

SOURCING LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: THE CASE OF YESILYURT

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Abstract

Once tourism establishments choose to source their food & beverage stocks locally, remarkable changes will happen for all parties involved. The small-scale producers will benefit increased demand and income and will also find opportunities to diversify economic activities. The establishments will increase the quality of their food & beverage offer and lower their costs. The tourists will enjoy a more authentic and memorable experience. The destination will enjoy a higher multiplier effect and lower leakage, preservation of nature and culture, and a potential for a marketable brand image and regional identity, as well as product diversification. The decision has the potential to contribute to sustainability of the destination however, only if the local food & beverage and supporting cultural and natural elements are in coherence, to create a sense of place.

Keywords: Local food & beverage, sustainable tourism development, tourist experience, sense of place

JEL Codes: L83, Z32

Introduction

The idea of “local” seems considerably straightforward to define at first. The localness concept or classification is also seemingly versatile and fit for purposes. However, its implications on tourism proves to be multifaceted and in need of solid understanding. Beyond the constraints of the destination’s geographical indicators, local is essentially a social construct (Halfacree, 2007). And more often than not, the tourists’

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perception of it may ultimately prove to be the determinant of success for a destination (Wang, 1999).

Food & beverage, as an ingredient of the total tourist product, or one of the attractive requirements (EU) is one of those facets. The decision to offer locally sourced food & beverage items to guests will have profound effects on almost all parties involved: the producer, the establishment, the guest and ultimately, the destination as a whole. This paper aims to shed light on those effects.

Likewise, sustainability and sustainable tourism seem straightforward to define at first. However, sustainable tourism development proves to be a field of much confusion and misconception. Although sourcing locally has been proven to *contribute* to sustainability of tourism development, there is no guarantee or a simple formula towards sustainable tourism. While projections based on the ongoing development may be classified on a weak / strong sustainability spectrum (Rees, 1998), it is ultimately time that is the determinant.

The present paper aims to analyse the implications of locally sourced food and beverage on the producer, the establishment, the tourist and the destination on separate subheadings, with a view to sustainability and presents the findings of a relevant field research in a small rural destination in Turkey.

Sourcing local and the producer

Small-scale, family farming, local and craft / artisanal food & beverage production, local recipes and supporting elements of agricultural human activities, rural idyll, open-air and relevant cultural landscapes are all considered significant tourist attractions, all the while being core elements of livelihood for rural destinations (Bessi ere, 1998; Sims, 2010; Frisvoll, 2013). Furthermore, those are elements of the destination’s “intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2017).

Small scale production has been under visible threat from industrial food & beverage production (Albeni, 2011), mass tourism and a general trend towards standardisation of the tourism product. The resurgence of local food and beverage production has been due to a number of factors, including a reaction of general public against the perceived health hazards of industrial production and a rekindled attention of tourists towards authentic, local, small scale and quality food & beverage products (Armesto & Martin, 2006).

The principal implication of sourcing local is the preservation of local production methods and relevant local culture (Buller & Morris, 2004). The relationship here is mutual; tourism is credited for the preservation of local culture, while the latter functions as a tourist attraction (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). The result is appreciation of (perceivably) authentic ways of local life, a resurrection of local arts & crafts, and in this case, small scale agriculture and local cuisine (Bessière, 1998). The preservation of local culture, while diversifying the tourism product and enriching the tourist experience, is a main component of sustainable tourism (Usta, 2001).

For small-scale farmers, tourism also offers a direct sales channel and an opportunity for economic diversification (Brandth & Haugen, 2011; Domenico & Miller, 2012; Hall, Mitchell, & Sharples, 2003). Further tourist activity on agricultural grounds may even motivate the farmer to engage in tourism endeavour. This might, incidentally, be detrimental to agriculture as there may arise a competition for the agricultural land and labour (Olali & Timur, 1988). As the farmer delves further into tourism service provision, their dominant identity may shift towards “farm-based tourism entrepreneurial family”, which may hinder the perceived authenticity of the tourist experience (Domenico & Miller, 2012). The farmer may also consider separating or co-locating the two ventures (Domenico & Miller, 2012) or even producing a “pseudo-backstage” in order to maintain a sense of authenticity all the while keeping the agricultural venture undisturbed by tourist activity (Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013).

