3 million visitors that Ontario welcomed, for a single night in 2008, of which 80.6 percent were Canadians (Travel Survey of Residents of Canada, 2008; and International Travel Survey, 2008).

5. Similar Best Practices and Examples

Comparing to other examples we can refer to the case of Ireland where the Ministry of Tourism and the Ireland's national DMO, Fáilte Ireland, initiated efforts to develop local food tourism.

Along with local enterprises they launched the Ireland's local cuisine food tourism strategy. Many actions were realized successfully such as the "National Quality Assurance Framework", a set of standards (tourism suppliers labeled their products to assure credibility), "Discover Ireland" a marketing campaign to spread awareness of the country's culinary roots and new products. Irish DMOs created new food-themed events and activities (Sheridan's Irish Food Festival, Ballymaloe Literary Festival, etc) and website outlining process of developing a food trail in step by step in detail and Social media. Enterprises also stepped in, such as The Restaurants Association of Ireland and Admailer.ie, an organization promoting "Ireland's Top Foodie Town" competition. Finally they hired OCTA, in order to develop thematic trails (eg The Burren Food Trail). In South Australia the South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC) developed programs around local food and wine to build food tourism branding along with South Australia's DMOs. Research was conducted and new products were launched such as the official "Tasting Australia" festival highlights local food and wine producers, a bloggers conference – for low-cost exposure of culinary offerings. Festivals were organized such as the Seafood Festival, tasting menus, cooking seafood barbecues by celebrity Australian chefs and food trails including (Life is a Cabernet, A Taste of South Australia, etc). DMO's created 30+ food films produced by local filmmakers. Tourism Australia launched an \$8.6 million advertising campaign called "Restaurant Australia" in 2014. In Nashville the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation reached out to every kind of individual and business involved in the F&B industry to develop food tourism. The DMOs saw synergies between local food and music. They realized innovative marketing and branding strategies combining the food & music industries and developed new event marketing partnerships. Through media they raised awareness about Nashville's culinary culture (Bon Appétit magazine). New urban development effected positively food tourism (eg. the city's new Music City Center convention, facility of 350,000 convention visitors per year, provided an instant gastro tourism customer base. DMOs also tapped local bloggers to communicate food culture to millennial visitors. The culmination of the food and music industries' collaboration resulted in the development of Music City Food + Wine Festival. Also a study was conducted to measure results and developmental potential for consumer interest in Nashville's fine dining. Ontario is the only example to create a successful non profit organization (OCTA) with expertise to implement successfully the action plan and gastronomy strategy while selling its expertise to others (see Ireland).

6. Canada

In Canada, revenue from tourism rose by 1.8% in 2011 compared to 2010. According to Smith Travel Research (2012), the sector of the Canadian hospitality experiences increases in all key performance indicators from March, with revenue per available room (RevPAR) to have the highest increase of 2.8%. The tourism growth Canada still comes from emerging markets, with the most significant increase this of Chinese travelers by 25% in 2011, due to the recent status-characterization

of "approved destination". The Canadian Tourism Commission foresees double-digit increase in arrivals from China in the coming years, (Deloitte, 2011).

The Gastronomic tourism, a rapidly emerging type of tourism has different responses from different age groups (Sims, 2009), and it consists a powerful incentive for travelers while continues to grow on an annual basis (Scarpato, 2002). Its peculiarity lies in the fact that a traveler while eating a region, is able to better understand the history and culture of a destination, in a much more comprehensive and empirical way. As noted by the International Culinary Tourism Association, because food and drinks are perceived by all our five senses organoleptic, that helps us to remember a meal and through it, as "a mnemonic device", the experience at the place of consumption is carved deep in our consciousness, more than a visit to a museum or other tourist related activity. This holistic collaboration of all senses through food consumption is the unique power of gastronomy and part of the contribution of local cuisine in the development of gastronomic tourism. Research travel activities and motivation (Travel Activities and Motivation Survey (2006) known as Research (TAM) conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, states that 125.7 million Americans (71% of all US travelers), participated in at least one culinary activity while on a trip outside the city in 2004 and 2005. Meanwhile, 77% of leisure travelers in the USA (131 million tourists) have been classified as "**gastro tourists**" (Mandala Research: "American Culinary Traveler Report"). Finally, culinary tourism is an important source of revenue and jobs stimulator. For example, the commercial sector of catering in Ontario had predicted, for the 2010 only, sales over \$ 22.5 billion and employment, of more than 404.000 people (Statistics Canada and CFRA).

