

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND GASTRONOMY

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LOCAL FOODS

Marketing and the destination

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Introduction

During the past 25 years across Europe there has been a marked renaissance in the consumption and production of quality, regionally denominated foods (Chambers et al., 2007). The production of regional foods has been backed by EU initiatives that have included origin-labelled product designations and the increase in market for local authentic products (Ilbery et al., 2010). However, within the food sector, large corporate organisations comprising agri-businesses, restaurant chains and retailers are dominant and represent an industry that is well-organised, politically powerful and driven by an array of lobbyists, lawyers and trade organisations. Over the past 150 years these companies have been responsible for an explosion in processed and mass-produced foods. In spite of this industrialisation of food production and supply, recent market trends suggest that local and traditional products, defined by specific geographic territories, occupy a food production and hence destination marketing niche that provide strong growth opportunities for local producers, retailers and the tourist destination as a whole (Brownell and Warner, 2009; Oddy and Atkins, 2009).

The debate regarding what is 'local' has occupied academics and industry for some time and is well covered in other chapters within this volume. However, for the purpose of destination marketing there are differences in construction between what is perceived as local and what is perceived as regional. As Gorton and Tregear (2008) observe, some overlap between concepts is clearly possible. The notion of local food and local food systems has gained much consumer and industry attention as an alternative to the global corporate model where producers and consumers are separated through a chain of processors/manufacturers and retailers. The locality of food is becoming increasingly important, influencing both marketing practice (e.g., adding value to brands) and policy (e.g., accreditation and other name-protection schemes) (Miroso and Lawson, 2012). Even so, there is a clear distinction between 'local' and 'locality' foods (Ilbery and Maye, 2005). Local foods are produced, sold and consumed within a limited geographical area – usually being produced within a 30–50-mile radius of the point of retail – whereas 'locality' foods are identified as having been produced and processed in a particular place but often circulated more widely (Ilbery et al., 2006).

Local food and sustainability

The primary underpinning for this book is the concept of sustainability and for the purpose of this chapter the authors will be considering sustainability from the perspective of the triple bottom line (TBL), or 'people, planet, profit'. This approach was used by the United Nations through the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) to develop standardisation towards public sector full cost accounting and is increasingly being adopted by the private sector as part of corporate and social responsibility. It was first proposed by John Elkington in 1994 (see Elkington, 1994 and 1998) and implies that sustainability is a holistic concept that involves conducting our lives today in a way that will benefit people in the future, socially, economically and environmentally.

One way in which interests and concerns with regard to the sustainability of food seem to have come together is within the idea of 'local food'. This movement (in terms of history and process) has been described by authors in books such as Ackerman-Leist (2013), Pinkerton and Hopkins (2009) and Small (2013) and in academic papers, such as Feagan (2007), Giovannucci et al. (2010), Pearson et al. (2011) and Wittman et al. (2012). Beer (2001) describes how originally human beings experienced short food supply chains, they ate what they hunted and gathered and the supply chains then gradually lengthened with the process of specialisation and aggregation. In the late twentieth century these extended globally, but began to be viewed with increasing scepticism by some people who sought a greater understanding of where their food came from, how it had been grown or produced and the environmental impact of both food production and the international transportation of ingredients. The concept and consciousness of 'food miles' describing the environmental impact of the transportation of food stuffs emerged around the turn of the century and led to a steadily growing band of consumers seeking out food that had been produced more locally and in sympathy with ideas of sustainability.

There is a widely held belief that food produced closer to the point of consumption is likely to be more sustainable and therefore preferable. From a profit perspective, the argument is that the consumption of locally produced food benefits those that produce it and those that consume it by reducing the complexity of the supply chain and the number of 'middlemen' thus providing a direct link 'to market'. This 'local' trade also results in a recycling of money within the local economy, giving rise to a multiplier effect; the financial benefit is passed on to other individuals and businesses within the local community. Where local supply is through structures such as farmers' markets there may well be 'knock-on' spending in other shops. Also, despite shortening the supply chain, there may be opportunities for other businesses to develop adding value in some way to local produce, enhancing business networks, reinforcing local jobs and maintaining local employment.

From a people perspective, local food is considered to be a valuable opportunity for consumers. There may well be a strengthening of community spirit and quality of life given the closer and less sterile interaction between people within the food supply chain. In addition, often the information available to the consumer is far richer, allowing for a more informed choice. From a planet perspective, shorter food chains will give rise to decreased food miles, thus reducing the carbon footprint and potentially increasing freshness of the food. Local produce is also often characterised by minimal packaging and clearer provenance information. Finally, local supply chains in addition provide an important outlet for small-scale farmers producing food that is organic or less intensively produced. Certainly there is a positive perception about the sustainability of local food, although this is open to challenge (see Chapter 5 in this volume).

