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The Role of Local Food Culture in Sustainable Tourism Development

Abstract: The study focused on issues related to local food, tourism, and creating sustainable development. The paper is based first on existing studies in this field and second on new research conducted among tourists and their preferences in local cuisine. The purpose of the study was to illustrate the significance of local food in the development of sustainable tourism along with the relationship between the two, as well as to indicate whether tourists are interested in the food offering characteristic of their destination.

Research has shown that tourists are interested in local and regional cuisine, while some take this one step further and seek out local and regional cuisine. Almost 60% of the studied tourists believe that a hotel restaurant offering should include dishes and drinks associated with local and regional cuisine, but only 36% believe that a hotel restaurant's décor should be related to its geographic region. A total of 70% of tourists are interested in cuisine characteristic of the place or region they are visiting, while 40% actively seek out local and regional items.

Keywords: geography, tourism, food, sustainability

1. Introduction

Food is an integral part of all cultures as well as an important part of world heritage and an increasingly relevant part of the tourism experience. Food is the subject of various types of tourism product and is a common theme in marketing, by businesses and destination authorities (Henderson, 2009). Linkages between food and tourism serve as the basis for learning more about the destination of choice, its local economic development, sustainable practices, and experience in the realm of food. These help shape a local brand and trigger demand in addition to helping support local traditions and diversity. This issue is noted by institutions concerned with world cultural heritage and tourism, including the UNWTO -World Forum on Food Tourism, World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism, and the UNESCO UNITWIN International Conference - Tourism and Gastronomy Heritage. Gastronomy has a strong territorial component, but the link between territorial products, their perception and evaluation by residents and visitors are not frequently examined (Prada-Trigo, 2018). New knowledge on consumer behavior in relation to food tourism will make it possible for all interested parties in the tourism industry to more effectively manage market growth and at the same time intervene in the decision-making process aiming to convince the consumer to buy local and regional products and food-related services (du Rand and Heath, 2006). Existing studies tend to suggest a direct relationship between the amount of money spent on food at a given event and the level of satisfaction (Kim et al., 2011). The eating experience also affects the quality of the tourist experience in general (Kyriakaki et al., 2016).

Local food and sustainable development

There does not exist a commonly accepted definition of local food, which allows consumers to decide for themselves. Given that consumers are usually not sure how to define the concept of "local food," it is not in the economic interest of food producers and other entities associated with food to generate a fine-tuned definition of what is authentically local, as this would only place a limit on what consumers define as local food (Håkansson, 2015). Researchers argue that eating locally implies a minimization of the distance from food production sites to food consumption sites in relation to the modern mainstream food system (Peters et al., 2008). Most attempts to define this concept make reference to physical distance in miles, kilometers, and hours of travel, or use national or regional boundaries as natural limits (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015). While the term "local" implies geography, there is no agreement as to what the distance should be between production and consumption sites (Martinez et al., 2010). In addition, the definition may vary depending on geographic region and seasonal food availability. For example, studies in Germany have demonstrated that most consumers view locally grown as grown within a 30-kilometer radius or 50-kilometer radius or in Germany in general - and do not make a clear distinction between the three options (Meyerding et al., 2019).

On the other hand, American consumers view the term "local" as meaning within a 100mile radius or in the United States in general (Peters et al., 2008). This definition comes into conflict with food coming from neighboring countries that may be less than 100 miles away and indicates that the term "local food" is still imperfectly conceptualized by the consumer (Lang et al., 2014). However, geographic proximity is only one of the attributes of the definition of local food. There exists an array of characteristics that may be used by consumers to define food as local. For example, some consumers focus on sustainable practices used in food production and distribution, including reduced use of chemical additives and fertilizers, while other consumers expand the definition of local food to include fair practices in agriculture and farm animal welfare (Martinez et al., 2010). Regardless of the definition adopted, the purchase of food cultivated close to home yields economic, environmental, health, and societal benefits (Brain, 2012). On the one hand, consumers choose local food in the belief that local food is safer, higher quality, fresher, more valuable in terms of health benefits, and better tasting. Consumers purchase local food in order to support local economies and farmers as well as in the belief that local food is friendlier towards the natural environment (Meyerding et al., 2019). The social movement associated with local foods represents a cultural phenomenon that is closely linked to organic and sustainable farming (Duram Ed., 2010). The aforesaid benefits exhibit a relationship with key dimensions of sustainable development. These relationships are discussed in detail in a review of the literature by Peters et al. (2008) who note the following:

- a shorter supply chain and close relationships between food producers and consumers help reduce energy use in food shipping chains and consequently reduce the emission of greenhouse gases,
- shorter transport times also affect the freshness and taste of food products,
- purchasing local food products improves the economic situation of local farms and local communities,
- local food purchases help increase social awareness of issues associated with food, better environmental management by food producers, and greater public control of national food systems,
- a more local food system reduces safety risks via the decentralization of food production.

Nevertheless, some critics do point out that local food systems do not have to be more ecologically and socially sustainable than the global food supply system (Peters et al., 2008).

Despite some cases of critique, the general view tends to be positive and characterized by openness to local trends in food production and consumption. Yet, more research is needed on the issue of sustainability in food production and consumption. One of the key issues in food production and consumption is how local food systems integrate the use of natural resources (Duram and Oberholtzer, 2010). This approach

to the issue is particularly important from the perspective of global challenges facing modern

society, including climate change, energy scarcity, and human health issues.

Tourism and local food in the context of sustainable development

In 2017 the worldwide number of international tourist arrivals was 1.33 billion (UNWTO, 2018).

Food remains an integral part of the tourism product and remains a significant part of tourist expenditures both in the case of organized and independent tourists. On tourists' consumption and expenditure on food, traditional cuisines have been particularly found to be at the center of the maximization of returns available from tourism development at the destination level (Amuquandoh and Asafo-Adjei, 2013). Culinary heritage and travel are often linked and there is no need to travel far to be a "culinary tourist" (Brulotte and Di Giovine, 2014). Tourists eat at regional-themed restaurants, tour restaurant-related facilities, and participate in food-related events. Tourists are increasingly likely to select a destination based on wine and food themes as well as much more traditional attractions such as atmosphere, art, historical heritage, human heritage, and general environmental issues. However, cuisine is not a main decision factor, although it can tip the balance in the case of undecided travelers. The high culinary attractiveness of a given destination is a driving force in the travel decision-making process of true connoisseurs. The increasing interest in this particular form of tourist activity is triggering interest in the scientific community as well. The research literature now includes a new form of tourism that is designated food tourism, gastronomic tourism, and culinary tourism. One of the broadest definitions of the notion of food tourism comes from Hall and Sharples (2003): "food tourism is an experiential trip to a gastronomic region, for recreational or entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers' markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food" (Hall and Sharples, 2003). Gendzheva (2014) argues that the differentiation of food tourism, where food is a motivation for travel regardless of whether this refers to primary or

secondary foods, does not adequately reflect the nature of this form of tourism. Without delving deep into terminology, it is important to note that the roots of food tourism lie in agriculture, human culture, and tourism. Agriculture provides products, human culture provides the historical context and authenticity, and tourism provides infrastructure and vital services as well as links these three elements in the experience of food tourism (du Rand and Heath, 2006). Since the introduction of the term "culinary tourism" into the literature, both the definition of the concept and the nature of it have changed. Food tourism no longer was just the delivery of food to tourists at restaurants, hotels, and resorts. The approach to the issues associated with local cuisine has also changed and now it is more focused on the use of food as a means to develop and promote well-known and newer regional tourist destinations, which are often associated with broader tourism products linked with cultural heritage as well as rural tourism. Hence, food tourism is gradually becoming one of the most vibrant new trends in the tourism industry (Gendzheva, 2014). It is also becoming a leading driver of the delivery of novel tourism products selling a "unique character" and "culture" of the target destination and are a potential antidote to mass tourism demand stagnation and a means to support and promote the notion of sustainable tourism (Jones and Jenkins, 2003). Guerrón-Montero (2004) proves on the example of Bocas del Toro that globalization does not always and inevitably result in elimination of destruction of local, regional and national culture. Moreover, sometimes the dining experience become elevated to a higher level and move far beyond the notion of food as fuel (Tresidder, 2015). Food tourism offers local communities the opportunity to integrate and trigger local food tourism in order to support local economic development and respond to the specific needs of visitors. It may also be perceived as a key source of sustainable tourism that supports local producers and boosts local economic growth (Kyriakaki et al., 2016). Demand for local products may