7. Culinary Tourism in Ontario

The Culinary Tourism in Ontario has also been recognized as a valuable contribution to the development of general tourism, (Deloitte's Navigate Magazine, Showcased at TIAO's Tourism Day at Queen's Park and the Premier's Agri-Food Summit "Taste of Ontario") mainly through increasing awareness of the media, for gastronomic tourism products such as the famous "Path of the pie" and the (Savour Stratford, Ontario's Southwest Culinary Guide, etc.). An interesting fact is also that Canadians feel strongly that they possess a "unique dining experience" comparable to other traditional gastronomic destinations such as Italy, France, etc.). For travelers who chase a gastronomic tourism experience, Rebecca LeHeup, member of the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA) reveals that gastro tourists are looking for authenticity and local flavors, or else what he calls the «taste of the place ". The definition of the Canadian food experience and the adventure of finding authentic local flavors and ingredients, they are becoming increasingly important prerequisites for the growing demands of these specialized tourists (OCTA+ Skift Tourism, 2015)

Regarding the choice and availability of the local cuisine, it is worth mentioning that most of the people surveyed prefer to dine in independently owned restaurants (as opposed to chain

restaurants) , strongly supporting the call for a search of the authentic “ taste place» (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). It is clear that the dining experience extends beyond just consuming food , and goes to another level of contemporary tourist experience, associated with the effort of a "holistic - experimental consumption of a destination", which is achieved only through tasting authentic, distinct flavors. Some figures of the development of gastronomy in Ontario are the following:

- The local food consumption brings about a positive impact of 3: 1 in the local economy (Local Food Plus 2013)
- The consumption of local wines has a corresponding positive impact of approximately 12:1. (Wine Council of Ontario 2015)
- The consumption and costs of a medium gastro tourist, is double of those spent in a destination than a traditional tourist.
- One gastro tourist spends during his stay in the place of interest, 40 % more than a traditional tourist. (Grishkewich, 2012)
- In 2010 carried out more than 100 million visits in Ontario. All these visits included 3 meals each. This translates *into 300 million opportunities to create memorable personal experiences* with the «unique flavor of the place” which will be transformed in to new potential visitors by word of mouth and will act as the ideal ambassador of the region.

8. Strategy and Business Plan 2005-2015

8.1 Historical overview

The culinary tourism is nothing new for Ontario. For decades, travel and exploration of this province, include the discovery of traditional tastes of local areas. While foods are part of the unique experience of every tourist, gastronomic tourism is a new term that explicitly links the consumption of food and beverages with the journey. In 2001, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and the Ontario Wine Council commissioned the writing of the first Strategy report, regarding the wine and the food, as a direct result of the increased interest and visiting rate in the field of wine and gastronomy in Ontario in during the 1990s. In 2001 the study was completed, and highlighted wine and culinary tourism as an important economic factors that could contribute effectively to the growth of tourism, especially in the Niagara region and the city of Toronto. The report referred to other Ontario regions, such as Essex County, Pelee Island, and the wine region of Prince Edward County, as areas that have the potential to create a healthy culinary tourism market. After this realization of the findings and the processing of the data, the Ontario state decided to exploit in the best possible way its economic growth potential through that was opened up by the development of oenogastronomic tourism. Specifically, the LG decided from simple observer of such developments to take action and to transform into an active player who will determine its own fate. Thus, in 2005, the municipalities, along with the ministry, and the business community of Ontario, commissioned a committee known

