The Role of Local and Regional Food in Destination Marketing: A South African Situation Analysis

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SUMMARY. An analysis of the relevant tourism literature and the promotional material of various destinations indicate that the role of food in the marketing of destinations has until recently received very little attention globally and locally. All indications, however, are that local food holds much potential to enhance sustainability in tourism; contribute to the authenticity of the destination; strengthen the local economy; and provide for the environmentally friendly infrastructure. This paper will highlight the key findings of the preliminary study regarding the utilization of food as a key or supportive attraction by destination-marketing organizations in South Africa. Guidelines for the future development,

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INTRODUCTION

A successful tourism destination is, among others, evaluated by the positive revelations of visitors to the area, the amount of money spent per capita and prospects of repeat visits to the destination. In this regard Murphy, Pritchard and Brock (2000) argue that visitors consume the products of a destination; therefore, the products must be something the visitor wants and needs. A further analysis of the literature indicates that food and drink products of a country can be among its most important cultural expressions (Handszuh, 2000; Bernard & Zaragoza, 1999; Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). On a practical level a nation's identity is reflected and strengthened by the food experiences that it offers. The way in which various ingredients are combined and cooked forms an important element of a national cultural identity (Bessiere, 1998; Cusack, 2000). Based on these perspectives it can be argued that local and regional food is a feature that can add value to a destination (Telfer & Wall, 1996; Handszuh, 2000), and furthermore may contribute to the sustainable competitiveness of a destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999).

The Potential Role of Food Tourism

Until recently, the contribution of food to tourism has been largely ignored in spite of its apparent importance and potential (Telfer & Wall, 1996; Handszuh, 2000; WTO, 2000). So, for example, tourism spending on food and dining out in South Africa by international tourists averages 8% of the total spending (SA Tourism, 2000), while the domestic tourist spends on average 24% (Rule, Struwig, Langa, Viljoen & Boiare, 2001). In light of these figures, it is important to consider the role of food tourism and how it can be utilized and further enhanced to contribute to the effective marketing of a destination. In this regard it is

also essential to consider how food tourism can be incorporated in the marketing and promotional material of a region.

Handszuh (2000), argues that local food holds much potential to enhance sustainability in tourism, whereby the tourism planner and the entrepreneur should work hand in hand to satisfy the consumers; contribute to the authenticity of the destination; strengthen the local economy; and provide for the environmentally-friendly infrastructure, including the ways and means by which food resources, both local and imported, are handled. This approach was not always common practice at the local level. Traditionally many local people did not hold their own cuisine in high regard, and often viewed it as not being sophisticated enough and definitely not something a tourist would want (Kapner, 1996). All indications are that this attitude is changing and is in accordance with the market trend where tourists want to experience and "taste" the region they are visiting (Bessiere, 1998; Refalo, 2000), an underlying reason being that culture is playing an increasingly important role in tourism and food is one of the key elements of culture.

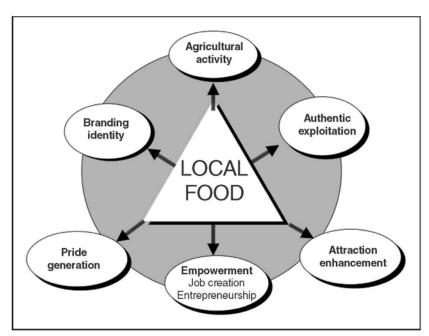
Tourists enjoy indigenous food, particularly items of local or ethnic nature (Wagner, 2001). Furthermore knowledge of the local, regional and national cuisine has become an interest for tourists (Chappel, 2001; Gallagher, 2001). Santich (1998), Macdonald (2001) and Bessiere (1998) report that people interested in travelling for gastronomical motivations are on the increase. In spite of these trends, gastronomy has not been considered for its real potential (Bernard & Zaragoza, 1999), nor exploited conveniently as a tourism resource. It needs to be identified and applied as a branding mechanism for a destination. For emerging destinations such as South Africa to compete with the other leading destinations and meet or improve on their food tourism initiatives, it is important to learn from existing best practices and then benchmark the country's initiatives against global best practices (Wolf, 2002; Hall et al, 2003).

From the preceding perspectives it is apparent that food tourism has considerable potential to enhance visitor experiences and to contribute to the branding and competitive marketing of destinations. It is, however, important to insure that the authentic cuisine of a region and marketable local and regional foods are approached with a delicate balance. If food is changed only to suit the taste of foreign tourists, then traditional foods of the region can be lost, which has wider implications regarding the sustainability of the community (Chappel, 2001).

