

Food souvenirs in the perception of the tourist: the case of the artisanal minas Serro cheese

Souvenirs gastronômicos na percepção do turista: o caso do queijo minas artesanal do serro

Gastronomic souvenirs from the tourists perspectives: the case of the artisanal minas serro cheese

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Abstract: The present study aimed to analyze the artisanal minas cheese as a food souvenir in the perception of the tourist. **The justification of the theme** refers to the fact that souvenirs carry different meanings for the tourist and also serve to the divulgation of the destiny. Food souvenirs evoke a taste memory and a sharing of different experiences. The choice for the artisanal cheese from Serro as a food souvenir was due to the fact that this product is a component of the culture of the state of Minas Gerais (Brazil) and holds a record of intangible heritage and geographical indication. The research **approach** was quanti-qualitative, and the **methodology** of a questionnaire applied online to people who traveled to the producing region was chosen. There were 129 answers, out of which 103 considered valid. Direct observation was also carried out at commercial locations during field research. **Originality** derives from the scarce works on food souvenirs and more specifically on products with registration of geographical indication as souvenirs of this category. **The results** point out fragilities in the commercialization of the product as a food souvenir. However, the respondents demonstrated a favorable behavior to issues related to differentiating identity, identification of origin, adequate packaging and easy transportation. The findings are congruent with the proposal of Horodyski et al. (2014).

Keywords: Attitude. Food Souvenir. Artisanal Cheese. Serro.

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Resumo: Este estudo teve como **objetivo** analisar o queijo minas artesanal como souvenir gastronômico, sob a percepção do turista. A **justificativa do tema** refere-se ao fato de que os souvenirs carregam diversos significados para o turista e também servem à divulgação do destino. Os souvenirs gastronômicos permitem uma memória gustativa e um compartilhamento da vivência diferenciado. A escolha do queijo minas artesanal do Serro como souvenir gastronômico deu-se pelo fato desse produto ser componente da cultura do estado de Minas Gerais (Brasil) e detém registro de patrimônio imaterial e de indicação geográfica. A **abordagem** da pesquisa foi quanti-qualitativa e optou-se pela **metodologia** de questionário aplicado *online* a pessoas que viajaram à região produtora. Obteve-se 129 respostas, das quais 103 consideradas válidas. Também foi realizada observação direta em locais de comercialização durante pesquisa de campo. Sua **originalidade** decorre dos escassos trabalhos sobre souvenirs gastronômicos e mais especificamente sobre produtos com registro de indicação geográfica como souvenirs dessa categoria. Os **resultados** apontam fragilidades na comercialização do produto como souvenir gastronômico. Entretanto, os respondentes demonstraram atitude favorável a questões relacionadas a identidade diferenciadora, identificação da origem, embalagem adequada e transporte facilitado. Os achados são congruentes com a proposta de Horodyski et al. (2014).

Palavras-chave: Atitude. Souvenir Gastronômico. Queijo Minas Artesanal. Serro.

Resumen: Este estudio tuvo como **objetivo** analizar el queso minas artesanal como souvenir gastronómico, en la percepción de los turistas. La **justificación** del tema se refiere al hecho de que los souvenirs llevan diferentes significados para el turista y también sirven para difundir el destino. Los recuerdos gastronómicos permiten la memoria gustativa y un compartir de la experiencia diferenciado. La elección del queso Serro como souvenir gastronómico fue dada por el hecho de que este producto es componente de la cultura del estado de Minas Gerais (Brasil) y detiene el registro del patrimonio inmaterial y la indicación geográfica. El **abordaje** de pesquisa fue quanti-qualitativo y se optó pela **metodología** cuestionario que se aplicó online a las personas que han viajado la región productora. Fueron obtenidas 129 respuestas, 103 de las cuales son consideradas válidas. También se realizó la observación directa en los sitios de comercialización durante la investigación de campo. Su **originalidad** radica en la escases de trabajo a respeito de souvenirs gastronómicos y más específicamente de productos con registro de indicación geográfica como souvenirs de esa categoría. Los **resultados** muestran debilidades en la comercialización del producto como souvenir gastronómico. Sin embargo, los encuestados mostraron actitud positiva a los aspectos de la identidad distintiva, la identificación del origen, el embalaje adecuado y el transporte facilitado. Los resultados son consistentes con la propuesta de Horodyski et al. (2014).

Palabras clave: Actitud. Souvenir gastronómico. Queso Minas Artesanal. Serro.

