
The Potential of Culinary Heritage in the Development of Tourism in Rural Areas: The Example of Thematic Villages

Submitted 09/07/26, 1st revision 13/08/26, 2nd revision 21/08/26, accepted 10/09/26

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of this study is to assess the potential of culinary heritage for rural tourism development, using selected thematic villages in the Lubelskie Voivodeship as a case study.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research was conducted between 2022 and 2025 in five thematic villages in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, Poland. It included interviews with village leaders and local entrepreneurs, on-site observations, and a survey of 180 tourists and visitors. Discriminant function analysis was used to identify age-related differences in culinary tourism motivations.

Findings: The use of culinary heritage varied considerably among the analysed villages. The most diversified culinary offer was found in the Chamomile Village in Hołowno, which also recorded the highest tourist traffic (approximately 40,000 visitors annually). Respondents under 35 were particularly interested in culinary workshops and leisure activities, those aged 35–50 in trying new flavours, and those over 50 in healthy and organic food.

Practical Implications: Combining traditional food products with interactive culinary experiences and adapting the offer to different age groups may strengthen the tourism potential of thematic villages.

Originality/Value: The study integrates supply- and demand-side perspectives on culinary tourism, supporting the development of targeted rural tourism products.

Keywords: Culinary heritage, culinary tourism, thematic villages, rural tourism, rural development.

JEL codes: Z32, R11.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

Tourism development in rural areas increasingly relies on local cultural, historical, and natural resources that contribute to distinctive and authentic tourism products. Among these resources, culinary heritage, including traditional dishes, local products, food preparation methods, and related customs and skills, can strengthen local identity and enhance the attractiveness of rural destinations (Bessière, 1998).

Culinary workshops, tastings, and traditional food products can diversify the tourism offer and support local communities. Thematic villages provide one way of integrating such resources into coherent tourism products based on local traditions and characteristics (Idziak *et al.*, 2015).

Despite growing interest in culinary tourism, previous research has focused mainly on the role of local food in destination attractiveness and tourism development (Bessière, 1998; Sims, 2009; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016), tourist motivations (Berbel-Pineda *et al.*, 2019; Pérez-Priego *et al.*, 2019; Ullah *et al.*, 2022), and thematic villages as a tool for rural community development (Idziak *et al.*, 2015). Less attention has been paid to the role of culinary heritage in thematic villages, particularly from a combined supply-side and demand-side perspective encompassing culinary offerings, tourist traffic, and visitor motivations.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess the potential of culinary heritage for rural tourism development using selected thematic villages in the Lubelskie Voivodeship as a case study. The analysis focuses on the diversity of culinary products and experiences, tourist traffic, and age-related differences in culinary tourism motivations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Culinary Heritage as a Resource for Tourism Development in Rural Areas

Culinary heritage, encompassing traditional dishes, local products, food preparation methods, knowledge, skills, and related customs, is an important element of local culture and identity. In tourism, it can become a resource for creating authentic experiences, promoting local products, and supporting rural development (Bessière, 1998).

Local food also strengthens visitors' connection with the history, culture, and identity of a destination, contributing to the authenticity of the tourism experience (Sims, 2009). It can enhance destination attractiveness, particularly for tourists seeking local, authentic, and distinctive experiences (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). In rural areas, culinary heritage can additionally connect agriculture, food processing, gastronomy, trade, and tourism services, thereby supporting local economic development (Mazurek and Hawlena, 2026).

2.2 Thematic Villages as a Form of Using Local Heritage

One way to utilize the endogenous resources of rural areas is through the creation of thematic villages. Their operation is based on identifying a characteristic motif related to, among other things, history, culture, traditional crafts, natural resources, or specific skills of residents, and then using it to create a coherent offer addressed to visitors (Mazurek-Kusiak *et al.*, 2023).

Recent research confirms the growing importance of culinary heritage as a resource for rural development. Giamporcaro *et al.* (2025) indicate that local food products can fulfill not only an economic function but also constitute an element of territorial identity and living cultural heritage. Their use in experiential tourism can support local development and strengthen the social and economic resilience of rural communities. Similarly, Moliterni *et al.* (2025) emphasize the importance of cultural and culinary heritage for the development of tourism in rural areas, while pointing out that its potential is not always fully utilized.

Thematic villages can combine tourism, education, recreation, and culture. A key element of their operation is the utilization of local social capital and the involvement of residents in creating the tourism product. Idziak *et al.* (2015), analyzing the operation of thematic villages in Poland, highlighted the importance of local community participation in creating rural tourism experiences. This concept enables the transformation of existing resources and skills of residents into elements of the tourism product.

The inclusion of culinary heritage in thematic villages offers special opportunities. Traditional products can complement the village's core specialization, while tastings, culinary workshops and the opportunity to purchase local products expand the range of activities available to visitors. Tourists can thus not only observe local heritage but also actively participate in its exploration.