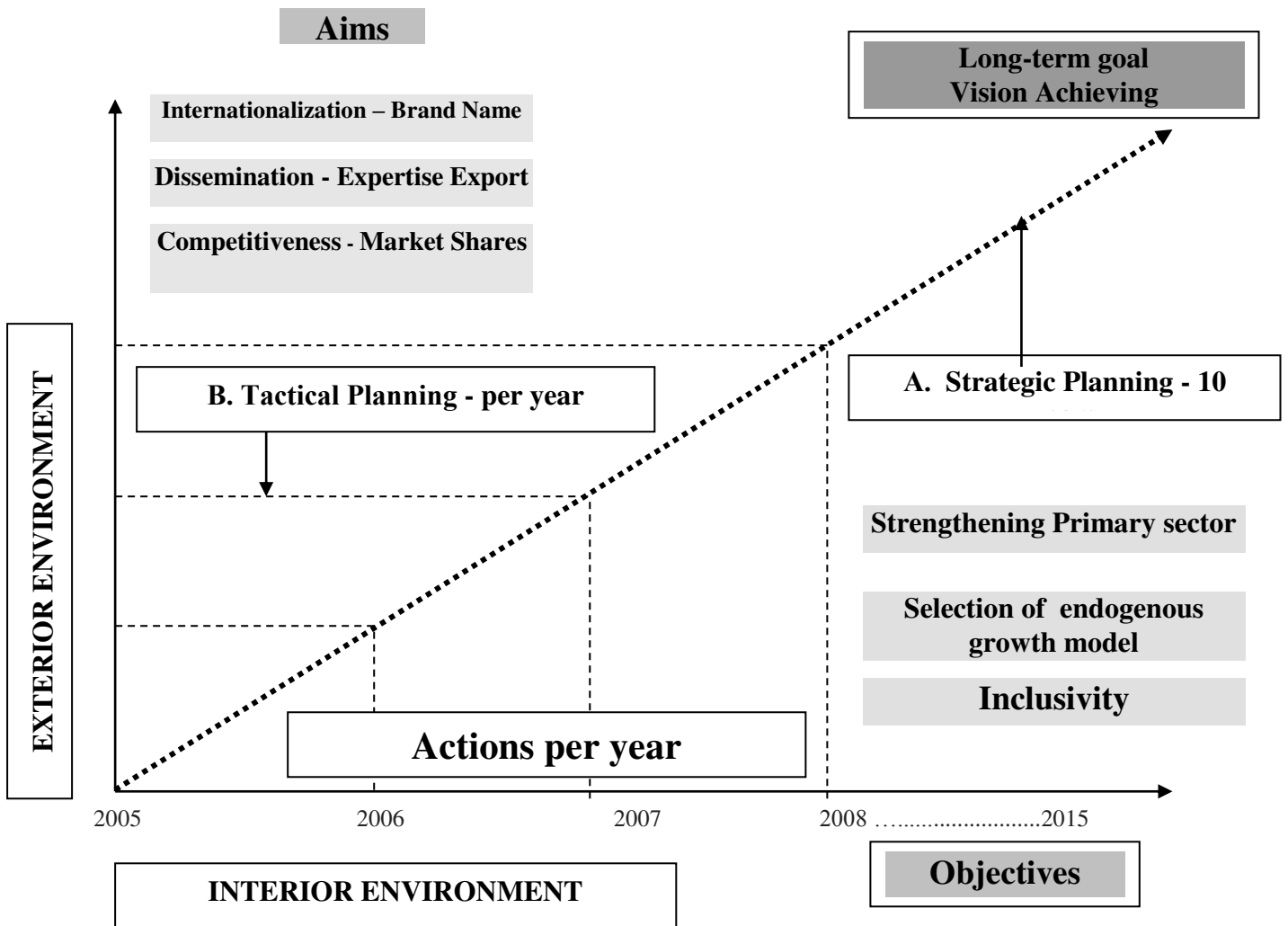
as the Advisory Council on Gastronomy Ontario Tourism (OCTAC), to develop a comprehensive, four-year Strategic Action Plan for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism in order to establish the state of Ontario, as one of the top culinary tourism destinations in Canada at first and then, worldwide.

The focus of the project was to produce a series of key strategies that would become the basis for a successful implementation of a peripheral strategy, which would be both supportive to all regional and local activities of tourism and other related culinary development strategies, at any application level. In preparation of the gastronomic tourism strategy of 2005, the industry stakeholders were asked to identify their expectations and desired outcomes of this report. Apart from seeing a provincial strategy being applied, their expectations were that this application could lead to five specific results: a) Building partnerships, b) successful and organized marketing and promotion, c) modern organization, d) positive economic impact e) defining Action Framework.

By combining travel with these edible experiences, culinary tourism offers both locals and tourists alike an authentic taste of place in our bountiful province (OCTA 2006) Strategy and Action Plan 2005- 2015. Many of the participants mentioned the need to include activities that help to reveal "the cultural heritage, regional diversity, and the history of a particular destination. It was clear that culinary tourism needed to be experiential and therefore unique, and authentic, unforgettable to every person who experiences it, involving the cultural heritage, and express the place. At the same time, the opportunity was given for the formulation of specific strategies which involved a) establishing strong leadership and links with the market, b) communication, c) encouraging research, education and training, d) supporting promotion of local culinary - tourism products and to the development of new, e) establishing new funding mechanisms for the support of gastronomic tourism development.(OCTA 2011; Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015).

Figure 1 presents the dimensions of culinary tourism development in Ontario over a period of 10 years, with clarification of the objectives and development activities under the Regular and Strategic Planning, inside and outside the region's environment.