stimulate local economic growth and is a significant part of tourist experience (Kastenholz et al., 2016). But the contemporary food system fails to protect the environment upon which we all depend for sustainable food production (Young, 2010). The involvement of food tourism in the direction of the principles of sustainable development includes areas such as poverty

reduction, effective use of resources, environmental protection, and climate change as well as the protection of local cultural values, heritage, and diversity (UNWTO, 2017). The table below lists the linkages and benefits associated with the growth of culinary tourism in relation to the notion of sustainable development.

Table 1. Culinary tourism and sustainable development – linkages and benefits (Summary based on Kyriakaki et al., 2016)

Demand for local food products may affect the sustainable development of the tourism sector and host community by encouraging the use of sustainable practices (supporting diversity and ecological practices), supporting local economies (strengthening local producers in rural area communities), improving living conditions in rural areas, thus helping to maintain the natural environment and helping local communities survive.

Development of culinary tourism helps build a brand that may aid a given region by drawing a larger number of visitors and more investment, and creating authentic visitor experiences.

Culinary tourism may connect consumers with people and places where food is produced.

In the context of the development of culinary tourism, it is possible to make use of demand for authenticity in order to encourage the development of products and services that will help increase the level of sustainable development and will promote specific rural areas and their residents. By supporting "local" food products, culinary tourism may generate broad benefits for host communities and their guests.

The development of culinary tourism may also serve as the basis for the establishment of a given region's identity.

Food tourism promotes and develops environmentally friendly practices and encourages the renewal of local heritage and local economies. Demand for "characteristic" local products is one way to encourage the revival of traditional festivals, emergence of new tourist offerings, and evolution of culinary and agricultural skills.

Consumption of local food products is associated with the needs of guests who demand and expect more authentic tourist experiences.

The restaurant and hotel industry in the context of sustainable development

A restaurant's offering consists of two integrated components: (1) materials such as products of which dishes and drinks are made, physical equipment in the guest room and kitchen area, and the menu, (2) non-material elements such as customer service and hospitality. Both groups can relate to local conditions and thus benefit the local community as well as influencing guest satisfaction. Studies conducted in the United States among employees purchasing food products for their restaurants have shown the predominance of the following views: (1) locally cultivated food is of higher quality, (2) local products are fresher, (3) relationships with local food producers are positive, (4) food grown locally is often requested by customers themselves (especially after local products are available at

a given restaurant for some time), (5) access to unique or special products has increased (Martinez et al., 2010). Restaurant chefs and owners may be particularly influential in the promotion of locally grown foods and in support for local food producers. Their approach to this issue may affect how consumers perceive this issue and may build consumer awareness of this issue. They may also help motivate farmers to switch to alternative crops and other in-demand farm products (Duram and Cavley, 2012).

The leading companies in the restaurant industry inform the public widely of green practices through their websites (Ham and Lee, 2011). The research literature appears to support the linking of the restaurant sector and tourism, but there are few studies on hotel

restaurants, which is surprising given the significance of food in the hotel industry.