1 INTRODUCTION

The artisanal minas cheese comprises the culture of the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil, and its traditional mode of production is recognized by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute as an immaterial Brazilian heritage (IPHAN, 2008; Meneses, 2006). There are several production areas recognized in the state (EMATER-MG, 2011) and two of them (Canastra and Serro) also have the geographical indication register, specifically of indication of origin, granted by the National Institute of Industrial

Property (INPI, 2013). In view of this traditional character, the product can be considered an important asset for tourism in the region, because "traditional food practices, their products and their services, when incorporated into the tourist context, become - rather than cultural manifestations and identities - strategic elements for the creation of a local "brand" (Gimenes-Minasse, 2015, p.190).

Food is an essential component of a travel experience, but also (increasingly) becomes a major or secondary attractive item for tourists (Fagliari, 2005; Gimenes-Minasse,

2015). Bringing food from a trip can extend and enhance the experience (Altintzoglou, Heide, & Borch, 2016; Buczkowska, 2014). For the tourist, they carry different meanings related to the destination visited and also serve to the divulgation of the destination to other potential tourists (Boto, Teodorescu, Pârgaru, Stancioiu, & Radu, 2013; Horodyski, Manosso, Bizinelli, & Gândara, 2014). Therefore, the objective of the present work was to analyze the artisanal minas cheese as a food souvenir based on the perception of the tourist. In order to do so, one of the traditional producing regions was chosen, and a structured questionnaire was applied to the visitors of the eleven municipalities that compose it.

To verify the perception of the tourist in relation to attributes considered interesting to food souvenirs is relevant to both the market and the academy. To the academy, because there are relatively few studies that address souvenirs and more specifically food souvenirs (Altintzoglou et al., 2016; Horodyski et al., 2014); and marketing-wise, because by knowing the consumer perception, entrepreneurs can see opportunities for improvement and/or new businesses.

Following the present introduction, a theoretical reference composed by a discussion with respect to the conceptualization, desirable characteristics and market importance of food souvenirs is presented. Then, the methodological choices that based the development of the work are exposed. Finally, we present the results, discussions and the final considerations followed by the references.

2 FOOD SOUVENIRS

Souvenirs are "goods acquired by tourists as a way of remembering the visited and experienced place" (Horodyski, Manosso, & Gândara, 2012). They are the third phase of a journey that can be called "extended journey" (Buczkowska, 2014). For Gordon (1986), the souvenirs are categorized as: a) pictorial products, which present images of the tourist destination; b) copies and icons, which represent elements that are part of the destination such as a monument or art work; c) products with a brand of the destination such as mugs, keychains, shirts, etc.; d) piece-of-the-rock objects, which are characterized by their raw or manufactured state, such as shells, seeds, sand, etc.; e) local products, which include art pieces, handicrafts, folk art, food products and clothing.

Based on the above, food souvenir can be classified as a local product (Gordon, 1986). This aspect is reinforced by the growing interest of tourists in items related to food heritage, which may even be a competitive distinction of destinations (Gimenes-Minasse, 2015), and the need for specific categorization and study emerges. Buczkowska (2014) proposes a category called "culinary souvenirs", divided into four categories: local food and beverage, kitchen gadgets, recipes, food guides, local menus, and photos of food, markets, local restaurants, etc. Horodyski et al. (2014, p.85) specifically address the first category and define it as "food souvenirs".

The authors classify this category as "food that represents a tourist destination, consumed as souvenirs of the visited venue". However, it is noteworthy that not all tourists

have the basic concern with the origin of the food souvenir, having a more commercial behavior focused on the product itself, but associated with the place of origin in its individual conception (Horodyski et al., 2012; Shen, 2011).

According to Hazman-Wong and Sumarjan (2016), food souvenirs may be better than "traditional" souvenirs in that they give tourists the opportunity to share moments and experiences with their families and friends by sharing food and/or beverage that evokes specific look, taste, textures and scents of a place when they return to their place of origin.

However, according to the authors, not every food product is suitable for use as a souvenir (Buczowska, 2014, Hazman-Wong & Sumarjan, 2016). Elements such as quality, taste, place of origin, production place, history, authenticity, practicality (including customs barriers, size, possibility of breaking, smelling or getting rotten in the suitcase), price and packaging contribute to the choice and purchase of food as a souvenir (Altintzoglou et al., 2016; Buczowska, 2014).

Cohen and Avieli (2004) point out that the tourism use of local cuisine also depends on the production of a nutritious, hygienic, accessible and culturally acceptable food. These factors make the offer of one or several products a little more delicate and go through questions of familiarity, estrangement, and cultural and biological influences that should be considered according to each proposal.