Figure 1: Strategic development of gastronomic tourism in Ontario (OCTA)



Source: Authors

8.2 Alliance Gastronomy Tourism in Ontario (OCTA)

OCTA It is a non -profit organization founded in 2006 and operates in the light of actual requirements and industry standards. In 2011 the provision was incorporated that can advise cases tourism development, food and beverage issues worldwide and that will lead the implementation of the regional strategy for the development of gastronomic tourism, by Action Plan 2005-2015 (revised in 2011). Because Ontario authorities considered that culinary tourism is a potential recipe for economic development of the province, OCTA, as the center for gastronomic tourism excellence, is a leading authority on culinary tourism created to serve the Ontario State but also the rest of the international culinary tourism community.

The OCTA possess the experience and the trained and dedicated personnel required to successfully help businesses, associations, destinations, regions and countries in the development of gastronomic tourism. It also offers a wide range of tools, and consulting services to help each person

to exploit in the best possible manner, the dynamics and the prospect of the rising culinary tourism in his region. According to its statutes, the vision of OCTA is described as "making Ontario and by extension Canada, the first quality destination four seasons, which will be connected with nature, offering the visitor the possibility of different cultural experiences (OCTA 2006). Also, one of the basic principles is the belief in the value of the locality and authenticity. The design is based on the belief that culinary tourism is an expression enhancing the value of local products and the style of the local cuisine that make a destination or a culinary tourism experience unique once it has been proven scientifically that almost any tourist experience is enriched further by the visitor by eating and drinking. Its principle is the cooperation with all concerned (starting with Ontario State) for the development of successful culinary tourism products and services to the benefit of the region or the concerned company. Studying this cooperation with the OCTA, we should consider the objectives and modus operandi of this organization, in order to perceive why the LG and the Canadian Tourism Ministry decided "in unity" to cooperate with the private sector and to delegate the leadership in an organization with the aim, the effective development of the region's gastronomic tourism. At the same time according to the official Canadian statistics from the Ontario ministry of Tourism, since 2006 when OCTA was created, there is a steady increase in the inbound overseas visitors and outbound US visitors into Ontario (same day and overnight) and an significant increase in US inbound visitors staying overnight (Figures 2 and 3)

Figure 2: Inbound visitor into Ontario from overseas staying for Same Day & Overnight