As a self-evident rule, in order for tourism development to be sustainable, so must be the food & beverage production. Sustainable agriculture practices are expected to be ecologically and economically appropriate, socially fair and humane (Scheewe, 2000). Sustainable food & beverage production also implies a stable flow of supply and competitive costs, as well as linkages to the local culture (Sims, 2010). In this context, “community based farming” enables cooperation of small scale producers and offers the chance of a more constant flow of products, lower costs and, in turn, sustainability (Çerçi, 2014).

Sourcing local and the establishment

As the local agricultural practices preserve (or attain) a certifiable standard of quality as well as attention from the tourist markets, tourism establishments may consider local produce as stock sources. Added to the hygiene and perceived authenticity requirements of such products, certificates of authenticity and localness are also in place. Any form of trusted geographical indicator (such as the French AOC) will guarantee the product's quality, reputation and links to a certain place (WIPO). Cohen & Cohen (2012) also mention "cool authentication", as a singular, objective and formal certification of a product, which will in turn be the basis of a "brand image".

Sourcing local *may* also offer cost advantages to the establishment, thanks to limited transportation and the omission of middlemen (Rogerson, 2012). In addition, the added value created by local ingredients, recipes, tastes and service styles may offer competitive advantage (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

An important point of consideration for the establishment would be the stability of the quantity and quality of local supply. Local and small scale food & beverage production will understandably be able to cater to small scale tourism. As the scale and capacity of the establishment grow, so does its need for constant stock supply.

Sourcing local and the tourist

Locally sourced food & beverage consumption may shape the tourist experience in a number of ways. Parallel to the reaction against industrial, mass produced food items, a growing amount of tourist motivation keywords include back to the basics / nature / old ways etc. The "escapism" from anomy (Do an, 2004), isolation, loss of meaning and other stereotypes of urban life towards rural regions, which are perceived to be more natural, socially inclusive and genuine (Frisvoll, 2013) would typically include the appreciation of locally sourced, authentic and high quality food & beverage, as well as the lifestyle, story and meaning around it (Sims, 2010). In this context, rural destinations offer not only a conceptual rurality of ideas, physical localness and human activities (Frisvoll, 2013), but also a (rather unrealistic) search for recreation, authenticity, roots and sanctuary (Bessi re, 1998).

Food & beverage during travel is not only a necessity, but a main component of local culture (Jones, 2002), and a main tool in experiencing said culture (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). The contrast of local food & beverage to that of the tourist's origin as well as the tourist's willingness

to experience will determine the experience as “peak” or “supporting” (Quan & Wang, 2004). Tourist may seek the novel and odd (neophilia) or express fear and resistance (neophobia) towards the local food (Fischler, 1988), based on the cultural distance between the origin and the destination (McKercher & Chow, 2001).

At this point, the tourist’s need for authenticity will play a key role. It should be noted that appreciation of local food & beverage seldom acts as the main motivation for the tourists [a research found a 6-8% of the population (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007)]. In this case, the staging of tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979), i.e. the (slight) modification of the local food to the general palate will be in order. If the tourist *perceives* the food to be authentic, the experience will in most cases be positive, a phenomenon named “experiential authenticity” (Trilling, 1974) or “existential authenticity” (Wang, 1999). Furthermore, the tourist’s own process of authentication, or “hot authentication”, coupled with the formal cool one will lead to total authenticity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

As a tangible product, local food offers the absolute advantage in creating memorable tourist experiences (Pine II & Gilmore, 1999). The senses of smell and taste, supported by the sensation of open space, cultural landscapes and other relevant factors (Sims, 2010), send direct impulses to the nervous system and immediately affect how the tourist feels in the destination. These points of perception, in turn, can effectively create memories and subconscious associations to the destination (Okumus et al., 2007).

However, tourists every year visit a seemingly endless number of destinations and engaging in yet so many food & beverage experiences. For any experience to “stand out” from the others, it should incorporate a sense of place (Soper, 2007), so that the tourists feel themselves “there” and may effectively associate those senses and memories of satisfaction to the relevant destination (Stedman, 2003): “tourists want to taste and experience the destination” (Bessière, 1998).