2.3 Motivations of Culinary Tourism Participants

Assessing the potential of culinary heritage requires considering not only the supply side, i.e., the availability of products and experiences, but also the needs and motivations of visitors. Berbel-Pineda *et al.* (2019) indicate that gastronomic experiences can be a motivating factor for travel and influence tourist satisfaction. Gastronomy can therefore influence both the decision to choose a destination and the subsequent evaluation of the stay.

However, tourists interested in gastronomy do not constitute a homogeneous group. Pérez-Priego *et al.* (2019) demonstrated the possibility of segmenting visitors based on their gastronomic motivations. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) also note the varying importance attributed to local food by different tourist groups.

The motivations of culinary tourism participants may include learning about local culture and traditions, seeking new flavours, gaining new experiences, entertainment, participation in food-related activities, and interest in specific characteristics of local products. Ullah *et al.* (2022) confirm the importance of gastronomic motivations in shaping tourist behaviour and destination experiences.

The diversity of tourist expectations indicates the need to analyse motivations also in relation to their socio-demographic characteristics. This has practical significance, as identifying the needs of specific market segments can enable better tailoring the culinary offerings of thematic villages.

3. Research Methodology

The research employed a diagnostic survey method, including face-to-face interviews with thematic village leaders and local product entrepreneurs in the Lubelskie Voivodeship. Observation was also used, with a study visit to each village. Additionally, a survey was conducted among 180 tourists and visitors to thematic villages.

A quota sampling procedure was applied, with age used as the quota variable. The final sample consisted of 60 respondents in each of the three age groups (under 35 years old – 33.3%, 35–50 years old – 33.3%, and over 50 years old – 33.3%). The sample comprised 51.67% women and 48.33% men. The research was conducted between 2022 and 2025.

The research was financed from the state budget under the program of the Minister of Education and Science in Poland, called "Science for Society", project number NdS/536437/2021/2022, funding amount PLN 386,952, total project value PLN 386,952.

Statistica 13.1 was used for statistical calculations. The importance of six motives for engaging in culinary tourism was assessed using a five-point Likert scale. The analysed motives included learning about authentic culinary traditions, trying new flavours, participation in culinary workshops, the opportunity to purchase traditional products, entertainment and leisure activities, and interest in healthy and organic food. These variables were subsequently included in the discriminant function analysis to identify differences among the three age groups.

4. Culinary Offer of the Thematic Villages in the Lubelskie Voivodeship

The thematic villages included in the study differ considerably in their specialization and use of culinary heritage.

The Village of the Former Tatar Settlement in Studzianki combines the cultural heritage of the Tatar community with traditional dishes, including chebureki, pilaf,

Tatar dumplings and *sękacz*. The Chamomile Village in Hołowno has the most diversified culinary offer, based on herbs, organic products and local specialities, complemented by culinary workshops involving traditional bread baking, butter making, pickling and the preparation of preserves.

In the Blacksmithing Village in Wojciechów, culinary products, including elderflower, dandelion and nettle syrups, complement attractions related primarily to blacksmithing traditions. The Goth Village in Masłomęcz combines the presentation of Gothic heritage with historical culinary experiences, such as dishes prepared in a cauldron or over an open fire, flatbreads and locally produced oils.

In the Pottery Village in Łązek Garncarski, the culinary offer accompanies pottery traditions and includes millet pancakes, mushrooms and locally produced wines. Overall, culinary heritage serves either as a central component of the tourism experience or as a complementary element reinforcing the main thematic specialization of the villages.

5. Research Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows substantial differences in the average annual tourist traffic among the thematic villages included in the study. The highest number of visitors was recorded in the Chamomile Village in Hołowno, with approximately 40,000 visitors per year.

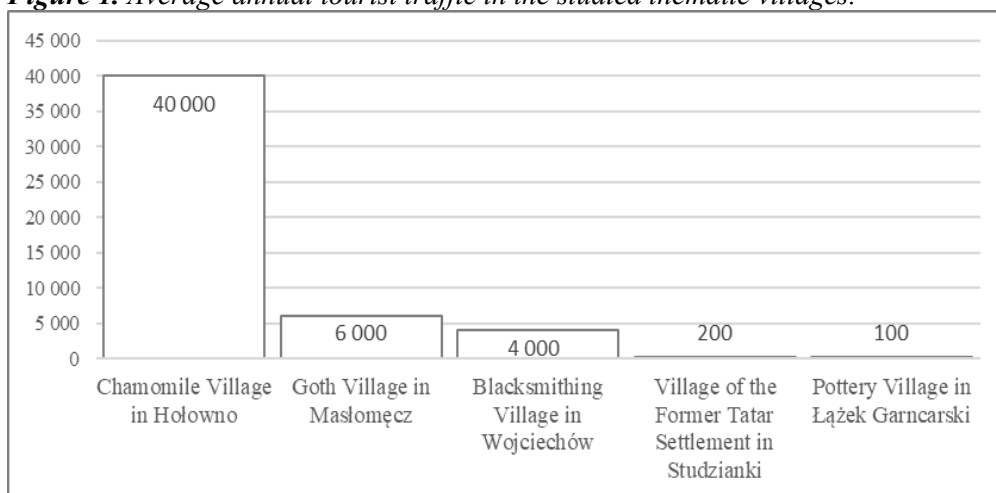
Considerably lower tourist traffic was observed in the Goth Village in Masłomęcz (approximately 6,000 visitors annually) and the Blacksmithing Village in Wojciechów (approximately 4,000). The Village of the Former Tatar Settlement in Studzianki and the Pottery Village in Łązek Garncarski recorded the lowest tourist traffic, with approximately 200 and 100 visitors per year, respectively.