Food souvenirs need to be adapted to the tourists' needs, but they cannot fail to

have the characteristics of the visited destination (Altintzoglou et al., 2016). There are studies that address the concept of 'local food' for foods and beverages produced in the region where they are offered as souvenirs of tourism destinations (Lehto, Cai, O'Leary, & Huan, 2004; Swanson, 2004; Swanson & Horridge, 2004) and contribute to the understanding of the concept of food souvenirs. In addition, the concept of 'food souvenir' was deepened in the study of Horodyski et al. (2004), based on previous research (Kim & Littrell, 2001, Mitchel & Orwig, 2002, Morgan & Pritchard, 2005, Norrild 2004, and Swanson, 2004). Thus, the authors emphasize that the food souvenir must have a distinguishable identity, identification of origin, adequate packaging and easy transport so that it is able to materialize the experience of the visit itself, to extend the feelings lived by the people after they return home and to share memories with other people to motivate new trips (Horodyski et al., 2014). Adjusted, understood and analyzed as food souvenir, these aspects are synthesized and proposed by Horodyski et al. (2014) in the categories Identification, Packaging, Identity, and Transportation.

"Identification" refers to the label and brand of foods and beverages which convey information and enable product recognition and relationship with a tourist and territorial image by the consumer. One of the strategies that can be used in relation to this variable is the use of geographical indications (indication of origin and denomination of origin, in the Brazilian case) and other distinctive signs as certification marks or collective marks.

"Packaging" relates to the function of wrapping and/or grouping products, as well as facilitating transport by protecting the integrity of the product contained therein. In the case of food souvenirs, it is desirable that they are easy to carry and are as light and as less spacious as possible, as well as aesthetically attractive. "Transportation" refers to customs restrictions on the entry and exit of foods and beverages that may require import or sanitary certifications. And "Identity" refers to elements that certify the product's belonging to a specific territory.

The adjustment to the aforementioned aspects certainly generates costs to the company that intends to offer food souvenirs. Thus, an analysis of the behavior of tourists to each of the aspects for specific products may be interesting. Before exposing the methodological choices that led to such an analysis, a brief conceptualization of the consumer's attitude and relevance is required.

Several studies that address consumers' attitudes (Allen, Machleit, & Kleine, 1992; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2000; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Larentis, 2012; Pham, 1998; Solomon, 2002) also address experiences in what concerns to a broad context of products and services, which affect consumers in their consumption experiences, in a comprehensive way, from the recognition of the need, through the knowledge of the product and the purchase decision until its disposal.

Consumer's attitudes consists of general and lasting evaluations of people, objects, advertisements, or specific issues (Solomon, 2002), and it is a positive, favorable, or

negative, unfavorable, judgment of the experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Rodrigues, Carlos, Mendonça, & Correa, 2009). For Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the attitude can have a judgment or an affective character. The attitude provides the categorization of an object under constant evaluation (Allen et al., 1992). For Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (2000) the attitude is formed by three components:

1. Cognitive component: involves the beliefs, knowledge and information of the person in relation to a certain object;
2. Affective component: involves the feelings and emotions of the person in relation to the object;
3. Conative component: involves the intentions to buy and consume the object.

Larentis (2012) mentions that each individual has particular beliefs and feelings and, therefore, an individual attitude is often based on feelings rather than beliefs, and vice versa. In the same way, the author believes that the third component would be a consequence of the first two, not composing an attitude, but rather a possibility due to the cognitive and affective components (Larentis, 2012). This is because attitude gathers inclinations and feelings, prejudices, distortions, and pre-conceived ideas of an individual on any subject (Thurstone, 1976).

Both favorable and unfavorable individual attitudes, mediated by contingency factors, can be considered as tendencies of an action of someone with respect to some object or idea (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Accord-

ing to Rodrigues et al. (2009, p. 169), the attitudes represent a pre-disposition of consumers in relation to something, "is learned and influenced so that individuals can behave in a way to accept or repel the object itself".

In this respect, Porto (2012) considers that consumers around the world have increased their demand for products protected by signs of substance, including geographical indications, certification marks and collective marks. Consumer behavior has changed as a result of their greater knowledge and interactions. Issues such as safe consumption, conscious consumption, sustainable crop, regional development, traceability, food safety, tradition, typicity, and *terroir* begin to affect their decisions (Porto, 2012; Tregear & Giraud, 2011). Thus, demand and price may increase in the face of valuation strategies of products with local identity.