That association and sense of place will (likely) occur under certain circumstances; but it is useful to remember that satisfaction as well as experience formation is a highly subjective and unpredictable process. Local food may act as a tourism symbol, adding meaning to travel, and

(together with situations of consumption) forming a part of the overall tourism environment (Do an, 2004). In the best case, the tourist will remember a taste, smell or a pleasant and inclusive social gathering around an unusual food experience and subconsciously associate the positive emotions with a certain destination, ultimately encouraging repeat visits.

Around the authentic sensory experience of local food & beverage, visual stimuli should accentuate, and support the overall experience. A compatible cultural landscape consists of farmyards, vineyards, restaurants, food trails etc. as well as supporting cultural outlook of the destination and the meaning attached to those (Tuan, 1974). Especially in rural / agricultural experiences, surrounding natural landscape complements the overall sensation, forming a favourable total environment (Kuban, 2000). When the regional identity, sensory elements, the environment, as well as the tourism and daily activities are in cohesion (Frisvoll, 2013), the tourist will likely have an authentic and memorable experience. A regional identity successfully unites, and communicates, each component of the destination that makes it special. This process starts by identifying those components, or differentiating factors, which will provide competitive advantage, and directing efforts of development towards a common goal (EU LEADER +).

Lastly, by consuming local or locally sourced food and beverage items, visitors are likely to experience a moral satisfaction of a perceivably ethical behaviour, on top of shopping / consuming differently, a process named “alternative hedonism” (Soper, 2007). Especially valid when purchased as a souvenir, local food will also evoke memories of the destination and the sense of place (Sims, 2009).

Sourcing local and the destination

The destination as a whole is expected to benefit more sustainable results once local resources are utilised, as a rule of thumb, encouraging local initiatives, equal access and fair distribution, as well as reducing leakage (Swarbrooke, 1999).

The direct impact of sourcing local will be on agricultural initiatives. The decision will create new jobs, alternatives and opportunities for diversification (Kyriakaki, Zagkotsi, & Trihas, 2013), increasing overall agricultural demand, income and multiplier effect (Civelek, 2013). The demand for high quality local products will also encourage diverse and ecological practices and ultimately sustainable

agriculture, and empower local producers (Sims, 2009) by creating direct income (Çakır, 1999).

The overall local culture is also expected to see benefits. Appreciation of local and agricultural societies will help preserve and rejuvenate local traditions and heritage as a tourist attraction, and ultimately strengthen the local identity (Kyriakaki et al., 2013). As the local / rural society thrives, so does the social bonds (Sims, 2009), and the quality of life increases (Civelek, 2013). Furthermore, emigration of active population may be reduced (Kyriakaki et al., 2013) and idle labour may be employed (Civelek, 2013). Increased tourist – local interaction will also form new social bonds, contributing to both parties' cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Fair agricultural practices also mandate respect to natural cycles, motivating a more sustainable, organic and natural production of food and beverage (Aydemir, 2013). Sourcing local will also obviously reduce transportation distances and packaging, reducing waste, energy use and carbon footprint (Rogerson, 2012), all the while preserving nutritional value. Increased tourism activity will also require improved natural landscape planning and protection, as well as resource preservation (Sims, 2009).

Increasing value added and multiplier effect (European Commission [EC], 1999), direct and indirect income (Archer, 1982) and ultimately reducing leakage through local (and reusable) resources will generate a recycling of financial resources and a general improvement in local economy (Hall et al., 2003). In addition to direct sales channels (between farmers and tourists), distribution of tourism income within the local economy will generate trust between stakeholders such as local cooperatives and unions, eventually forming marketing networks (Hall et al., 2003) and composing an authentic brand image (reflecting the regional identity) that will attract investors as well as tourists (Sims, 2009).

Ultimately, the tourism product will see certain improvements in terms of tourist arrivals and income. In proportion to the demand generating power of local food & beverage, the destination will have the chance to diversify its tourism product (Kyriakaki et al., 2013), and possibly overcome seasonal and regional concentration (Civelek, 2013).

As an ambassador of culture, authentic and local food & beverage may also enrich the tourist experience, even creating awareness and demand for sustainably produced food & beverage.