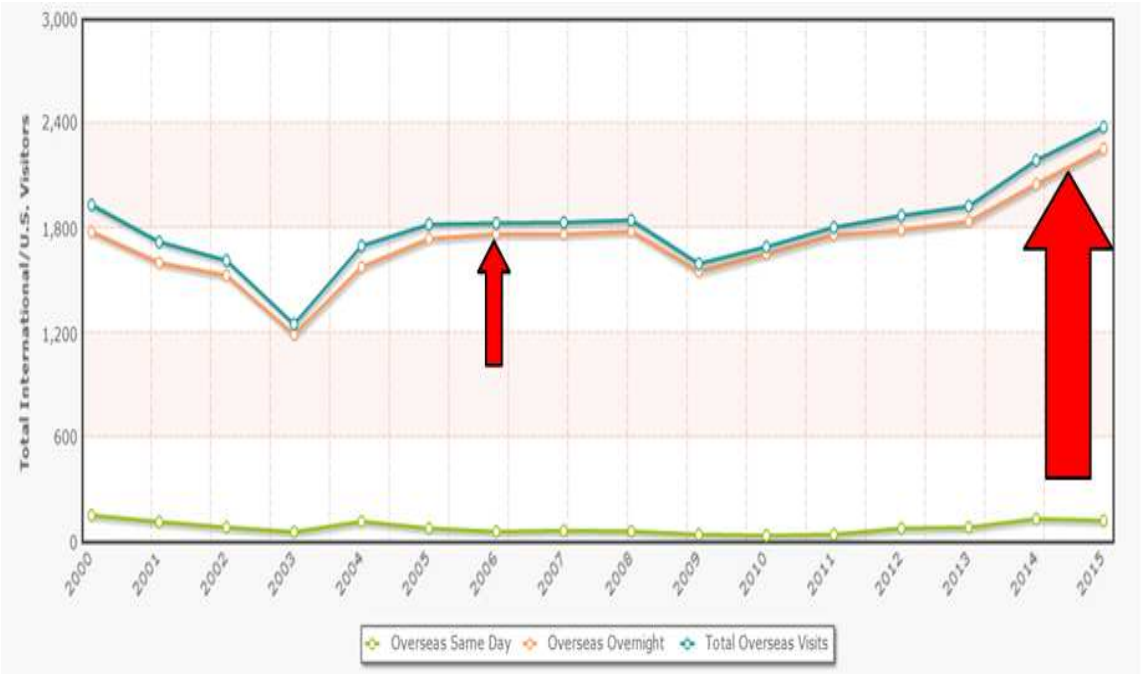
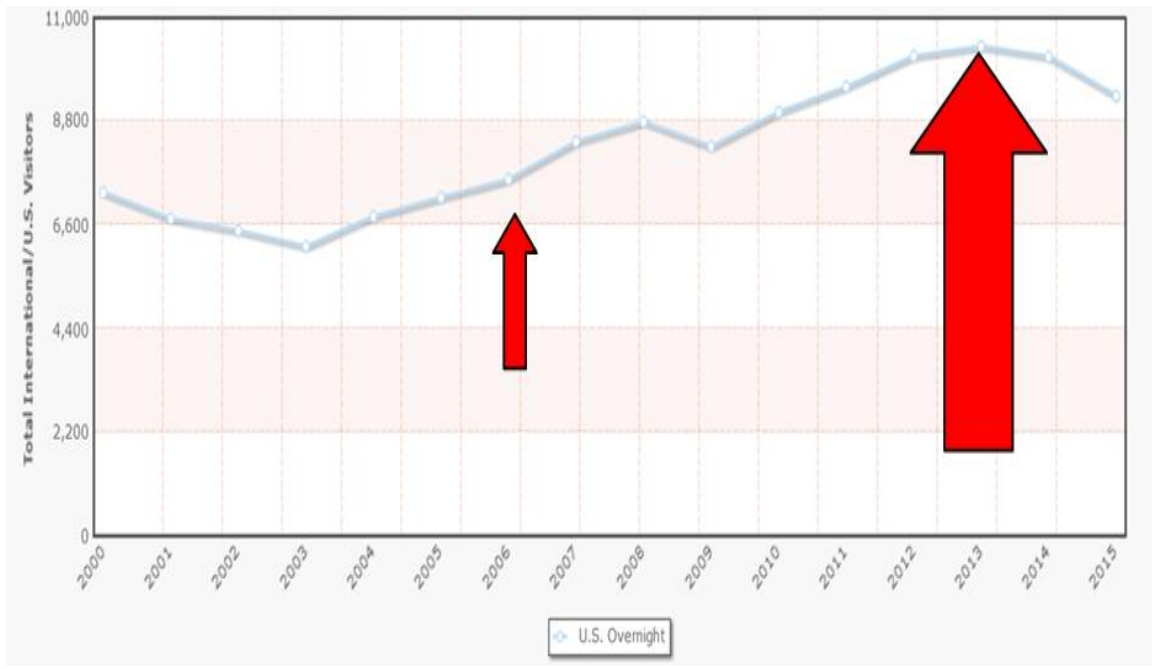
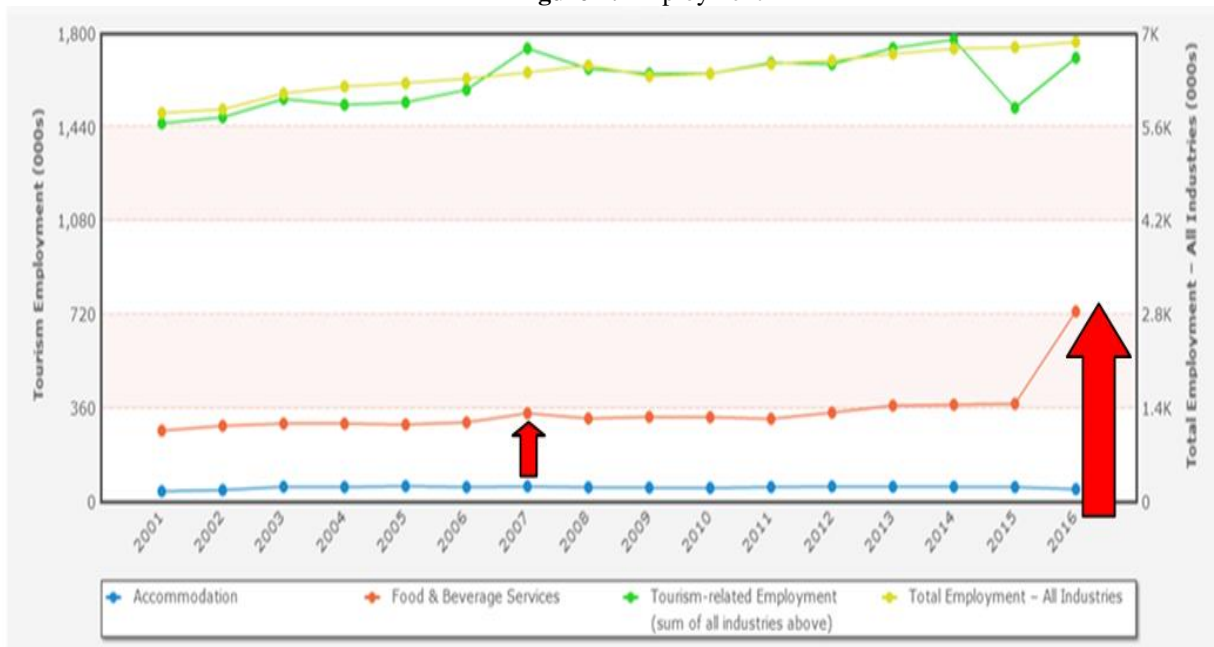