Focussing on the Role of Local Food

As governments in developing countries increasingly embrace international tourism, they should not underestimate the importance of food service as a vital part of their overall development and marketing strategies (Elmont, 1995). The use of local food can directly or indirectly contribute to the various elements of sustainability in a particular area (see Figure 1), namely stimulating and supporting agricultural activity and food production; preventing authentic exploitation; enhancing destination attractiveness; empowerment of the community (by means of job creation and encouraging entrepreneurs hip); generating pride, specifically regarding food; and reinforcing brand identity of the destination with the focus on food experiences in that area (Telfer & Wall, 1996). Furthermore, food service is a generator of jobs and income that is of major importance to the tourism sector in these countries, including South Africa, and can contribute to the establishment of a destination that is both sustainable and competitive (Elmont, 1995).

FIGURE 1. The Contribution of Local Food to Sustainable Development Within a Destination



The reality regarding food tourism is that local food in the form of regional cuisine is rarely present as an important resource in publicity material and promotional messages prepared for mainstream tourism (Handszuh, 2000). This also appears to be the case in South Africa and therefore it has become essential to explore opportunities to promote food tourism and more specifically its culinary heritage. The popular perception that food is regarded as a given (as tourists need to eat), relative to other attractions, needs to be challenged. A key question that needs to be answered is if local and regional food does not hold a sufficiently strong appeal to attract visitors and can it not be elevated to a key attraction in many destinations with considerable untapped potential?

When developing the food potential of a particular area the warning should be heeded to, that the presence of tourists might negatively impact the local culture. Appropriate planning and coordination is therefore essential to prevent the altering of social values and diminishing standards concerning food production (Handszuh, 2000; Nield, Kozak and LeGrys, 2000). Care must therefore be taken to assure that definite checks and balances are in place to prevent exploitation of the local community and environment, thereby assuring the sustainability of food tourism as not purely an income generating activity but also as a cultural enhancement activity and eminently contributing to the sustainability of the destination.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Against the background of the preceding perspectives the objectives of this preliminary study were to determine the following regarding food tourism in South Africa:

- the current status of food as an attraction in destinations:
- the current role of food in destination marketing strategies;
- the constraints and gaps experienced in utilizing local and regional food as attractions and as key elements of destination marketing strategies;
- guidelines for future strategy development; and
- key recommendations for future research.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

To address the above objectives a survey was conducted at INDABA (2001), the annual South African tourism-marketing exhibition, which

is attended by leading Southern Africa destination and product marketers and key overseas tour operators. A convenience sampling method was applied in accordance with specific criteria. Only target groups representing key substructure agents in food/culinary tourism and agents of tourism, namely the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in South Africa, were included in the study. To be included in the sample the organization had to comply to the following criteria, namely be a:

- South African Provincial, Regional or Local DMO, or
- South African key marketer/organisation in food/culinary tourism.

A sample of 80 South African local, regional and provincial destination-marketing organizations and other marketers complying with the criteria were selected. Information was collected by means of a structured questionnaire consisting primarily of close-ended questions. Openended questions were also included to accommodate answers that did not fall into specific categories. The questions covered information regarding the attractions of the particular destination; the role of food as a key or supportive attraction; marketing tools and activities applied by destination marketing organisations; marketing constraints and gaps and possible strategies that can be applied to market the food experiences of a destination.

Of the 80 questionnaires distributed, 58 were returned and were considered suitable for analysis. Frequency ratings expressed as percentages were calculated regarding the status of an attraction; the role of food as a key or supportive attraction; and the key constraints, possible strategies and recommendations. The responses are reported reflecting the categories of each question in the questionnaire. The responses of the openended questions were listed and grouped together according to meaningful categories. Due to multiple responses for questions concerning information reflected in Tables 1 through 6 the percentages reflect the number of responses for each category indicated by the respondents and not the number of respondents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The key findings of the preliminary study as stated in the objectives of the study are outlined below:

TABLE 1. Key Components of Food Tourism

KEY COMPONENTS OF FOOD TOURISM	n = 42* %	
Speciality restaurants/eating places	62	
Locally/regionally produced food products	59	
Special cuisine/food routes	45	
Food festivals	31	
Special food events	19	
Other	14	

^{*(}n = 42) number of respondents that indicated food as a key/supportive attraction.