A possible pitfall in organising, packaging or staging cultural values (including food & beverage) for tourism purposes is degeneration (Shaw & Williams, 2004). Authenticity of local food & beverage, as well as supporting cultural elements and meaning should be carefully preserved against pressures of increased arrivals through planned development.

The case of Yesilyurt

Yesilyurt is one of the numerous little villages located on the southern slope of Mount Ida (Kazda ı), in the north-western city of Canakkale in Turkey (Northern Aegean). A large portion of those villages have been undergoing small-scale rural tourism development, mainly functioning as a supporting tourist attraction / excursion getaway to the main attraction, “holidays, leisure & recreation” (UNWTO, 2013) (or simply beach tourism) along the coast line to the south. Among the attractions throughout those villages other than local food & beverage include climatotherapy, archaeology, local culture, agriculture (olive oil), hiking, cycling and jeep safari routes, shopping and general leisure.

The local cuisine heavily features the indigenous olive oil and recipes include a rich tradition of herbs and pastry. The choice for meat is traditionally kid, especially during spring and early winter. The cuisine has been heavily shaped by Yuruks (nomadic Anatolian Turks) and influenced by Cretan, Balkan (especially Albanian) and Ottoman traditions (Azato lu & Azato lu, 2011). Local recipes, also made from local produce, are featured almost exclusively in restaurants and small hotels throughout the region.

Agriculture in the region is mostly traditional, small scale and mechanised as long as the terrain permits. There have been ambitious initiatives for non-certified (IFOAM, 2013) and certified organic farming, natural and sustainable practices and organic markets (bu day).

The village Yesilyurt is situated at an altitude of 170 metres and has a population of 165, as of 2012 (244 in 1985), without a community clinic, postal service or a school (YerelNet). The village witnesses both immigration (of outsider investors and pensioners) and emigration. Aside from the hotels interviewed are a few cafes, home pensions, local

restaurants and local product sales outlets. Restauration and construction of new buildings in the village is heavily regulated, as is the case in neighbouring villages.

Methodology

After the review of literature regarding sourcing local and sustainable tourism, potential and effective linkages and effects have been detected and exhibited (Yıldırım & İmrek, 2000). As a real life example, the village of Yesilyurt is chosen due to the satisfactory amount of tourism service providers, development and potential. The field research has been focused around semi-structured interviews with the owners or managers of those establishments. All the relevant establishments in the village have been marked on the village map and have been selected, with the exception of two that did not show interest. The interviewees have been contacted and scheduled. The interview questions mainly focused on local food & beverage stock and recipe usage. A semi-structured pattern was adopted in order to gain in-depth knowledge and flexibility, as well as to uncover overlooked matters (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktarolu, & Yıldırım, 2004). The interviews were supported by observation, unstructured natural environment fieldwork (Yıldırım & İmrek, 2000), in order to naturally observe landscapes, cultural components, sense of place, rural coherence and structures.

Findings

An immediate finding of the research is that almost all establishments use exclusively local food & beverage sources and heavily feature local recipes. This proves especially important due to the relative isolation of the village and the region. Almost all interviewees remarked on a lack of cooperation of farmers as well as tourism establishments. Poor road conditions and accessibility has been a recurring point of concern, diminishing the village's tourism potential. However, this is also pointed as a "blessing in disguise", protecting the villages from overcrowding and unplanned tourism development. The interviewees also expressed their concern at the lack of tourism infrastructure, namely cultural / educational facilities and waste management.

Kısık Kona 1 (Kısık Mansion)

The mansion offers 24 beds in 8 rooms and a 26 seating capacity in its restaurant. Very high in spring time and almost empty in winter, the average occupancy is 25% throughout the year. All personnel is local. The menu is mostly Aegean with herbs, fresh vegetables, fish and olive oil used heavily, omitting fries and poultry, featuring local (researched) recipes. The food & beverage is sourced exclusively local and in season. Dried food, jam, tomato paste and preserves are home made.

Öngen Country Hotel

One of the largest establishment of the region boasts 75 beds in 30 rooms and an 80 seating capacity. The yearly occupancy is around 35%. The personnel, food & beverage sources and the menu are exclusively local. While the main ingredients are supplied from the county market, cheese and vegetables come from neighbouring mountain villages. The hotel also organises rural tourism activities such as hiking and storytelling. The hotel houses a home-made products outlet.