Pricing is a complex process that involves several factors to be analyzed (Boone & Kurtz, 2004; Santos, 1997) and it is also strategic, since it is the pricing that determines profitability and can serve as a promotional tool (Morrison, 2012). Price decisions are guided by three main theories: economic-based, cost-based and market-based (Machado, Fiorentin, & Scarpin, 2015). According to the authors, market-based proposal takes into account marketing, sociology and psychology fundamentals for price, and is suitable for distinguished products so that they are not parameterized by the prices defined by the competition. In this sense, we try to find out the price that the consumer is willing to pay for the product or service and the relation to the characteristics of the product with its price (making it increase or decre-

se). It should be noted that estimates of cost, demand and supply of competitors must be taken into account regardless of the method chosen for pricing (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Considering the experiential character of souvenirs (Horodyski et al., 2012), especially food souvenirs, which is the object of the present study, it is verified the importance of understanding the perspective of consumers tourists by analyzing their attitudes towards this type of product. The methodology of the present research is presented in the next section.

3 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Aiming to analyze the artisanal minas cheese as a food souvenir, based on the perception of the tourist, the research can be characterized as exploratory. Analyzing the cheese in general could disregard particularities inherent to each region, so the artisanal minas cheese from Serro was chosen because it was the object of the first geographical indication of cheese in Brazil in 2011. It was also the first one to receive the title of intangible heritage of Minas Gerais by the State Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (IEPHA-MG) in 2002 (the first declaration in the country).

According to the National Institute of Industrial Property (*INPI – Instituto Nacional da Propriedade Industrial*), the region that produces this cheese is made up of ten municipalities, according to the INPI, namely: Alvorada de Minas, Conceição do Mato Dentro, Dom Joaquim, Materlândia, Paulistas, Rio Vermelho, Sabinópolis, Santo Antônio do Itambé, Serra Azul de Minas and Serro. There

is, however, one more municipality that can be included as a producer: Coluna, included in the most recent demarcation of the Farming and Livestock Institute of Minas Gerais (IMA - Instituto Mineiro de Agropecuária, n.d.). Thus, eleven municipalities were considered in the present study.

Data were collected by applying a questionnaire directed to tourists who have already visited the producing region (one or more municipalities), and the direct observation in field visit was used to verify the places and conditions of sale of the product.

The questionnaire was built on the virtual Survey Monkey platform and disseminated through the social network Facebook. This social network is currently considered the largest social network in the world in terms of number of active users and, in addition, studies indicate that it can influence consumer perceptions and attitudes towards products and services (Machado, 2015). In order to obtain a greater range of qualified individuals (people who visited the region), it was requested to disseminate the research in the official pages of all the municipalities included in the demarcated region, understanding that social networks can be considered as a means of researching information for decision making by tourists. The characteristics of individuals who respond to research on the Internet have approached applied research outside of it due to the increasing insertion of people on the web, but it is still important to note that people selected themselves to participate in the research (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). In order to increase the interest in responding and not simply "contributing to research", reward in-

centive was used (participation in a lottery by completing the questionnaire).

A total of 129 responses were obtained, out of which 103 were considered valid because they included visitors from one or more of the municipalities pertinent to the region (question filter) and because they were complete in the whole. Twenty-six were discarded in the analysis for failing to complete the required responses. The questionnaires had an initial part related to the profile of the respondent, besides addressing tourist consumption and tourist behavior related to Serro cheese as a food souvenir. The proposal of Horodyski et al. (2014) was used to construct this data collection instrument. These quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics developed using Microsoft Excel software. In most cases, graphs have been constructed or percentage has been shown in order to characterize the issues under discussion.

Direct observation was non-structured and comprehended the main commercial places in the municipality after which the cheese was named (Serro, MG). A souvenir shop, two producing farms, a shop of "mining products", supermarket, restaurant and bakery were visited. The criterion for choosing these was accessibility. It was observed the form of production and commercialization of the product considering aspects desirable to the food souvenirs, but not limited to these aspects, so that the observation could capture aspects not foreseen *a priori*. The study used the N-Vivo software (Version 10) as an auxiliary tool for content analysis. In this software the collected data were organized in the form of primary documents/sources

grouped in a hermeneutic work unit. Tooling was useful for recording and characterizing coding by taking the text, the "tag codes" or "nodes" and the text units (selected sections) without losing the link between the original text and the codes (Bauer, 2002). In this tool, the researcher's analysis procedures are guided by the principles: visualization, integration, chance and exploration. In addition, the use of this type of qualitative research support software brings the benefits of consistency, speed, flexibility and, mostly, contributes to the transparency of the analysis process (Bandeira-de-Mello, 2006).

The following section presents the results of the research and a confrontation with the theoretical reference.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to better understand the present study, it is necessary to characterize the product and highlight its economic, cultural and social importance for the region, which justifies its analysis as a food souvenir. Thus, this section initially contemplates a discussion regarding artisanal minas cheese and then highlight the results found in the research applied to the specifically targeted clients (tourists who visited one or more cities that make up the region that produce the artisanal minas Serro cheese).