TABLE 2. Nature of Food Experiences Offered

NATURE OF FOOD EXPERIENCES OFFERED	n = 30* %
Speciality restaurant/eating place promotion	63
Food festivals	47
Included in locally produced food product promotions	37
Special food promotional events	33

^{*(}n = 30) number of respondents that indicated that local/regional food is used as a marketing tool/activity.

TABLE 3. Communication Tools Used in Food Marketing

COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED IN FOOD MARKETING	n = 30* %
Included in marketing tools/brochures/pamphlets	80
Included in advertising initiatives/radio/TV/media/printed material/advertising/publicity	63
A key element of the image/branding identity	60
Included in trade/consumer exhibitions/shows	57
Included in web promotion	53
Other	13

^{*(}n = 30) number of respondents that indicated that local/regional food is used as a marketing tool/activity.

The Current Status of Food as an Attraction in Destinations

In a destination such as South Africa, nature-based attractions are the most important key attractions followed by cultural and outdoor and recreational activities. The focus of this study, however, was to deter-

TABLE 4. Promotional Gaps/Constraints of Food Promotion in a Destination

PROMOTIONAL GAPS/CONSTRAINTS OF FOOD PROMOTION IN A DESTINATION	n = 39* %
Insufficient funds available to develop and promote the food experience	74
No special food events are organized	61
In spite of our potential food is not promoted as a special tourist attraction	59
Food is not included in any media coverage of the destination	54
Food does not feature in any of the brochures/pamphlets of the destination	49
No speciality restaurants/eating places that offer local/regional foods	46
No regional branding of locally produced food products	41
No locally produced food products are exported	41
Other	31

^{*(}n = 39) number of respondents indicating that there are gaps/constraints in the promotion of food in a destination.

TABLE 5. Initiatives Required to Address Gaps/Constraints in Food Promotion

INITIATIVES REQUIRED TO ADDRESS GAPS/CONSTRAINTS IN FOOD PROMOTION	n = 39* %
Marketing strategy/initiatives/procedures	36
Branding/promotion of local products/menus reflecting local food	20
Promotional material required/advertisements	18
Development of a culinary route/addition to wine route	15
Organisation of food festivals/food promotion/exhibitions	13
Sponsors/funding	10
Training to staff of DMOs and educating providers	10
Tourism policy incorporation of food tourism/sustainability of local food	10
Package food together with other key attractions in destination	5
Improve foodservice standards and quality	5

^{**(}n = 39) number of respondents indicating that there are gaps/constraints in the promotion of food in a destination.

mine where food would be positioned. Figure 2 portrays a very positive image where food was indicated by 32.7% of the destination marketing organizations as a key attraction and by 39.7% destination marketing organizations as a supportive attraction, making food the prime supportive attraction. Wine in comparison was only indicated by 13.8% of destination marketing organizations as a key attraction. The majority of destinations where food was a key attraction were in the Cape Province,

TABLE 6. Possible Strategies That Can Contribute to Optimising a Destination's Potential

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO OPTIMISING A DESTINATION'S POTENTIAL (n = 58)	Major importance %	Limited importance %	No importance %
Media coverage of all local/regional foods	64	17	2
Sufficient funds available to develop and promote the food experience	60	19	2
Promotion of speciality restaurants/eating places	60	20	3
Development of local/regional food as a special tourist attraction of the destination	55	19	2
Branding/marketing of locally produced food products	55	17	3
Brochures/pamphlets accentuating role of local/regional foods	55	21	2
Launching of a regional food festival	48	24	10
Exporting of local food products	45	21	9
Trade/consumer exhibitions/shows	40	33	7
Development of a special food/wine tourist route	34	28	10
Organizing of special food events	28	31	7

followed by Gauteng. A possible reason for this could be the existing wine routes in the Western Cape, which have fostered the development of food tourism in that area. Gauteng, which includes Soweto and various other cultural villages, has promoted the culinary heritage of the African culture and promoted it as an authentic tourist experience in this area. Food as a supportive attraction was more evenly represented in all the various provinces of South Africa. This finding supports the fact that food is a product that is provided in all destinations. DMOs, however, can promote the food of a destination with potential and move it from being a supportive attraction to enhancing it in becoming a key attraction.

The key components of food tourism, as reflected in Table 1, he strongly in the presence of specialty restaurants and the local or regionally produced food products of the area. This is in accordance with expectations as this is the traditional way of showcasing the food of a region and offering the tourist a cultural experience. Of particular significance is the finding that routes, festivals and events are also receiving considerable attention.