Figure 3: Outbound visitors into Ontario from US staying for Overnight



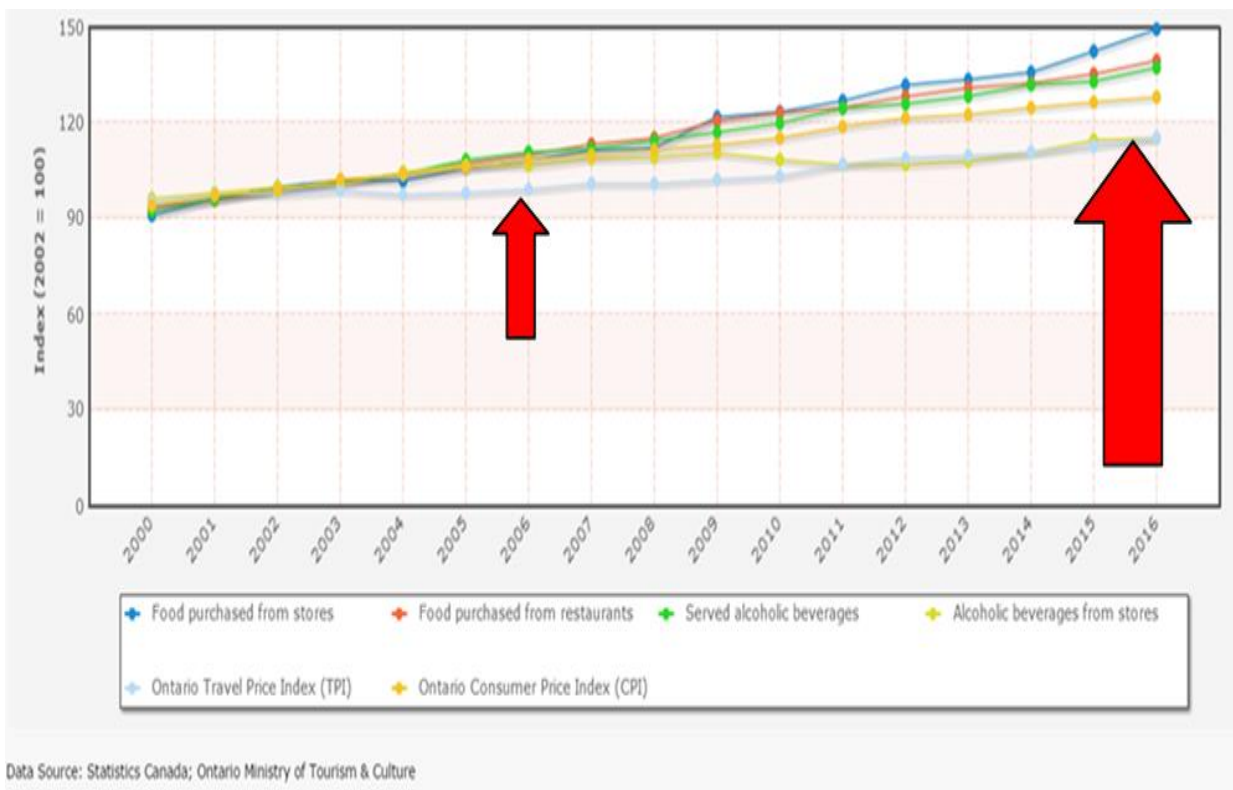
It is also interesting to see that the employment rate in food and beverage sector show a steady increase since 2006 (OCTA creation) and a rapid increase since 2014. There is also, a steady increase in the food purchased from stores and food purchased from restaurants that has been almost doubled since 2000 (Figures 4 and 5)

Figure 4: Employment



Data Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey
 Note: This is total employment in these industries, not all of which is attributable to tourists' spending.

Figure 5: Price Indices Statistics



In the case of Ontario, OCTA highlighted some leading development factors to be successfully created the "Taste of a Place» which is, for their proposed strategy, the cornerstone of the development of gastronomic products of the region. Success factors were, the identification and clarification of objectives, the effective management in the light of the Strategic Planning, the integrated strategy, the special gastronomic resources of the region, the development of finished products (*market ready* to purchase), the sufficient knowledge of the market and competitors, as well as the connection of all these with the local community and the real economy.

