

The future of food tourism

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Abstract

Purpose – *The authors identify five driving forces of changes that are shaping the discourses about food tourism. The paper aims to discuss this issue.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The approach used by this paper is a general review.*

Findings – *The five driving forces identified are: food tourism as political capital; food tourism as a visionary state; what it means to be a foodie; the drive for affluence and exclusivity; fluid experiences in a post-modernist world.*

Originality/value – *The five drivers of change are identified as the core of any food tourism strategy for policy makers.*

Keywords *Futures, Food tourism, Drivers*

Paper type *General review*

As society has advanced, the consumption of both food and tourism has changed. In 1950, 25 million tourists took an international holiday, today it is over one billion and Yeoman (2012) optimistically forecasts that this is set to rise to 4.2 billion by 2050. Food tourism without doubt is a major component of the tourist's itinerary and a focus of destination strategies. The interest in food tourism is a representation of tourism today, in which culture has moved out of the museum and is represented in the experience economy with food tourism one of the central spheres. So, where does the future of food tourism lie? This trends paper identifies five driving forces that will shape the discourses of food tourism (see Figure 1).

Driver 1: food tourism as political capital

Food is the one of key elements of a nation's culture and identity, along with its history, symbols, myths and discourses (Smith, 1995). In line with this there is a connection between food and capital. Capital can be the economic, social, cultural and political (Bourdieu, 1984) and it can be objectified or embodied. Food and tourism have a strong historical connection which binds them together as a political force. Additionally, food and agriculture have been traditionally strong economic sectors with associated public policies and strategies. These now often encompass food tourism and, as such, it drives political capital. Food and tourism are outputs, symbols and rituals of the food production system and, often, they cannot be separated. For example, a farmer's market is both a food tourism experience and farm retail outlet. Political capital of food tourism is captured in destination strategies as destinations chase high-yielding tourists to bring wealth and economic propensity. Politically, food tourism generates employment and economic activity. In many destinations across the world, from Scotland to New Zealand food is central to tourism strategy thus creating political and economic capital. Why? Smith's (1995) explanation gastronomic theory of nations where a political capital perspective is the link between "authenticity" and a destination's or

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Figure 1 Drivers shaping the future of food tourism



country's history, place and culture. Here, authenticity is nationalism as food tourism is a symbol of ritual and identity. Hence, political leaders champion and protect local foods and cultures as a form of political capital.

Driver 2: food tourism as a visionary state

Closely linked to the driving force of food tourism as political capital, is that of food tourism as a visionary state. Visions and political utopias are closely associated (Shklar, 1965). Ideologies are political utopias, paradises and perfect worlds in which those ideologies are presented as visions (Bergman *et al.*, 2010). Utopian entities are often portrayed in tourism as romanticised images of destinations where tourists desire to be (Yeoman *et al.*, 2014). As food tourism has political capital it is portrayed as a vision through the use of words such as "authenticity" and "activism" in relation to how food tourism can react to the problems of humankind and climate change. Food tourism is often portrayed as a visionary gaze due to images of "local", "regionality branded", "authentic" and the "focus of economic development strategies" in which tourists are "climate aware" and want a "sustainable" experience. Food tourism is a vision of how science can be incorporated into tourism and hospitality, this is where food meets science in the form of Heston Blumenthal. The growth of organic food too a certain extent to address the issues of homogeneous food that is bland and tasteless found in the food chain, a much the sameness prevails. Hence, authenticity, activism and slow food are a rebellion against the globalisation and McDonalds. We suppose that food tourism has become a vision of the future in which food tourism offers a scalable cost-effective means of local and regional development, with the potential to strengthen identity, enhance appreciation of the environment and encourage the regeneration of local heritage and the local economy. Thus food tourism is a utopia everyone can buy into. Food tourism cannot do any wrong, is all local, natural and something that brings communities together. It advocates villages, localism and cultural identity. Food represents the geography of the place, a historical escapism from today. A sort of gaze for both producers and tourists to imagine a future in which stakeholders, communities and political groups bond together through a common language.

