

Institution: University of Bedfordshire
Unit of Assessment: 26 - Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
Title of case study: The impact of food tourism on sustainable development in rural regions
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The focus of this statement is upon research funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation during 2009-2011 into how food tourism can be used for sustainable development. We understand this to be the first externally funded research project on this subject. Food tourism strategies and associated sustainable development policies informed by the research include the Causeway Coast and Glens of North Ulster; the Brecon Beacons National Park; and Fáilte Ireland are using the research results in their strategy development. The impacts of food tourism in rural areas related to sustainable development include: the strengthening of economic linkages and multiplier effects within regional and local economies; encouraging cultural identity and distinctiveness; and the reduction of environmental pollution from food transportation.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The primary research aims were to: (i) develop an understanding of how food tourism can contribute to sustainable rural development (defined by: economic growth; enhancement of cultural identity; and environmental improvements); (ii) identify barriers to stakeholder participation in food tourism and to construct strategies and capacity to overcome them. Food tourism may be understood as the development of regionally specific food and service based products that aim to increase visitor numbers within the framework of sustainability [3.1]. Key elements include: a focus on the use and promotion of localised agricultural produce; the strengthening of local agricultural supply chains to the tourism industry; maximising the economic benefits of tourist spend through enhanced multiplier effects and reduced leakage; contributing to environmental sustainability by reducing food miles and encouraging sustainable agriculture; and aiding community stability through employment creation.</p> <p>The Principal Investigator was Dr. Sally Everett who was employed as a Senior Lecturer and later Head of Department by the University from May 1 2008 to December 31 2012 and the co-investigator was Dr. Susan Slocum employed as a Research Assistant from March 1 2010 to March 31 2011. Knowledge exchange activities were undertaken in partnership with a private consultancy, Miller Research Ltd (www.miller-research.co.uk) who had experience of consultancy on food tourism. The first phase of the research involved consultations with food tourism specialists, providers and associations on the potential of food tourism for sustainable development. They included: Steve Blaimire, Consultant for Food Development and Marketing, Isle of Wight; The Anglesey Sea Salt Company; Peelham Farms/Scottish Borders Network; Slow Food Berwick-Upon-Tweed; Phil Jones, Food Festival Manager for Manchester Food and Drink. The focus of these consultations was upon the potential of food tourism as a tourism product and generator of economic, social and environmental benefits. Simultaneously an analysis of relevant policy documents to assess the potential for food tourism in rural sustainable development was consulted. They included: DEFRA (2002) 'Our Countryside: The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England'; DEFRA (2005) 'Securing the future delivering UK sustainable development strategy'; DEFRA (2010) 'Food 2030'; Cabinet Office (2002) 'Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food'; and the Welsh Assembly (2009) 'Food Tourism Action Plan: Food and Drink for Wales'. A required need for systematic research to inform the creation of 'vehicles of practical help' for food tourism suppliers and organisers was identified to facilitate the interface for producer and consumer engagements.</p> <p>The second stage of the research consisted of a questionnaire survey of 267 attendees at three regional food festivals at Abergavenny, Stratford, and East Midlands about their attitudes to food tourism. This data was analysed and discussed as a component of the third research phase of 16 stakeholder interviews conducted during March and April 2010 with food and/or tourism organisations to establish a list of industry needs to participate in food tourism. The results of the</p>

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research indicate that significant barriers to participation in food tourism development exist for both food tourism providers and consumers. For the suppliers of food tourism these include: identifying and accessing tourism markets, as available data is limited, fragmented and not updated; the need to establish a destination brand that is reflective of local food production; not being able to access any available data on best-practice food tourism case studies from other regions of the United Kingdom; consumers and the hospitality industry lack knowledge of the geography and access to local produce, nor do they comprehend the range of benefits of purchasing locally; a lack of networks and partnerships between both food producers and hostellers, and between potential partner regions.

For food tourism festival and event organisers the identified challenges included: a struggle to make food festivals and farmers' markets financially self-sustainable; an absence of a national promotional agency for food festivals and farmers' markets; and a lack of information on local food sourcing, advertisers and funding schemes [3.2, 3.3]. There was also found to be regional variations in the coherence between local government initiatives, regional food organizations and tourism bodies. In some districts these stakeholders work together in partnerships whilst in other areas they are highly competitive. The majority of tour operators have difficulty connecting local agriculture with tourist activities, for example the visiting of farms and educating the tourists on traditional production techniques [3.4]. For consumers the challenges included there not being enough information available about: how to access local producers whilst on holiday; about the types and availabilities of local foods; and the locations of food tourism activities in the UK.