8.3 Achievements and Activities of OCTA Ontario leading the way for the development of Gastronomy Tourism in Ontario

During the years of its operation, OCTA achieved a lot. Among others, it hosted two presentation missions of best practices for culinary tourism development in 2012. It organized meetings to create business opportunities during the international meeting in Ireland. It promoted the efforts of Ontario in Focus conference held in Bilbao, Spain. OCTA made important contributions to the World Food Travel project Association - «Have Fork will Travel book» that promotes gastronomy and tourism worldwide. It collaborates with the tourist industry of Ontario and participates in the steering committee and working committees in order to promote their interests through the gastronomy tourism development. In cooperation with the Canadian tourism department, it has

participated in many projects and initiatives supported by the Government of Canada. OCTA invited and participated in the meeting of leaders of the tourism industry and the Tourism Ministry to revise the existing strategy and to describe in the best way possible steps to create a new action plan. It participated in the steering committee for the creation of a gastronomy tourism "Office". It contributed and organized the development of work committees dealing with the implementation of each of the objectives of OCTA. It participates in activities coordinated with the regions and local communities that already use tourist destinations rating system (Premier Ranked Tourism Destination Framework). It established a direct connection with other provincial networks in the country. It introduced interconnection with the culinary chain links and tourism supply. OCTA contribute effectively and promotes the development of culinary tourism products and partnerships which, after their evaluation, are considered *«ready for market»*. OCTA contributed to the creation of a **Gastronomy Tourism Partnership** project. It undertook the dissemination and communication of all relevant research results. It contributes variously to the education and training of human resources of the state in order to develop appropriate educational programs and tools which will help in the smooth operation of the tourism industry. It works with managers, regions and communities that have completed the *tourist destinations classification program (Premier- Ranked Tourism)*. It institutionalizes awards and alternative ways of recognition for the industry in order to highlight the bright examples, to reward significant achievements in gastronomy tourism and to be recognized, the businesses, the regions and the partners invested who invested time and money in order to create exceptional destinations and gastronomy tourism related products. Finally, OCTA works systematically towards creating a supply chain fully networked that promotes partnerships and communication among members and businesses. Much of the effort is focused on the establishment of a funding mechanism so that access to funds for gastronomic tourism projects and related business can be achieved in the most efficient way, in order to successfully address the objectives and priorities of the stakeholders.

9. The importance of education in Economic Development

From our research is demonstrated that in all its forms and manifestations, gastronomy is a key component in the offered tourist product of the Ontario state. Equally important though is the role of proper training of human resources involved in the tourism process and constitutes the backbone of this effort, (Long, 2004). The industry of culinary tourism in Ontario is still new, but it continues to grow steadily, while as everything alive, it should also be adapted to the new conditions, by following the needs of visitors and modern trends of world tourism. Understanding the importance of the development of gastronomy tourism to the local economy, the higher educational institutions in the region, as knowledge institutions, but also as members of this peculiar alliance for economic development of Ontario, they have developed modern educational programs. So the best possible

preparation of the next generation will be achieved by those academic skills needed to continue tourism develops successfully in Ontario, remaining competitive at the highest level. For the importance of education in the development and progress of a nation, but also for the difficult process of learning, the Aristotle has been extensively reported that, *"The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is always sweet "*and in Ontario the planners of the future (see OCTA), know very well the importance of proper education in development, so they invest in it systematically. According to Ozturk (2001), education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development. No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. In the earlier neoclassical models, education was not considered a major input for production and hence was not included in growth models (Harberger, 1998: 1-2). In the 1960s empirical evidence stimulated the "human investment revolution in economic thought" (Bowman, 1966). The seminal works of (Schultz, 1961) and (Denison, 1962: 67) led to studies indicating education's contribution to the economic growth of western economies (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1974; Behrman, 1990, Psacharopoulos, 1984). Education is also an important contributor to technological capability and technical change in industry. Statistical analysis showed that the skill and education levels of workers and entrepreneurs (Deraniyagala, 1995). According to Lucas (1998), the higher the level of education of the work force the higher the overall productivity of capital because the more educated are more likely to innovate, and thus affect everyone's productivity (Perotti, 1993). There is also a positive feedback from improved education to greater income equality, and higher rates of growth (Psacharopoulos, 1992). Knowledge accumulation influences a country's trade performance and competitiveness (Grossman and Helpman 1989).