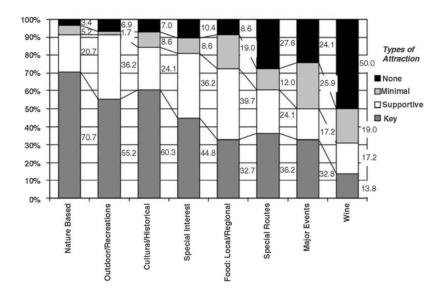


FIGURE 2. Relative Position of Food as an Attraction

The Current Role of Food in Destination Marketing Strategies

The traditional way that food experiences are offered in a destination is reflected by the promotion of restaurants (Table 2). This form of food experience occurs more easily as food has to be provided to tourists, it does not involve additional effort, organisation and promotional activities as for example a food festival would require.

Fifty-two percent of the respondents (n = 58) indicated that food is used as a marketing activity or tool in promoting the destination.

The communication tools used in food marketing reflected the use of the traditional methods of marketing communication as indicated in Table 3. Although these tools are the most generally utilized by most DMOs the information regarding food tourism in the pamphlets, brochures and media advertisements evaluated is scant; not informative enough; and often primarily in the form of advertisements, where the provider is advertised and not necessarily the generic food products of the region. Very little information is provided with regards to the culinary heritage or the authentic food tourism experience of the region. Of significance is the finding that a considerable percentage of respondents use food as a key element of their branding identity and also include it in their web promotion.

The Perceived Constraints and Gaps Regarding Food Tourism

The perceived constraints and gaps are outlined in Table 4. Insufficient funding appears to be the major problem encountered by many of the DMOs concerning the promotion of food in a destination. When funds are insufficient, the promotion of food, which is considered a product that will be consumed regardless whether it is promoted or not, will not be included in the marketing efforts. The additional gaps and constraints hampering food promotion concern the specific marketing strategies, promotional initiatives and activities of the destination. This is a more challenging problem to solve as it involves the DMOs making a mind shift regarding the importance of local food in destination marketing.

Table 5 provides respondents' views on initiatives required to address the perceived gaps and constraints. More than a third (36%) of all the respondents that indicated the need for promotional tools specified that marketing strategies were required as an initiative to promote food tourism in a destination. The other responses strengthen this recommendation, as food tourism is not considered essential in the planning and marketing actions of a DMO.

Guidelines for Future Strategy Development

The possible strategies and recommendations made regarding optimising a destinations' potential and the use of food to enhance a destination are outlined in Table 6. Aside from funding that is required for all types of promotional incentives in a destination, the strategies that can contribute the most to optimising a destinations' potential with regard to food tourism are all promotion and market orientated (Table 6). The providers of food services and the products of the area need to be boosted and branded as the local and specialty products of that area. Specific recommendations that require a concerted effort from all stakeholders in a destination are the following:

- Creation of "proud of local food."
- Development of an identification system for locally produced food/branding identity/packaging identity.
- Empowerment of local SMMEs to establish food services utilizing locally produced foods.

A recommendation that could provide a positive development would be the development of food routes in various regions, that would not involve much additional effort or funding as many areas are already developing different cultural/scenic routes and food could easily be included as part of the marketing strategy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Food as an Attraction in Destinations

Food does play a role in tourism, and is primarily considered as a supportive attraction and, to a lesser extent, a key attraction in South Africa. Tourism spending on food and dining out in South Africa by international tourists (8%) and domestic tourists (24%) is substantial enough to warrant more aggressive marketing as a form of niche tourism. It could contribute to the promotion of food tourism in destinations that have the resources (local food products/suitable providers) but that are not exploiting their potential related to food tourism.

When analysing the reasons where food is not promoted as a key or supportive attraction it can be concluded that there are certain financial and marketing restraints or lack of knowledge regarding local and regional food. Marketing efforts regarding food tourism are lacking not only in South Africa but also globally (Handszuh, 2000) and are an issue that can be addressed if DMOs start to develop strategies to incorporate food as part of their overall marketing strategies. To enable the DMOs to achieve this goal a tool needs to be developed which will assist them. This is one of the envisaged key outcomes of this study, namely the development of a product potential and attractiveness audit instrument that will contribute to providing a framework and guidelines to destination marketers and current and prospective entrepreneurs, to optimise the tourism potential of local and regional foods in future destination marketing.