The key outcomes of the data analysis reveal that the effective unification of food and tourism requires the cooperation of distinct industries with varying priorities, goals and challenges [3.5]. Key challenges relate to: the organisation and networking of stakeholders involved in the supply of food tourism; and raising levels of consumer awareness about food tourism to link them to suppliers.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Everett, S. and Aitchison, C. (2008) The role of food tourism in sustaining regional identity: a case study of Cornwall, South West England. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 16 (2), pp. 150-167. (75 citations- Google Scholar: October 2013)
- 3.2 Everett, S. and Slocum, S. (2012) Food and Tourism: An effective partnership? A UK based review. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism (iFirst)* Article Views: 549
www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09669582.2012.741601#.Uk164MWZMWc
- 3.3 Everett, S. & Slocum, S. (2013). Food Tourism: Developing cross industry partnerships. In Hall, C.M. & Gössling, S. (Eds) *Sustainable Culinary Systems: Local Foods, Innovation, and Tourism & Hospitality*. London: Routledge, pp. 205-222
- 3.4 Everett, S. (2012) Production Places or Consumption Spaces? The Place-making Agency of Food Tourism in Ireland and Scotland. *Tourism Geographies* 14(4), pp. 535-554. Article Views: 618 www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09669582.2012.741601#.Uk164MWZMWc
- 3.5 Everett, S. (2009) Beyond the visual gaze? The pursuit of an embodied experience through food tourism. *Tourist Studies* 8 (3), pp. 337-358. (36 citations- Google Scholar: October 2013)

Impact ratings for cited journals

Journal of Sustainable Tourism - 2012 Impact Factor: 3.000
Tourism Geographies- 2012 Impact Factor: 0.731

4. Details of the impact

Following the completion of the research in 2011, the results have been used by Miller Research Ltd. to inform their work on the Food Tourism Strategy for the Causeway Coast and Glens region of North Ulster in Northern Ireland and the Brecon Beacons National Park Food Strategy in Wales with an aim of networking producers to create a shared vision for food tourism and increase visitor spend on food produce [5.1]. The Irish Tourist Board (Fáilte Ireland) has also used the research results to involve local champions in food tourism and to make food tourism in Ireland more sustainable [5.2].

The results of the research have also been taken forward by Miller Research to inform policy initiatives in partnership with local and regional authorities. These include the organisation of conferences with national, regional and local stakeholders in association with the Abergavenny Food Festival to promote the relationship between food tourism, community development and regeneration; working with Visit County Durham to upgrade the status of the Bishop Auckland Food Festival to a premier regional event as part of the region's wider tourism strategy; and strategy work on the Thames Food Festival to improve visitor perceptions of South Oxfordshire and to increase levels of tourist expenditure on local food produce. The research results are also informing the creation of a food network and festival for Newport aiming to attract food tourists to the city [5.2].

Attributable to the research has been the development of networks and organised events to bring stakeholders together to enhance cross-sectoral understanding in an attempt to overcome barriers identified to food tourism development. The Institute for Tourism Research (INTOUR) at the University of Bedfordshire hosted an event on *Food Related Tourism* in September 2010 [5.3] at which over 60 delegates from local businesses attended and local producers were invited to sell products in a small marketplace at the event. The spatial reach of the impact upon commerce has extended beyond the United Kingdom to Norway. Following a key note address by Dr. Everett on the research at an industry seminar in 2011 at North Cape industries in Norway, the Rico chain of hotels expressed interest in increasing the use of local produce to both sustain local producers and offer more local produce to their visitors [5.4].

Public seminars were organised by the research team to disseminate the research and provide a forum in which local producers could network and seek advice on how to develop food tourism. For example, co-hosted with Miller Research 'The Big Food Debate' on 18 September 2009 brought together approximately 70 delegates aiming to develop food tourism. A further public food tourism seminar was organised in conjunction with the Scottish Border Food Network (SBFN) in Melrose from the 29 – 30 November 2009 as part of a wider set of projects to raise understanding of food tourism at which the results of the research were presented [5.5]. The event brought together an audience of 60 delegates including travel journalists, food writers, tour operators, academics, the head of the Scottish government food industry unit, representatives from NFU Scotland, Scotland Food and Drink, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Borders Council, VisitScotland and MSPs. This event galvanised support for the SBFN who have now developed a five-year Regional food strategy to enable Scottish Borders to compete effectively in the national food and drink sector [5.6]. Alongside contributing to the establishment of the Borders network, beneficiaries were local producers looking to access local markets and consumers now able to locate local produce.

With an aim of facilitating communication between stakeholders of food tourism development and providing information for consumers an online resource of the 'UK Food Tourism' website was developed [5.7]. The site offers a link and matching service between visitors and suppliers using the latest methods of displaying information online including Google maps, blogs and reviews. The UK Food Tourism site continues to be developed to include new projects and developments.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Supporting Testimonial A – Miller Research
- 5.2 Supporting Testimonial B – email correspondence with *Fáilte Ireland*
- 5.3 www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/events/khnews/2010/aug/100831-foodtourism
- 5.4 www.rica-hotels.com/about-rica-hotels/konsepter/local-food/.
- 5.5 The report (with p.16 outlining the seminar)
www.ruralgateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/Taste%20Scottish%20Borders%20Project.ppt
- 5.6 Details slide 25/26
www.ruralgateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/Taste%20Scottish%20Borders%20Project.ppt
- 5.7 www.ukfoodtourism.com