However, local food products are not a major feature of research studies on restaurants (Duram and Cavley, 2012). Telfer (1996) indicates that five-stars hotels are often presented as part of international chains importing most of their food and having minimal contacts with the local economy (Telfer, 1996). However, a significant share of hotel guests form their opinion of a country's food selection based on what they had to eat at their hotel. The basic task of a hotel is to provide a lodging and food experience for their guests. The range of hotel restaurant services varies and is dependent on the size of the facility and other factors. In many cases, the larger the hotel, the larger the selection of food items available on the hotel restaurant menu. Other factors are the hotel's quality rating, with more stars usually implying a larger hotel restaurant offering, as well as other factors such as target market, hotel location, and competitive environment. The nature of hotel restaurants is similar regardless of hotel size. Most hotels serve breakfast in various forms along with lunch and dinner. Some hotels host special events or conferences. Earlier research has shown that more than 90% of hotel guests take advantage of restaurants at the hotels they are staying at mostly breakfast - with 44% of hotel guests stating that they do consider the hotel restaurant offering when choosing a hotel (Kapera, 2015). Hotels are therefore the place where tourists can most easily taste the local cuisine and meet the local culture. Research has tried to find out if they need it.

2. Research methods

Questionnaire and data collection

The present research consists of a review of the research literature and subsequent empirical study. The next step in the process consisted of the creation of a survey questionnaire, which was designed for respondents who had spent at least one night at a hotel regardless of its type. This approach made it possible to reach consumers who had the ability to fully evaluate the hotel's restaurant offering and not merely one meal. The survey was anonymous. The data were then examined statistically based on the stated research goals. All data were collected at hotels located in Poland between March and September 2017.

Poland possesses significant tourism potential, and tourism in itself has the potential to become a leading sector of the country's economy. Poland enjoys an advantageous geographic location right in the center of Europe. In addition, it has a large number of tourist attractions and well-developed tourism infrastructure. Given all of these advantages, Poland should see more tourist arrivals than it currently does. Other states in the region of Central and Eastern Europe are characterized by larger growth rates in international tour-

ist arrivals. For example, in 2018 Lithuania enjoyed a growth rate of 9.9%, Ukraine 6.7%, Moldova 19.6%, and the Republic of Georgia 27.9%. In the same year Poland reported an increase of 5.4% (UNWTO, 2018). Another possible explanation may be the following: In countries such as Georgia and Moldova, local food may constitute a competitive advantage in the global tourism market. One of the leaders in terms of the number of tourists and number of tourist accommodation facilities is the city of Kraków and its surrounding region - Małopolska Province. This region was selected as the study area in the research. The paper focuses on tourist accommodation facilities is this region. The data were collected with the hotels' permission. Each hotel was given 10 survey forms and asked to give them to their guests. A total of 524 survey forms were completed by all guests involved in the study. Given that the questions in the survey were multiple choice, the statistical analysis of the data simply involved the counting of the selected choices. Relationships between variables were tested via the Chi Square Test (Ferguson and Takane, 2009). The data set

was analyzed using the "confreq" and "Fun-Chisq" packages – part of the "R" environment (R Core Development Team, 2015). The following research hypotheses were posed:

- H1 tourists are generally interested in cuisine characteristic of a given place or region.
- H2 guests eating meals at hotel restaurants prefer dishes and décor related to local/ regional cuisine.

The study survey was taken by 542 individuals including 280 women (51.66%) and 262 men (48.34%) aged 18 to 72 (mean age: 34.3 years). More than 65% of the studied hotel guests did possess a higher education. Most guests were Polish tourists, with most foreign guests from Great Britain, Germany, and Sweden. The vast majority of the hotel guests were traveling due to business reasons,

for sightseeing purposes, and to rest and relax. Most guests stayed at their hotels between two and three days (Table 2).

Survey participants were asked to identify their gender, age, level of education, and place of origin as well as answer an array of questions on hotel restaurants. The responses are discussed in the Results section. In addition, survey participants had the opportunity to express their views in a comments section. However, only 10 individuals elected to do so, which makes it impossible to conduct a thorough analysis of the comments section. Survey participants who did provide comments formulated both positive and negative opinions on service quality, restaurant standards, range of services provided, and the menu itself.