10. Policy implications

It is clear that culinary tourism can help a region reach its overall objectives to increase tourism revenues and achieve its goals. While studying the case of Ontario as best practice, one can realize the importance of the effective and decisive leadership into the realization of this goal. We also realize the importance of LAs' involvement and commitment to the cause along with the importance of specialist and industry's experts' involvement in order to plan and communicate the necessary messages and information (see OCTA). Finally we documented the importance of realistic strategy planning and involvement of the private sector and the local enterprises in order for food tourism to grow. It is obvious that united the community must engulf this effort with the inspired leadership and governmental guidance and feel the developmental process as its own in order to succeed. Local population must understand the benefits; demand and have role and speech into the planning and the realization of the effort in order to achieve a successful result that serves its interests.

At the same time, the added value in Ontario's example is the acceptance of the private sector's significant contribution in the business development of a region with the assistance and

support of LGs and not the opposite. The most important thing is that the Canadians have shown that they can create and invest in a product (food and wine tourism) while the required investments for such development in order to operate and yield benefits to the local community are minimal compared to the conventional types of tourism. Basically Canadians managed to invest the least, while utilizing intangible elements of culture such as gastronomy, and they expect huge profits through the travelers' personal experience of such a products and tourism in general.

For Greece of austerity, with harsh economic and financial policies & memorandums and with the crippled economy after seven years of recession (so far), this is a beneficial and effective tourism development model, with minimal investment costs and great return on capital, maybe the only realistic under the existing economic conditions. Learning from the Canadians, the Greek LGs could organize and show off, with modern ways, their culture and history transforming them with the local gastronomy into a market ready, intangible product. Beyond the fact that no large investments are required (such as hotels construction of theme parks and other expensive tourism infrastructure) for this kind of promotion, gastronomy and local cuisine, showcase, simultaneously, efficiently and economically, local producers and local products, contributing to the local economy and to the openness of farmers and SMEs of the region to the global markets.

Finally if a LGA, managed to organize successfully and operate efficiently such a tourism development model, they could pass it on successfully, to potential customers under a fee and even "sell" it to other Greek LAs and also abroad, creating wealth (see OCTA). At a time when Greece –is looking for effective economic solutions to contribute to country's financial development, the example of the exploitation of gastronomy tourism in the province of Ontario and the exemplary engagement of Canadian municipalities in it is a best practice for Greek municipalities and for the entire country.

This specific development model of operation and intervention of LA, goes beyond the Greek territory and could have a beneficial effect on many developing regions around the world where they do not possess financial strength, but only their authenticity and originality instead, which could share to the benefit of their local population and economy.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

The example of Ontario, Canada is an exceptional case, and as a best practice it highlights the importance of LG in the development process. It also shows the roll, the way and the manner in which LA in Greece can and must contribute constructively and effectively for the effective development of the region and the country in general. The development of sustainable tourism requires that both levels of government (region - municipalities) will assume their responsibilities and cooperate in the best way possible to achieve common development goals. The principles that support sustainable development, entailing and the need for cooperation with LAs of a broad range of stakeholders, actors and social partners, so that can manage together tourism in a sustainable way, and

beneficial to the local community. LG and development policy-making bodies should achieve their goal by methodical planning, while promoting sustainable tourism development.

The comprehension of the needs, positions and requirements of all interested parties (e.g. Tourism businesses, visitors and the local community) the continuous and adequate information to all parties, the honesty and sincerity of intentions, along with the undertaking of sustainable tourism initiatives, will help achieving much needed sustainable development, which in any case cannot be achieved if it will not win first, the hearts and minds of the local population. In addition, national and LAs and all stakeholders, should actively participate in the reshaping of the strategy and policies for tourism development in order to be represented all the trends and interests of each branch, in the best possible way.

LG should not only have a dominant role in determining the development direction, but also in promoting and ensure the goals of sustainable tourism development of the particular destination. In order to achieve a mutually accepted developmental proposal, first step should be that small and medium- sized tourism enterprises be given the opportunity to express their needs and their opinions , in matters relating to the overall planning and implementation . In this way, the responsibility of tourism enterprises will increase along with their participation in the development process in proportion to their degree of involvement and size, while they will be encouraged to participate constructively in any future problems solving process.

It is important to be understand that the strategy of sustainable tourism development should include the management of all those tourism resources, but also all those interested in such a way, so that they are served the economic, social and operational needs of a region, while preserving at the same time as the most precious of its virtues, its identity and its cultural authenticity. Finally, as vigilant guardian, LAs should contribute to the growth but at the same time to protect the public interest and the natural resources of their area of responsibility, for the benefit of citizens and future generations because, as aptly have said: "*the environment, not ours, we just borrow it from our childrenso we owe to deliver it in a better condition than that we received it..* "

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