In Minas Gerais specifically, production is associated with the occupation of the territory due to the discoveries of gold and diamonds during the 17th and 18th centuries. In the mid-18th century, with the development of the dairy region, artisanal cheese emerges with characteristics identified today

in the so-called "Minas cheese" (DPI/IPHAN, 2014; Pires, 2013). The mining regions coexisted with a diversified rural production since the beginning of the occupation of the territory of the state. "Cheese production was inherent in a food supply system with a diversified economy in which farming, mining, handicrafts and the provision of various services were independent activities and sources of income" (DPI/IPHAN, 2014, p. 27). With the decline of the mining activity, cheesemaking activity gains autonomous economic expression, substitutes for decadent activities and competes in regional economies (Pires, 2013, p.38). Thus, in the Minas Gerais food system, cheese can be considered an important element for the agro-pastoral economy and culture from colonial times to the present day.

In Minas Gerais, cheese is an important cuisine feature, as well as it considered an element that favors sociability:

When sitting at the table to deal with business, celebrate friends, or talk to someone, Minas Gerais dwellers like to have some cheese, which is consumed while "small talking". The longer the conversation, the less cheese is left on the board, and the less questions are left to settle. Much better if the table is in the kitchen, because the state cultural says that the kitchen invites familiarity and frank conversation (IPHAN, 2008).

As a national cultural heritage, its recognition and the delimitation of areas with specificities and intrinsic notoriety to the product by means of geographical indication indicate that this product can be of great tourism interest. Cerdan et. al. (2010) state that geographical indications highlight the particularities not only of the product, but

also of the territory where it is inserted. This originality and its own characteristics can be attractive to tourists since the travelers "consume places" (its culture, resources, environment, and landscape, among other subjective possibilities) and seek more and more experiences to which they can attribute meaning and emotions deriving from the characteristics and particular experiences to the place (Tonini & Lavandoski, 2011). This consumption can take place before the trip, through the tasting of a product; during the trip, through activities related to production, and after the trip, with its extension through souvenirs (Medeiros & Passador, 2015).

Tourism consumption and consumer behavior are likely to vary. Therefore, it is important to characterize the sample of respondents used in the research in view that the profile of the visitor can have reflection on their desires and needs. Thus, before starting the central discussions of the present study, we first describe some data (origin, age group, motivation of the visit) of the respondents.

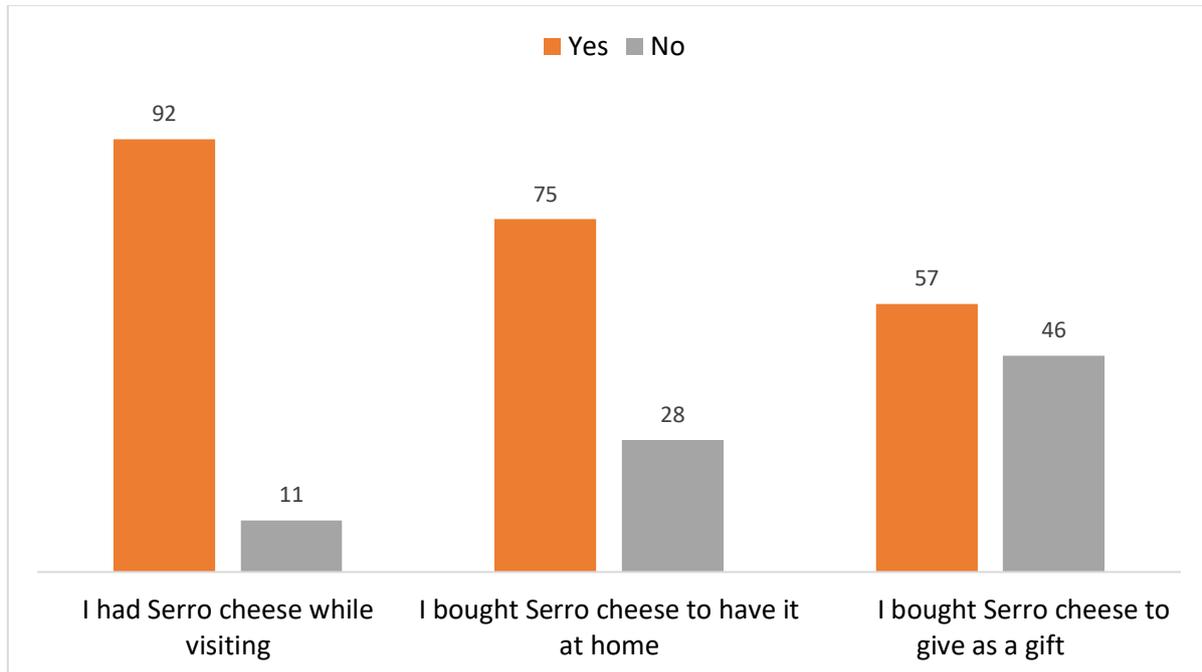
Most respondents (89%) come from the state of Minas Gerais, followed by visitors from the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The characteristic of having a larger share of the state's demand is a characteristic of Minas Gerais. Although it observes only the 22 inductive destinations of the state, it is interesting to mention the similarity to the results regarding the profile of the visitors exposed in the research of tourist demand of the state in 2014 (Qualitest & Minas Gerais,