These results indicate a strong concentration of tourist traffic in the Chamomile Village, which attracts substantially more visitors than the other thematic villages analysed. The results presented in Figure 1 indicate that the village with the broadest and most diverse culinary offering, including local products, workshops, and active culinary experiences, also recorded the highest tourist traffic.

This is consistent with the results of Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016), who indicate that local food can increase the attractiveness of a destination, and Sims (2009), who emphasize the importance of local food in creating authentic experiences associated with a given place.

Similarly, Bessière (1998) points to the possibility of using traditional cuisine as a resource supporting the development of rural tourism. However, the observed differences do not allow for establishing a causal relationship, as the intensity of tourist traffic may also depend on the availability, promotion, recognition, and reach of other rural attractions.

Figure 1. Average annual tourist traffic in the studied thematic villages.



Source: Own study based on information provided by the leaders of thematic villages.

Table 1 presents the results of the discriminant analysis of the motives for engaging in culinary tourism in thematic villages according to the age of the respondents. The obtained model was statistically significant (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.702$; $F(12, 344) = 5.553$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the age of the respondents significantly differentiated the structure of motives for engaging in culinary tourism.

Analysis of the classification function values indicates that, among respondents aged under 35, the most characteristic motives were culinary workshops (1.692) and entertainment and leisure activities (2.158). This suggests that the youngest respondents were particularly distinguished by their interest in active participation in culinary activities and leisure-oriented experiences.

In the 35–50 age group, the opportunity to try new flavours was a distinguishing motivation (1.859), indicating a greater orientation towards seeking new taste experiences in this group. In turn, respondents aged over 50 were particularly distinguished by the motivation related to healthy and organic food (1.944). However, no statistically significant age-related differences were found with respect to learning about authentic culinary traditions ($p = 0.180$) or the opportunity to purchase traditional products ($p = 0.369$).

Table 1. Motives for engaging in culinary tourism in thematic villages according to the age of respondents – discriminant function model.

Motives	Wilks' λ discriminant model: 0.702; $F(12, 344) = 5.553$; $p < 0.001$			Classification function		
	Wilks' λ	F	p	< 35 years old	35–50 years old	>50 years old

learning about authentic culinary traditions	0.716	1.730	0.180	2.189	2.329	2.034
the opportunity to try new flavours	0.729	3.383	0.036	1.487	1.859	1.529
culinary workshops	0.786	10.342	0.001	1.692	1.115	1.067
opportunity to purchase traditional products	0.710	1.003	0.369	1.599	1.525	1.393
entertainment and free time activities	0.736	4.136	0.018	2.158	1.706	1.860
healthy and organic food	0.765	7.726	0.001	1.401	1.489	1.944
constant				-	-18.839	-18.086

Source: Own study.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the importance of these two motives was relatively similar across all age groups analysed. The obtained results confirm that the motivations of culinary tourists are not homogeneous. This is consistent with the research by Pérez-Priego *et al.* (2019), who demonstrated the existence of different tourist segments depending on their gastronomic motivations. Berbel-Pineda *et al.* (2019) also indicate that gastronomic experiences can be a significant motivating factor for travel.

6. Conclusions

- Culinary heritage is a significant element of the offerings of the thematic villages studied, but the scope of its use varies. The most extensive offering, combining local products with workshops and active tourist participation, is offered by the Chamomile Village in Hołowno.
- The Chamomile Village also recorded the highest tourist traffic, with approximately 40,000 visitors annually. The descriptive findings show that the village with the most comprehensive culinary offering also recorded the highest tourist traffic; however, this pattern should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship.
- Age significantly differentiates the motives for culinary tourism. Younger respondents are distinguished by their interest in workshops and entertainment, those aged 35–50 by their pursuit of new flavours, and those over 50 by an interest in healthy and organic food.
- The results indicate that the development of tourism in thematic villages can be supported by combining traditional products with active culinary experiences and adapting the offer to the needs of different age groups.

The study has several limitations. It was conducted in only five thematic villages in one region of Poland and involved a relatively small sample of 180 respondents, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include a larger sample and thematic villages from other regions of

Poland and other countries to verify the observed relationships and age-related differences in culinary tourism motivations.

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