Driver 3: what it means to be a foodie

Food tourism and foodies are well documented in the literature (Getz *et al.*, 2014). A picture has developed of a future consumer is that is better educated, wealthy, has travelled more extensively, lives longer and is concerned about their health and well-being. Foodies are those tourists who are passionate about food and where food is the main reason for travel. Food to the foodie is the source of all moods and all sensations (Yeoman, 2012) and is the signifier of culture and symbolic order. To the foodie, food is a focus for socialising and a means for simultaneous enriching experiences, expressing personal identities and adding to quality of life. In this book, the foodie and food tourist are a central construction of the future. Consumers are moving from an era of industrial to cultural capitalism where cultural production is increasingly becoming the dominant form of economic activity. Securing access to the many cultural resources and experiences, such as food and food tourism, become an important aspect in shaping identity. The food tourist is now mainstream, exploring places, tasting the cheese of France, the sausages of Germany or the salted cod of Portugal. Thus food tourism is now part of modern life and food tourist is the new culture vulture.

Driver 4: the drive for affluence and exclusivity

The importance of affluence and exclusivity is shaped by the proposition that rising income (and the wealth improvement connected with it) has been the driving agent of modern society. It is a key indicator of societal success and responsible for the empowerment of consumers in relation to tourism. Increased personal prosperity creates an emboldened consumer-citizen, a more demanding, sophisticated and informed actor with intensified expectations of, for instance, quality innovation and premium choices in every market. It seems every destination for political and economic reasons is chasing high-value tourists in order to increase revenues. Yeoman (2012) points out that with the arrival of mass tourism for the middle classes the definition of luxury within tourism becomes diluted thus luxury providers need to redefine luxury as exclusivity. Yeoman recognises a future society where food is scarce. Consumers' access to and ingestion of food will reshape identity and cultural class. Showing culinary prowess will bring recognition and honour. Food could become a luxury with expensive, rare and exotic foods marketed for their authenticity, local nature and cultural identity. Affluence is a key component of destination strategies, with all countries targeting high-value tourists. Yeoman *et al.* (2015) draws attention to the fact that the activities of the serious wealthy and celebrities can shape markets and consumer trends. This is the language of neoliberal tendencies and economic development which dominates strategy and policy discourse in tourism.

Driver 5: fluid experiences in a post-modernist world

Rising incomes and wealth accumulation distributed in new ways alter the consumer balance of power as new forms of connections and associations allow a liberated pursuit of personal identity which is fluid and less restricted by background or geography. Tomorrow's tourist wants dynamic escapist experiences but at the same time social responsibility and authenticity. This is about diversity of experiences through sampling a wide range of novel and familiar experiences (Yeoman, 2008). Fluid food tourism experiences means undertaking an authentic Turkish cooking class but at the same learning to cook with liquid nitrogen. Food tourists of the future will have so much choice: consumer volatility will increase and a high-entropy society will exist. Food tourists are and will be excellent at using social network tools to search for better deals, become communities, be informed and influence. This is a tourist that wants to experience in several ways, reflecting increasing aspirations and higher-order expectations. The changing meaning of luxury raises the importance of cultural and social capital, as this is the importance of how tourists talk about destinations and experiences. The importance of cultural capital defines identity and status and it becomes the critical currency of conversation e.g. "have you been to Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck Restaurant or the Blue Oyster in Los Angeles?"

Therefore ...

In conclusion, these five drivers of change are at the centre of discourses about the future of food tourism as was recently demonstrated by Yeoman *et al.* (2015) in *The Future of Food Tourism*. The drivers overlap, influence and integrate with each. Food tourism as a collective discourse binds farmer, producer, distributor, retailer and consumer together thus providing stakeholders and communities a utopian vision of the future. Through the creation of visions, political capital is created as political leaders see the opportunity to create dialogue through common purpose i.e. the land, food and the tourist. These are the elements of policy and strategy which focus on the high-value tourist characterised by affluence and exclusivity. To the food tourist, food is their identity. This identity is fluid and is shaped by authenticity and hedonistic experiences.

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