Role of Food in Destination Marketing Strategies

The marketing strategies and tools that were identified as being used by the various DMOs constituted a wide spectrum, but only 52% of the total sample indicated that they used these tools. The reality is that nearly half of the DMOs are not applying any specific strategies to promote food tourism, which clearly underlines the need for a product potential and attractiveness audit instrument, appropriate guidelines and a

framework to enable DMOs to put in a more concerted effort regarding the marketing and promotion of food tourism.

The necessary actions that have been identified to promote and develop food tourism offer a great challenge to DMOs. The actions entail both policy and strategy development actions and specific products or services that can be developed. The recommended strategies as identified by the DMOs entail formulation of policy and the marketing and promotion of tourism products and services within a destination, such as development of promotional material and branding the products of a destination. The development of a strategy and the application of a policy are activities that can be streamlined by applying a tool, guidelines and developing a framework that can assist the DMOs in formulating a food tourism strategy. Specific product and service development would require the necessary resources that would include knowledge of the local and regional food products and experiences, to facilitate the development of food tourism in a destination.

Guidelines for Future Strategy Development

Strategy development, packaging and marketing of local and regional food entail the development and marketing of appropriate products and experiences, but more importantly the implementation of these initiatives by DMOs.

The following are suggestions that can be considered by the DMOs:

- Be sensitive to local conditions-use local foods instead of imported foods.
- Enhance domestic tourism as standards of living improve.
- An attractive/unusual/unknown cuisine can be regarded as a resource of a destination and needs to be developed as a destination branding item.
- Gastronomy routes can promote a destination and can contribute to sustainable tourism projects.
- Specialty restaurants can be developed to assist with the promotion of the special cuisine of an area.

A key question is: How can food tourism in South Africa be marketed successfully? In this regard certain suggestions made by Bannister (2001) pertaining to the promotion of tourism to South Africa can also be applied to local and regional food tourism. These include the following:

- Maintain a public relations and media management campaign to keep a unique destination profile of a combination of authentic experiences and a sophisticated infrastructure. This is where food tourism can find a definite place as it can be marketed for its exotic and authentic experience.
- Create a visual experience either by developing virtual "food" tourism and promoting food tourism in the "Project Hollywood" which is being negotiated by S A Tourism and deserves the support from government and international marketing organisations.
- Continue with campaigns such as "Circle of Sunshine" and "Celebrate South Africa" but include the rich and authentic resources of food and culinary heritage in these promotional efforts.
- Focus on tourists and lure them into coming to SA for the real experience by promoting the key attractions and also focusing on the secondary attractions such as food tourism.
- Local governments should encourage tourism, including the development of food service businesses, to boost the economy and create jobs and contribute to the development of a sustainable destination.

The increase in tourism volume and a more discerning clientele has spurred the more alert of South Africa's entrepreneurs and the more innovative and adventurous chefs to invest in the development of local cuisine. The challenge is for this to develop without losing any of the cuisines' fragrance, taste and originality and preventing it from becoming a fusion of confused tastes and flavors with no definite distinction of the various cultures of our country.

Possibly the key challenge regarding development of food tourism in South Africa is the utilisation of local food as a catalyst for local pride. South Africans need to cultivate a pride in that which is their own and realise the advantages of promoting their local and regional cuisine and culinary heritage.

Proposals for Future Research

This preliminary study has indicated that food tourism in South Africa has not capitalised on this ideal opportunity to promote each local tourism region for what it excels in as far as food is concerned. Future research is required to determine the culinary heritage of each tourism area in terms of local and regional cuisine. It is also imperative to identify the local food produced in each area, region and province, thereby

incorporating it into the local cuisine and promoting the products according to region and locality, which can contribute to sustainability in such an area.

When the data of this preliminary study was analysed it was found that the destinations regarding food as a key and supportive attraction were represented from the entire country and not only a specific region, as was the case with the wine. This poses a greater challenge for further study as it will be imperative to identify the regions which are more prone to food tourism and that have a greater chance of promoting and marketing the local and regional food of the region more successfully. Much of this information is either available on ENPAT (Environmental Potential Atlas) or can be added to the existing ENPAT database and assist in providing additional data concerning the tourist (consumer) and the tourism product (food experience) in the various tourism regions.

The development of a product potential and attractiveness audit instrument that will provide a framework and guidelines to destination marketers and current and prospective entrepreneurs, to optimise the tourism potential of local and regional foods in future destination marketing is one of the envisaged key outcomes of the longer term research project concerning food tourism in South Africa. This instrument that together with the data from ENPAT may be utilized by DMOs during strategy formulation and implementation and provide information and guidelines to providers of food products and services in a destination and contribute to the development of food tourism in a destination.

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