Table 2. Demographic profile of survey participants (Source: Author's own work)

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Women	280	51.66
Men	262	48.34
Country of origin		
Poland	414	76.38
Foreign	120	22.14
Not listed	8	1.48
Education		
Elementary	5	0.92
Vocational	29	5.35
High School	145	26.75
University	354	65.31
Not listed	9	1.66
Purpose of travel		
Business	192	35.42
Sightseeing	156	28.78
Leisure	149	27.49
Health	15	2.77
Other	28	5.17
No response	2	0.37

3. Results

More than 50% of the survey participants indicated that they strongly consider the restaurant offering at hotels before choosing a hotel (Table 3). Close to 90% of the studied hotel guests eat at hotel restaurants, of which most eat breakfast only (418 persons – 86.90%).

In the context of this particular study, it is important when survey participants strongly prefer traditional cuisine of the host country – in this case, the cuisine of Poland. Dishes from other national cuisines were selected by 200 survey participants. Italian cuisine was the

most popular non-Polish cuisine in the study – 103 survey participants.

This pattern also applies to foreign hotel guests staying in Poland – who were most likely to favor Polish cuisine, then Italian cuisine, and then in most cases the cuisines of their respective countries of origin.

Close to 60% of participants believe that the restaurant at a hotel should include local or regional dishes and drinks, but only 36% of participants state that the restaurant's décor should make reference to the specific nature of its geographic area. Close to 80% of the studied hotel guests also took advantage of the restaurant offering outside of their own hotel. A total of 374 survey participants stated that they liked the local cuisine. In particular, the most popular local dishes were pierogis and pork cutlets – both very traditional dishes in modern Poland.

The testing of research hypotheses was conducted using a number of statistical tests designed to check for the fulfillment of stated expectations.

H1 - Close to 70% of the studied individuals were interested in local or regional cuisine that is characteristic of each given area in the course of their travels, while 40% (219) were found to actively seek out such cuisine. Only 19% of the survey participants stated that they do not seek out local or regional dishes and drinks in the course of their travels. However, no correlation was found between the answer to this question and the stated purpose of travel. Only two significant correlations were found between demand for regional flavor and gender, country of origin, and level of education in the studied respondent sample. Women were more likely than men to note that the décor of a restaurant should be linked with the area where the given restaurant is located. Polish respondents were more likely to answer "yes" to this question than foreign respondents (χ^2 =12.876; p=0.0049). No significant correlation is noted in the responses to this question with respect to the level of education of respondents.

Table 3. Responses to questions in the survey study (Source: Author's own work).

Q	uestion	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
	Do you consid	der the hotel restaurant offering when ch	oosing a hotel?
Yes		293	54.26
No		247	45.57
No response		2	0.37
	Did you tak	e advantage of the hotel restaurant duri	ng your stay?
Yes		481	88.75
No		60	11.07
No response		1	01.18
		Which meals did you consume?	
Breakfast		418	86.90
Lunch		176	36.59
Dinner		204	42.41
Room service		81	16.84
Other		17	3.53
	What ty	pe of restaurant service do you find mos	t suitable?
Full service		199	37.20
Self-service		140	25.83
Mixed		196	36.16
No response		7	1.29
		Which cuisine do you prefer?	
Traditional Polish	n	334	61.62
Non-Polish cuisii	ne	198	36.53
No response		10	1.85

Do you believe that the hotel res	taurant offering should include dishes an and regional cuisines?	d drinks associated with local
Yes	318	58.67
No	30	5.54
Not important to me	192	35.42
No response	2	0.37
Do you believe that the décor of the	hotel restaurant should be linked with the region where the hotel is located?	e specific nature of the geographic
Yes	195	35.98
No	94	17.34
Not important to me	251	46.31
No response	2	0.37
Did you consume me	als at restaurants outside your hotel duri	ng your hotel stay?
Yes	422	77.86
No	119	21.96
No response	1	0.18
If so, did you try disi	hes and drinks associated with local and	regional cuisines?
Yes	374	69.00
No	96	17.71
No response	72	13.28
Speaking in general terms, when trave	eling as a tourist, are you interested in loo istic of a given geographic location?	cal and regional cuisines character-
Yes	371	68.45
No	165	30.44
No response	6	1.11
Do you actively seek out products and	d drinks associated with local and region tourist destination?	al cuisines when staying at a given
Yes	219	40.41
No	100	18.45
Sometimes	221	40.77
No response	2	0.37