Local food marketing

The celebration of local foods is not just restricted to retail and hospitality; culinary interest may extend beyond the dining experience to understanding local farming practices, how foods are produced, distributed and preserved. Local foods, like any food category, are a multifaceted tourism product and can be considered an essential component of a destination's offering which may be consumed and experienced in a variety of ways. Table 28.1 identifies some key themes through which food can enhance and promote the destination experience.

Food producers can plan their business and their distribution strategies around a number of 'routes to market' dependent on their individual product offering, where they are located and the size and scale of the business. Across the Western world there has been a steady expansion of direct farm marketing with consumers purchasing from farmers through a variety of retail mechanisms. Growth in this 'direct' form of retailing has taken off because it provides a platform for producers and consumers to interact on a face-to-face basis and form a relationship. Such engagement lies at the heart of the enhanced experience of consuming local foods (Nosi and Zanni, 2004).

In the UK, farmers' markets have re-emerged and grown substantially, fuelled by consumer interest and in part due to the response of the UK government following the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak of 2001 (McEachern et al., 2010). At this time, measures to stimulate the rural economy were introduced and farm shops were supported as a means to sell produce directly to the consumer. Quality farm shops became particular examples of rural-based specialist independent retailing, selling a range of higher-margin local and regional food products of known provenance. Some developed their hospitality offer by combining tea rooms and restaurants as well as broadening their retail scope to include gift items and other products associated with a rural lifestyle (Sharples, 2003a). Increasingly, shopping at such establishments and farmers' markets is regarded as a leisure pursuit (Megicks et al., 2012) where farm shops have become integral features of garden centres and other out-of-town retail operations, acting as an additional consumer pull to the destination.

In the UK since the mid-1990s there has been a steady movement towards quality local and regional food products with consumers welcoming individuality and rejecting 'standardized, highly processed product lines' that constitute 'placeless and faceless' foods (Ricketts Hein et al., 2006). Local foods can form part of a destination's fabric, where consumers/tourists with little interest in food beyond basic nourishment can enjoy an engaging gastronomic experience and participate in food-related activities forming part of a 'things to do' agenda, for example sampling local beers and cider.

For groups of consumers with a high interest in food, eating out can become the key purpose of the holiday experience, with quality, seasonal local foods of known provenance a

Table 28.1 Local foods and destination routes to experience

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Experience pathway</i>
Hospitality and food service	Hotels, restaurants, gastro pubs, tea rooms/café shops and takeaways
Attractions and Events	Pick your own, food events and festivals, producer visits, food and wine trails, tourism attraction
Shopping (includes online and mail order)	Farmers' markets, farm gate sales, farm shops, delicatessens, holiday camp, caravan and campsite shops, local convenience stores and supermarkets

Adapted from Jolliffe (2008) and Pearson et al. (2011)

significant influence when selecting restaurants to dine in. Tourists may be motivated by meals prepared with certain in-season, local ingredients, produce sourced from a particular location, being entertained in a particular way in attractive venues or the meal cooked by a celebrated chef (Sharples, 2003b). The power of the 'celebrity chef' restaurant(s) in particular destinations is noted as a major food tourism attractor (Henderson, 2011). People indulging in this form of dining experience may be referred to or known colloquially as 'foodies' (Barr and Levy, 1984), a term that has evolved in everyday language to encapsulate anyone who now has an interest in food (Deleuze, 2012). At the heart is a celebration of food and in much the same way as tourists collect souvenirs, foodies collect food experiences (Morgan et al., 2008).

Destination marketing

For both academic and tourism professionals, food represents an emerging theme in destination marketing that is increasingly seen as a core element of a destination's product offering providing a degree of uniqueness and differentiation (Beer et al., 2012). Food tourism is also inextricably bound up with experience and can create an additional level of complexity for destinations to manage successfully. Local foods are a valid construction in food tourism and for many consumers participating in local food ways and consuming local and regional specialities are important parts of the tourist experience (Mak et al., 2012). Experiences at the destination level are complex affairs; they move along a continuum between positivity and negativity that over time may change, but fundamentally involve individuals interacting with people and places (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2010). Destinations that embrace a constantly evolving vista where a mix of the urban, rural and coastal landscape interlocks with a distinctive local food provision are becoming popular. Local foods form part of a bundle of attributes that, when acting collectively, create a 'specialised regional product' (Bessiere, 1998). They can be considered a resource that enhances the destination, but one requiring careful coordination. Combined they provide an attribute that may appeal to consumers delivering enjoyable, distinctive and memorable local food experiences within the destination (Hall and Mitchell, 2002; Novelli et al., 2006).

