
EDITORIAL

Food is a reflection of the culture of a place and an expression of a society and its people (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). The offer of food is central to the hospitality experience at home, in commercial outlets and in wider society. After decades of globalisation, local food has been welcomed as a pathway to sustainability for hospitality and tourism. Local food, it is claimed, creates economic value both for restaurants and for destinations by helping them differentiate from competitors and cater for more demanding customers (Williams et al., 2014). Moreover, if local food is preferred above imported produce, local farmers and producers are supported, thus benefitting the local economy beyond tourism and hospitality (Hjalager & Johansen, 2013). Yet, buying local not only benefits the community socio-economically by supporting jobs that otherwise may have been lost, but also culturally by valuing and promoting local (food) traditions (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hall & Gössling, 2013). In addition, choosing local food helps in preserving the "natural" look of the surroundings and, as local food needs to travel less to reach the table, reduces transportation and its negative impact on the environment (Pratt, 2013). To sum up: the claim is that local food benefits all three dimensions of sustainability – the economic, the social and the environmental – at once.

However, experience and research show that these benefits cannot be taken for granted: using local food does not by definition translate into less environmental impact and a revitalised socio-economic region. To mention some examples: without proper logistics, food miles may increase instead of decrease when a restaurant uses local food; the purchasing department may not be able to handle more suppliers than it is used to; buyers might in fact not even know what is on offer locally; and guests may desire authentic, local food but may also be puzzled by the offer of a dish that they do not know (Cavagnaro, 2018; Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016). In fact tourism has been seen as one of the culprits of the "McDonaldisation" of culture, including culinary traditions (Page & Hall, 2003; Ritzer, 1993). From a socio-economic perspective it is unclear what impact the "buy and eat local" trend has on "non-local" growers, both nationally and internationally (Koenigs & Reinders, 2018; Seidel & Cavagnaro, 2018). More generally, it can be questioned whether the "buy local" trend is part of a doubtful turn against the unfamiliar. Indeed, the term "local" itself is subject to debate. How should "local" be defined? Looking at distances, time, regions? And where should the line between "local" and "non-local" be drawn? Should then, for example, a restaurant in the Netherlands stop offering coffee and chocolate because they are not grown "locally"?

The 2019 AIHR Guests on Earth conference, held at Stenden Hotel Management School (Leeuwarden, The Netherlands) on 26 and 27 March 2019, was dedicated to "Local food for vital regions: Facts and myths" in an effort to expand our understanding of the conditions under which "local food" positively impacts the economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainability and thus contributes to more sustainable organisations and more vital communities, a core goal of NHL Stenden University. In this issue several of the papers presented at the conference are bundled together, alongside a conference report by **Conrad Lashley**.

Sally Everett has been involved with the development of food tourism research from the beginning and is therefore in a perfect position to reflect on the evolution of this discipline. In her conference keynote address and now in her article, she traces the conceptual, theoretical and empirical twists and turns of food tourism research over the past few decades. Everett suggests that food tourism research still yields enormous potential for a more profound and critical understanding of tourism.

With his keynote and article, **Gabriel Laeis** offers exactly such a critical contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of "tourism" through a local food lens. During two participatory research projects in Fiji and South Africa, he comes to the understanding that the turn towards locally grown food will not result in a more sustainable development of the Global South if it is aimed at serving Western tourists with a Western (read e.g. meat-based) diet.

Sarah Seidel's contribution brings us back to Europe and specifically to the Emsland/Veenland region, a region that extends over the border between the Netherlands and Germany. Notwithstanding the geographical similarities between Emsland and Veenland, they know different tourism developments, and, as Seidel skilfully shows, they differ also in the way tourists understand and appreciate local products. Seidel's article shows that at least for some tourists "local" is what they see, not what they taste.

Perrine Leroy and **Peter Varga's** article, on the role of milk in Swiss gastronomy, continues the discussion on the symbolic and cultural meaning of food. Throughout history, milk is an inexhaustible source of questioning, reflections and discussions. Milk-derived products are somewhat exempt from such controversy and, as the results suggest, are considered by Swiss chefs as an untouchable product. Leroy and Varga's article was given the best paper award at the 2019 AIHR conference.

Peter Klosse, in his article, offers a framework for approaching food system change systematically. After offering a comprehensive overview of the issues connected with food, Klosse reasons that sustainable food, including local food, should be as convenient, accessible and tasty as the food that people are used to buying and cooking. Considering taste, he argues that hospitality professionals have a major role to play.

Wilhelm Skoglund explores the growth of the craft beer sector in a northern Swedish rural setting, with a particular focus on how small-scale brewers manage to fund their activities and ventures. Findings suggest that brewers shrug off traditional forms of financing and prefer to rely on alternative funding opportunities, such as crowd funding, and the regional network.

Erwin Losekoot and John Hornby consider the impact that foreign food experiences have on foreign students living in New Zealand. They identify that while food can be a great leveller and integrator of culture, the differences can also be used to define the "other". This article offers a natural bridge to the last section of this issue containing three articles written in co-operation with students and on the basis of their research.

Marcelo de Mansoldo, Elena Cavagnaro and Vanessa de Oliveira Menezes look back over the food chain and explore one of its essential links: farmers who sell directly to customers. Their research is testimony to the profound knowledge of farmer-sellers not only of their product, but also of their client base. It also confirms Skoglund's insight into the value of cooperation, even among former competitors in the local food and beverage chain.

Gerasimos-Panagiotis Angelopoulos, Jan Schulp and Vanessa de Oliveira Menezes explore the use of local food in Greek restaurants. One interesting conclusion from their research is that Greek restaurateurs are willingly to forego some profit for the sake of using more expensive but authentic and local ingredients.

Last but not least, Margo Enthoven and Aleid Brouwer offer some insight into the tension between passion for the profession and passion for sustainability of Dutch restaurateurs. Findings suggest not only that some restaurateurs claim to offer sustainable food while actually not doing so, but also that the choice to serve sustainable food is negatively influenced by entrepreneurial passion and positively by sustainability passion. This result unfortunately confirms that for many professionals commercial hospitality is seen as antagonistic to sustainable choices. Therefore, we wish to conclude this editorial with an appeal particularly to academics involved with hospitality education to find a way to reconcile hospitality passion with sustainability choices in the mind of their students, the future hospitality professionals.

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