2015). According to this, there was a percentage of 66.7% of visitors from the state itself, followed by 12.9% from São Paulo and 7% from Rio de Janeiro.

In what concerns age group, there was also similarity with the research of tourist demand of the state. Most respondents (67%) are aged from 21 to 35. The second age group with the highest occurrence was 36 to 50 (17%), followed by those aged from 51 to 65 (9%). The major motivation of the visits, according to the categories used in the studies of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015), in most municipalities is "leisure, recreation and rest". Only in the municipality of Paulistas the majority of visits were prone to "visit relatives and friends".

Graphic 1 shows the consumption of Serro cheese by tourists. Out of the 103 respondents considered, 92 consumed the product during the visit to one of the municipalities belonging to the cheese region in question. It was already expected and shows the importance of the product not only for the state dweller as described in the IPHAN report (DPI/IPHAN, 2014), but also for those who visit the state. Serro cheese was also consumed as a souvenir by most of the respondents, either for their own consumption (73%) or as a gift (55.3%). It is important to note that sometimes the tourist buys for himself and, for various reasons, eventually gives the souvenir to others (Buczowska, 2014). In the case of food and beverage, this sharing can be facilitated by means of a joint consume.

Graphic 1 - Consume of the artisanal minas Serro cheese by tourists



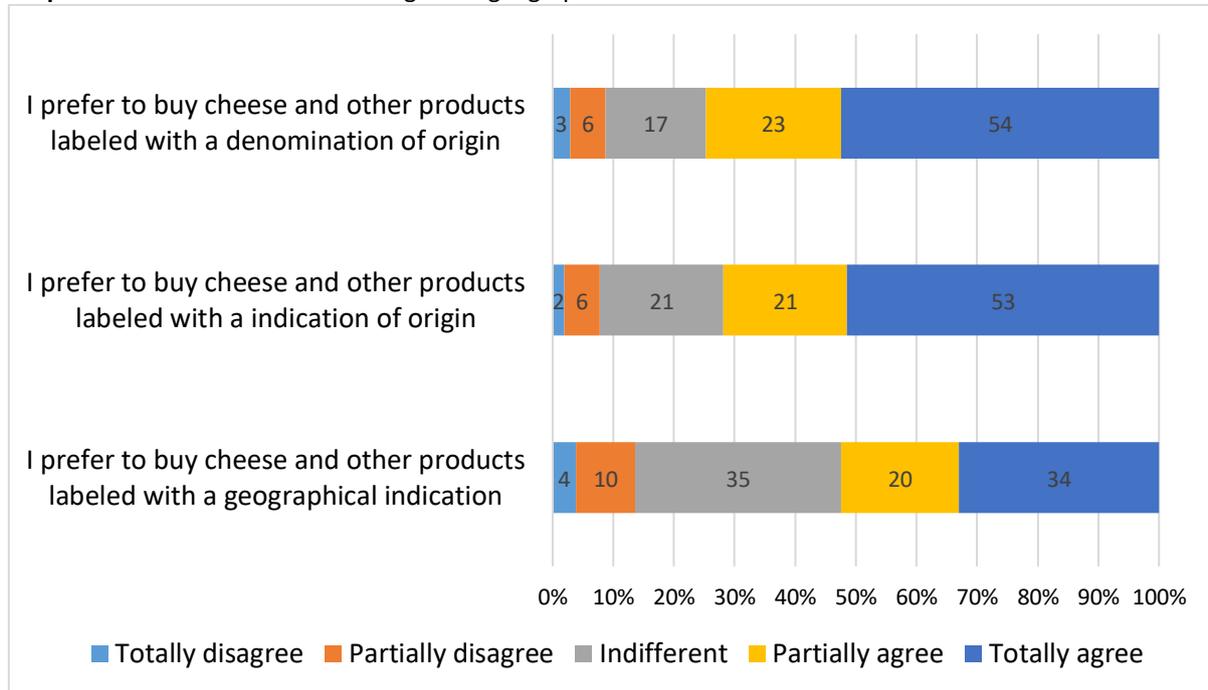
Source: research data

According to Buczkowska (2014) food and beverage become souvenirs in two different ways. The first way is when the purchase is influenced by the moment of excitement by a particular taste, packaging, place or by the way the product is sold or served (ceremonial). The second refers to the premeditated purchase of the souvenir from previous knowledge about the food (from guides, requests from somebody who does not participate in the trip, from previous tasting). Thus, it was sought to verify if the tourists knew the cheese and if that was one of the motivational factors of the trip. Sixty-three percent of respondents already knew Serro cheese before the visit, and 27% pointed to Serro cheese as one of the factors that motivated the visit.

The research subjects were argued in relation to some issues related to the factors

proposed by Horodyski et al. (2014): Identification, Packaging, Identity, and Transportation. Regarding the identification, it was verified *in loco* that many of the cheeses sold do not have information regarding the product, producer, or the fact that this cheese has a record of indication of origin. In all sale points, however, the attendant mentioned the cheese producer and maturity differences. The information regarding patrimony was mentioned in one of the stores, and the information on indication of origin was not mentioned in any of the places. Since one of the strategies used in relation to this aspect is to emphasize the geographical indication register (Horodyski et al., 2014), tourists were asked if this factor interferes in the intention to purchase the product. The results with respect to this issue are shown in Graphic 2.

Graphic 2 - Tourists' attitude with regard to geographical indication information



Source: research data

The results (graphic 2) indicate that respondents do not recognize denomination of origin (DO) and indication of origin (IO) as types of geographical indication (GI), because while more than half of the respondents mentioned they prefer to buy cheeses and other products with DO and IO registration, only about 30% mentioned they prefer to purchase products with a GI registration. Also in relation to the trip, the two categories had greater number of full agreement in comparison to the general term.