For such a positioning, destinations will require the coordination of many actors, representing a complex web of supply relationships that, when acting in tandem, will be capable of providing spontaneous but also carefully choreographed participation. This in turn will start to define a destination, its image and brand and provide a level of differentiation. The establishment of place-brands that tie in food, cuisine and tourism are powerful mechanisms for the destination and, where this is managed in a coordinated effort, represents the first stages of 'collaborative advantage' (Fyall et al., 2012; Hall, 2012) that contributes to an overall sustainable agenda. In addition, as a shared common resource, food and drink may also be utilised to create collaborative advantage with neighbouring destinations such as adjoining counties.

Increasingly, destination and tourism providers are adopting more strategic approaches and new forms of customer-oriented experience. Merely stage-managing experience in isolation has been considered an 'out of date' notion that reflects a product-orientated culture (Major and McLeay, 2012). To be mindful of consumers' desires to create their own experiential platform, providers of food tourism experiences need to craft their offer, recognising altruistic and hedonic components by building and adding to existing provision with an experience that may be considered to be indulgent and/or memorable. A chalkboard outside a restaurant simply highlighting seasonal and local foods does not deliver experience per se, it

is one of a number of variables that can have a part to play but for customers to be attracted by local food they need to be engaged in a highly personal way (Gibbs and Ritchie, 2010; Lugosi and Walls, 2013). The simple pleasure of eating a freshly baked Cornish pasty on a headland overlooking the Atlantic Ocean may provide the perfect authentic setting; for the individual this may be an intensely personal encounter that defines a holiday.

The place local foods have within a destination is largely determined by how destinations are funded and managed and by the interests of key stakeholders. In the UK, tourism devolution has led to very specific and proactive approaches adopted by home country national tourism organisations. Over the past five years food tourism has been fully utilised and integrated with tourism strategies; local foods now form part of a culinary agenda promoting special characteristics of national and speciality dishes. Notwithstanding, the disbanding of regional tourism boards in 2010 has significantly altered both the tourism climate and where the private sector has had to accept a greater degree of responsibility but also influences and streamlines the way in which destinations work (Coles et al., 2012).

This has culminated in a form of 'patchwork' where no two destinations are the same even though a shared local food resource may be close at hand. While local foods are not identified as specific elements of national sustainable tourism, there remains a clear relationship at destination level where local foods can be linked to local sustainability development. At the national level, VisitEngland identifies sustainability as a key business tool to secure increasing numbers of customers who have an interest in authentic experiences. Local foods are thus connected to this and in England a range of experience dimensions are at play in destination marketing. Leading coastal resorts such as Bournemouth, Poole, Torbay and Plymouth demonstrate a strong hospitality theme with particular emphasis placed on eating out in 'Michelin' starred, celebrity chef and leading local chef personality restaurants. In addition, due to the proximity of the ocean, a seasonal seafood proposition is heavily promoted. In the large urban destinations of Bristol, Bath and Exeter, food tourism experiences are based on a variety of culinary themes coupled to a strong association with individual local delicacies such as the 'Bath Bun, Olivers and Chaps'.

Across the EU, a strong relationship can be observed between local foods and tourism. In countries such as France and Italy, food is engrained in national culture and in the fabric and images of the countries' individual regions and destinations. Authentic and interesting foods attract modern tourists – many of whom will be searching for new sensations and experiences (López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Given the maturity of the European tourism market and the competitive nature of destination marketing, it is hardly surprising that destinations are increasingly being drawn to the potential of food tourism. Interest in local cuisines is leading many of them to focus on food as a core tourism resource (Karim and Chi, 2010; Lin et al., 2011), and as such forms part of a sustainable agenda. Consumers are becoming more sophisticated in their demands of destinations. A trend, perhaps, is identifiable as destinations begin to explore and manage their tourism resources by constructing destination products with the ability to deliver distinctive and memorable encounters (Kim, 2014). Foodscapes are thus changing and becoming more localised as tourists increasingly expect true taste experiences based on provenance and knowledge of where food comes from. Quality locally grown, reared, produced and sourced foods, integrated into tailored hospitality and foodservice offers – together with appropriate local food and drink product, direct marketing and retailing – provide an effective platform for destination marketing. This in the longer term should build and reinforce destination competitiveness and sustainability. A summary of the key features associated with local foods and destination resource is presented at Figure 28.1.