Manici Kasrı (Manici Pavilion)

Arguably the most deluxe hotel of the whole region, the Pavilion accommodates some 80+ beds in numerous separate buildings, located in an extensive area. Averaging a 50% yearly occupancy rate, about half of the visitors are foreign, a stark difference from other hotels interviewed. Almost all personnel is local. Food & beverage stocks are requested to be mainly organic. Olive oil is produced on site and most ingredients are sourced locally but outsider ingredients are also used. While the menu is predominantly Aegean, items are modified according to the international palate and the menu includes numerous house specialties.

Ida Tas Konak (Ida Stone House)

A newer establishment, Ida houses 56 beds in 22 rooms and 70 seats. The food & beverages are sourced mainly from the county, while cheese and meat is supplied from local producers from around the city. The hotel also manages an organic fruit & vegetable garden, from where the guests may serve themselves. Olive, jam, bread, yoghurt, tomato paste etc. are home made. While the menu features mainly Aegean cuisine, there are exceptions such as pizza, marinated chicken and fries in sunflower oil.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper addressed possible effects of the establishments' decision to source local food& beverage on the sustainability of the

destination. As the wealth of the literature suggests, once the tourism establishments use local food & beverage sources (or any sources for that matter), the destination sees various changes, potentially towards sustainability.

Firstly, sourcing local food & beverage benefits local producers, increasing demand for quality produce. The producers also find themselves in close contact with visitors, a direct sales channel and even opportunities for diversification.

Second, the establishments themselves benefit from the decision in terms of a more authentic food & beverage offer and reduced costs. The constant demand also requires the producers to seek cooperation and certification, in order to meet the quantity, hygiene and quality requirements of the establishments.

Thirdly, the tourist will benefit by consuming local, in proportion to their need for authenticity. Locally sourced food or local recipes, surrounded by cultural and natural elements and the story is likely to produce a memorable experience for the tourist. Authenticity and coherence of elements will also create a sense of place associated with the very experience of local food.

Lastly, the destination as a whole benefits from preservation (and even improvement) of local culture and nature, enjoys higher direct and indirect income, higher value added and multiplier effect and reduced leakage. The destination finds a solid ground on which to build a strong brand image and regional identity. The tourism product offer also prospers and diversifies.

The village of Yesilyurt is a prime example for the study of those effects. With the bed capacity far exceeding local population, the isolated (mountainous) village exhibits hallmark features of a small scale rural tourism destination. Almost all food & beverage (and other) sources have been found to be local. This proposes opportunities for cooperation, between producers and establishments (also among themselves) to ensure higher multiplier effects and lower leakage, as well as higher quality standards and a strong brand image. Through those steps, the village will be able to create a tangible sense of place and memorable tourist experiences.

However, it should be noted that the decision to source local, or the small-scale tourism development is not completely voluntary. This is in great part due to poor accessibility, a convenient and productive food & beverage resource base and also building prohibitions, rather than a proactive tourism planning that takes carrying capacity and local culture into consideration. The future of tourism in the village remains to be seen, and with that, the role of sourcing local on sustainability.

As a closing remark, it should be stressed that while sourcing local is likely to contribute to sustainability, there are no guarantees. Once the arrival figures increase, the establishments may face a decision to include outside food & beverage sources or menu items to satisfy higher numbers of more mid-centric guests. The producers also might consider higher yield, industrial farming methods or non-indigenous species. Once local food & beverage is involved as a tourist attraction, the carrying capacity of local agriculture must also be taken into account in overall carrying capacity estimations and tourism plans. Even so, an unappealing food & beverage offer, or weak links to local culture and lack of coherence will fail to create sense of place and memorable tourist experiences. In addition, sustainably sourced food & beverage alone will not ensure sustainability. Pro-active planning, tourism effect analyses, cooperation and preservation will be needed to ensure the longevity of resources and attractions and a long-term profitability of the destination. And time will be the only indicator of sustainability.

For further research, the future of tourism in the village, in light of its food & beverage offer may be considered. Also, linkages of local food & beverage with sense of place may be more thoroughly analysed.

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