Nevertheless, the sum of the respondents who agrees totally or partially with the statements is over than half of the valid answers in all the cases, in this way, one can evaluate the attitude of the visitors as favorable before the purchase of the cheese with registration of geographical indication.

The producers of the Serro cheese, holder of indication of origin, could therefore use this sign strategically in the tourist information media (labeling, folders, etc.), corroborating Horodyski et al. (2014).

In addition to the use of these distinctive signs, it was investigated whether tourists would be willing to pay more for the relevant attributes of food souvenirs (distinguished identity, origin identification, adequate packaging, and easy transport) and what the current situation of the product offered. The reality and the perspective of the tourist with respect to these questions are also described, and then a summary of the behavior toward these aspects is presented in Table 1.

The packaging found at the point of sale of the destination is usually restricted to

a plastic wrap that comes in direct contact with the cheese (primary packaging, according to Kotler & Keller (2006)). Only in one point was offered a secondary packaging, or a paper bag for gift that had a landscape of the region stamped in the background, the cheese in the foreground and the information that it was an intangible heritage. This packaging was made by a specific producer and therefore only served for his cheese. In this specific case, the packaging facilitated the transport, but did not prevent the odor from spreading into the tourist baggage, which is a desirable factor, according to Altintzoglou et al. (2016). Another issue that must be mentioned is that the cheese has different maturations. When it is fresh, cooling is required. In addition, its texture is softer, which makes its transportation more difficult. Regarding this issue, most tourists (66% of the respondents) were willing to pay more for the product if there was a package that facilitated their transportation.

Since the transportation restrictions of the cheese in the country refer to health

issue, tourists were asked about this issue. A high percentage of respondents (74%) are willing to pay a higher value for a hygiene-sanitary quality certificate, confirming the proposal of Horodyski et al. (2014).

Finally, the question of identity was addressed in two statements, one regarding the existence of signs related to the place of production and another with respect to the "traditional" mode of production. This second question was addressed because the way to make this cheese is considered heritage, and there are particularities that link the final product to the visited place. More than half of the respondents would pay more for the cheese if it presented indications of the visited place (54%), and would pay more if there was a form of production guarantee in the "traditional" form (68%). The first question was addressed in the secondary packaging observed in the field (which contained a landscape picture). The second was not observed.

Table 1 - Synthesis of tourists' attitude towards desirable attributes of food souvenirs

	No	Yes
I would pay more for the cheese if the package made transport easier	34%	66%
I would pay more for the cheese if I was sure of the hygienic-sanitary quality	26%	74%
I would pay more for the cheese if there was any indication that referred to the place I visited (as a city name or photo)	46%	54%
I would pay more for the cheese if the production was assured according to the traditional way	32%	68%

Source: research data

According to the proposal of Horodyski et al. (2014) it is desirable to the food souvenir a distinguished identity, identification of origin, adequate packaging and easy transport. As seen in Table 1, the research

subjects in question are willing to pay more to receive a product suitable for these issues. However, it should be noted that the aspect with the lowest positive percentage is related to the identification of origin (name or photo

of the city). In contrast, the distinctive identity conferred by the traditional form of production is one of the most valued aspects.