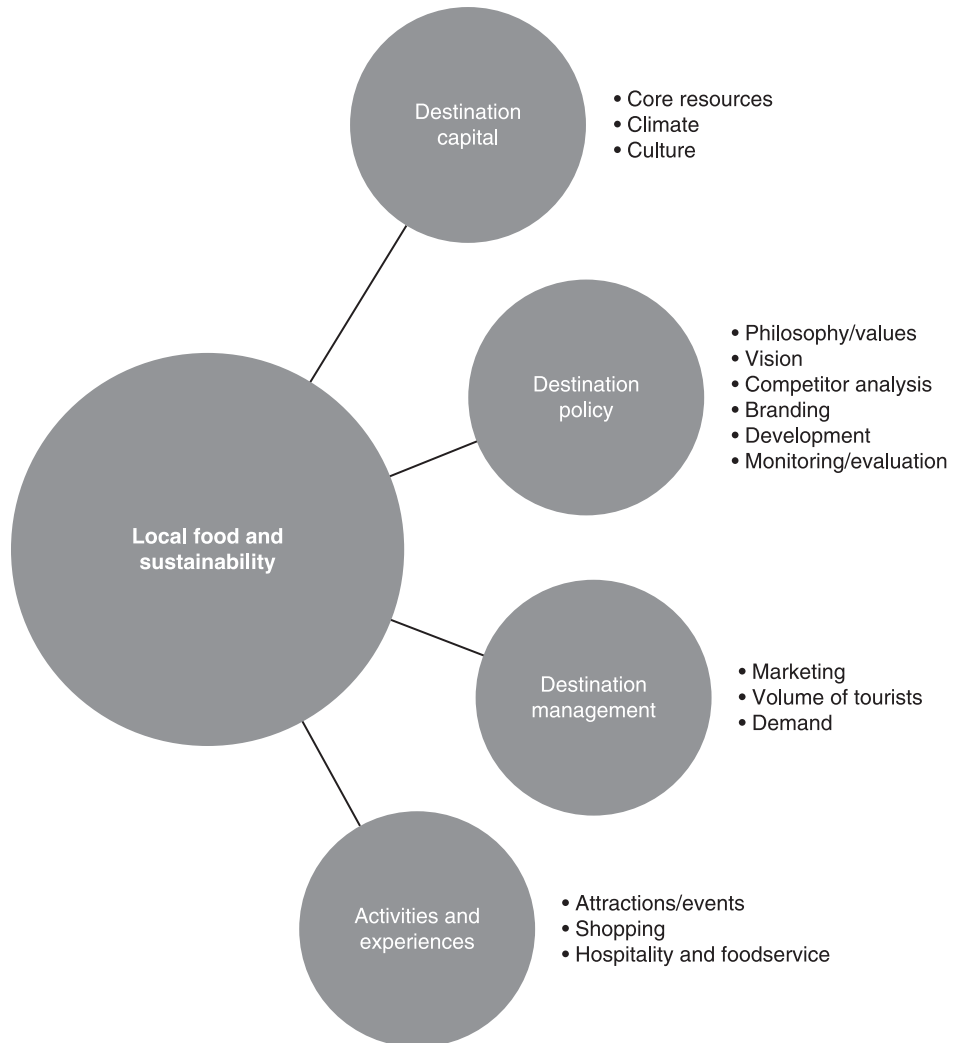


Figure 28.1 The role of local food as a tourism destination resource. Adapted from Hartwell et al. (2012).

Conclusion

A number of authors have considered the broader implications for gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism and food tourism. Some view these descriptions to be one and the same whilst others regard them as distinctly separate and catering for tourists from very different and specific market segments. Therefore, one of the most important issues to be faced by destinations in the future will be how this resource or attribute is best managed and how it fits within the context of destination marketing. Certainly, the challenges of the creation and nurturing of a clear and consistent 'food identity' and how local foods fit into these 'food tourism categories' will not disappear. Destinations and their stakeholders will have to evolve thinking and in particular the utilisation of local foods as a tool for destination marketing and branding. In this way too, 'people, planet and profit' merge into a win-win situation.

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