H2 – Most of the study participants noted that a hotel restaurant's offering should make some reference to local and regional dishes and drinks. There exists a statistically significant link between the answer provided and the stated purpose of the hotel stay. Among the respondents who answered "yes" to this question, there were respondents stating "recreation" as their main purpose of travel. Survey respondents were less attached to the décor of a restaurant as a reflection of local or regional culture ($\chi^2 = 70.381$; p<0.0001). How-

ever, even in this case, a correlation was noted with respect to the purpose of travel. Among respondents who stated "yes" to this question, there were more respondents who were traveling for leisure purposes as opposed to business purposes. Research has also shown that individuals who take advantage of hotel restaurant offerings are much more likely to state that they are interested in local and regional cuisine while traveling as tourists ($\chi^2=8.8926$; p=0.0308).

4. Discussion

Food tourism is becoming one of the most promising segments of the tourism market. Current research results show that there is interest, on the part of hotel guests, in local and regional cuisines. Close to 70% of the survey participants were interested in local cuisine, while 40% were likely to seek out local cuisines. This study shows that food is most often not the main draw at a given travel destination and ought to be treated as a supporting attraction (du Rand and Heath, 2006). The results presented in this study reflect the views of consumers. For comparison, the restaurant owners' view is presented in Iaquinto (2014) who asked owners in Japan whether their customers want to see the implementation of the principles of sustainable development in their restaurants. Only 43% of restaurant owners answered in the affirmative, although the responses were dependent on whether each given restaurant would be able to handle the exact requirements of sustainable development in the Japanese restaurant industry (Iaquinto, 2014). Research has also shown interest in regional cuisine. Hotel guests identified well-known and commonly encountered Polish dishes. Similar findings were obtained in other countries. Tourists in Ghana were able to identify the local foods they consumed and also were able to write the names of the foods thereby demonstrating knowledge about them (Amuquandoh and Asafo-Adjei, 2013). Another project that confirms the findings in this research study is the "Greek breakfast" project, which was employed in hotels in order to reveal the proportion of local cuisine with the goal of enriching the tourist experience (Kyriakaki et al., 2016). Ignatov and Smith (2006) found that food tourists in Canada tended to be female (Ignatov and Smith, 2006). Research has also shown a relationship with local characteristics in hotel restaurants among the residents of the country where the hotel is located. It may be inferred based on literature sources that this depends on the type of visitor. While Americans enjoy seeing "their" fast food chains in other countries, Europeans tend to seek out specialties and criticize when these are not up to anticipated standards (Hudman, 1986). Ultimately, it is to be expected that globalization will generate a better educated class of travelers who are more demanding in terms of food quality (Gendzheva, 2014).

5. Summary

Research has shown that tourists are interested in local and regional cuisine, while some take this one step further and seek out local and regional cuisine. The tourism industry, especially that in Central and Eastern Europe, has been vigorously searching for innovative promotional opportunities in recent years. One such means may be the development and promotion of the local cuisine in the region, which would allow it to escape its current image as a cheap place to visit for the purpose of mass tourism. However, the potential of the food tourism segment remains untapped in many parts of Europe due to a lack of aware-

ness of the potential of this form of tourism and inept marketing efforts in the area. Research has shown that more action is needed in the area of sustainable development, as this is the expectation on the part of hotel guests today. Hence, it is important that hotel managers skillfully communicate their efforts in this area to potential guests. This will make it possible to more easily influence their choice of hotel – especially one that is implementing the principles of sustainable development – and to indirectly help popularize such practices among competitors in the hotel market.

Limitations

As in the case of other research studies, there are limitations that need to be considered. This study was done in Poland, which means that it is difficult to generalize and apply sim-

ilar rules to other countries. Further research is needed in other countries in order to draw conclusions about the food tourism scene in other countries.

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