From the perception of the tourists, the *in loco* observation and the theoretical reference, some suggestions regarding the Serro cheese as a food souvenir are pointed out. To improve the issues of identity, packaging and identification, it is suggested the development of new packages of different appeals to the tourist: utility towards matu-

ration, representation and/or traditional production associating the product with APAQS (Association of Craft Producers of Serro Cheese), and aesthetics, among other issues. One possibility might be to rethink a packaging that has already been used (figure 1) which looks similar to formerly ones used in the region. In the time of the *tropeiros*⁴, the Serro cheese was wrapped in leaves of banana or straws of corn and carried in crates by animals.

Figure 1 - Wood packaging once used by APAQS as gift packaging



Source: research data

With regard to identification and identity, labeling could be used to identify the region, information on proper consumption and storage. The identification of the region and or municipality can corroborate so that third parties who have received the product as a gift can look for further information. Instructions regarding consumption and adequate storage may be relevant to possible changes in the organoleptic characteristics of the product (a matter that has been mentioned as a concer-

non the part of producers and traders).

Finally, the Serro cheese is a product of great historical importance, and this history can be outlined by means of educational work, in and out the region, corroborating to understand the meaning of the relevant registers (of geographical indication and intangible heritage) and the artisanal raw milk cheese and, subsequently, the insertion of the "seal" or information on these issues on the packaging or the place of commercialization of the product.

⁴ Local conductors of horsemen or mules who crossed large areas carrying cattle and goods.

Altintzoglou et al. (2016) found in his research the aspects "history about the food" and perceived authenticity as the major factors that took tourists to buy food souvenirs. These factors can be emphasized by the registers once obtained, but little used.

The implementation of the aforementioned suggestions certainly does not guarantee success to tourism and to organizations that may dedicate themselves, totally or partially, to the activity. It was not intended to prescribe actions, but rather to highlight possibilities based on the study. Like Mckercher (1999), it is understood that tourism operates in a non-linear, non-deterministic and dynamic way, so any turbulence (internal or external) can generate different results from those expected.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of the present work was to analyze the artisanal minas cheese as a food souvenir based on the perception of the tourist. To do so, an online questionnaire was applied to tourists who visited one or more municipalities in the producing region, and a direct observation was made of how the tourists find the product in places of commercialization in the tourist destination. Based on the results obtained and on the theoretical reference, some notes for the Serro cheese supply as souvenirs were made.

Data analysis points out weaknesses in the commercialization of the product in relation to the items considered important in the tourist decision (Altintzoglou et al., 2016;

Buczowska, 2014). Nevertheless, the respondent tourists showed a favorable attitude towards the payment of a higher value for the food souvenir in question if they had identification of geographical indication, packaging to facilitate transportation, identity highlighted by symbols and signs of the place, and seal of inspection (sanitary and hygienic certificates). These findings are congruent with the proposal of Horodyski et al. (2014) of desirable attributes to food souvenirs (distinguished identity, identification of origin, adequate packaging and easy transport).

The factors were separately asked to the tourists, however, some combinations could result in a greater favorability to buy or to increase the amount paid for the product. Still, it is understood that for an applied research online a smaller number of questions favored the reach of a greater number of respondents (103 valid respondents). It is understood that this number is appropriate to an exploratory research, and it is suggested that future descriptive or causal-character studies have a larger sample.

Another limitation that exists in the research refers to the observation in loco only in one of the municipalities of the producing region of the artisanal minas cheese of the Serro. We understood that the points of sale and products commercialized in the other municipalities would not present substantial difference and, faced with resource constraints, the option for the municipality that gives name to the product was the most appropriate.

Future studies may analyze other products that have geographical indication

registration as food souvenirs from the perspective of the tourist, but also from the perspective of the producers. They may also verify, in the case under study, the major variables involved in the purchase of Serro cheese as a food souvenir and what would be their order of importance.

Souvenirs are key features in the tourism experience, and food and beverage have gained prominence in this function. Products such as the artisanal minas Serro cheese carry an inseparable value to the territory and have greater potential of tourist consumption. However, the consumption during the visit can occur, but not the after-visit, due to desirable aspects to the food souvenirs which are not contemplated in the food supply. Therefore, research on this issue is relevant in both marketing and academic terms.

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