

## Academy of International Hospitality Research Conference, 26–27 March 2019 — Local food for vital regions: facts and myths

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The conference was organised round the theme, *Local food for vital regions: facts and myths*. The programme included four keynote speeches, and eighteen abstract presentations arranged under six tracks. The conference was principally organised by Elena Cavagnaro, Professor of Sustainability at Stenden Hotel Management School, and one of three research leaders who work in the Academy of International Hospitality Research.

Sally Everett gave a keynote address entitled *Theoretical turns through tourism taste-scapes: Celebrating the inter-connectiveness of culinary artefacts, identities and practiced place*, drawing linkages between food tourism and sense of place. Gabriel Laeis presented the second keynote address entitled *Local food on a side plate?* Tourists travel to faraway places, curious to eat local foods. There is a myth that providing local food in tourism destinations is a "triple win": income for small-scale farmers, fresh local produce that are a delight for every chef to work with, and local delicacies for tourists. But these myths disguise a reality that many tourists are looking for food that is at the same time local, yet not too strange.

### Track one: Local food between gain and altruistic values

Mackenzie's paper, *Local food on the menu: the intermediary perspective*, explored the ambiguities around the term "local" when describing the source of food on menus. The paper suggests that costs and profit motives also play a role in the actual sourcing choices made by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). *Local food: Creating value for small restaurateurs in Greece* by Angelopoulos and Schulp explored the definition of local in Greece, and pointed out some ambiguities and differences between restaurant managers/chefs and their customers. The notion of authenticity is an important overlap here. Interestingly, for a hotel owner the value of authentic, local food weighs more heavily than financial considerations. Enthoven and Brouwer's paper, *The choice for a sustainable cuisine: Passion and self-transcendence in the restaurant business*, explores restaurateurs aiming to operate in a sustainable way. Restaurateurs' values were an important determinant in the decision to base menus on sustainability. The entrepreneur's values determined the approach to either a sustainable/local menu, or a vegan/vegetarian menu.

### Track two: Food for vital regions

Schulp's paper, entitled *Can local food systems modify the landscape? A case study in the Kromme Rijn region*, explored agriculture in close proximity to urban settings. The competing demands of a functioning farm and the urban/rural vista are an

issue with potential tension. Local food purchasers expressed belief in the superior taste and quality of the food purchased.

The paper *Vital food for a vital region — transparency in sustainability and health values in a regional food market* by Nederhof was a discussion piece relating to the design of a programme that will provide insights into sustainability and a healthy diet. The author proposed a series of measures that might be put in place to investigate healthy food production. Kampaxi's paper explored issues of the link between mental health and diet among students. The paper suggests that dietary well-being has an impact upon academic performance and personal happiness.

A third keynote address, by Francesca Zampollo, outlined food design and the impacts of high animal protein diets upon the environment, and made a bold and persuasive case for a vegan diet to reduce carbon emissions and maximise sustainability.

### Track three: Local food from a critical lens

Klosse's paper, *The managerial implications of local food* explored the need to re-establish diets that are more local, traditional and healthier, and links this to more sustainable and local food production. It points to the dilemmas that restaurants face when customers have developed a taste for a diet that is out of kilter with these more sustainable traditions. It proposes a Foodzone model that aids chefs and managers identify menu localness.

Leroy and Varga's paper, *Symbolic understanding of milk in Swiss gastronomy*, explored milk and dairy products in the context of Switzerland. Dairy is an important strand in the local diet, but has implications for the production of greenhouse gases. A qualitative study involving an interview-based survey of chefs in western Switzerland was used. It raises issue about the degree of change that can be made to diet that have a deep symbolic significance in a particular culture. Smit, Neven, Peperkamo and Melissen's presentation, *Regional food, regional identity and regional hospitality: Brabantic hospitality and the regional food chain*, drew links between Brabantic hospitality that embraces a supposedly unique approach and regional food chains. This is then discussed in relation to sustainable food production.

### Track four: Local beverages

*Microbreweries and finance — case study of funding and bootstrapping in the craft beer sector* by Skoglund explored the initial funding of microbreweries in Sweden. The Swedish brewery sector has experienced the growing popularity

witnessed in other countries. The research suggests that crowd funding and similar non-formal finance sources have been important. Rinaldi's discussion paper, *Consumers' perceptions of local wine*, considered the role that food plays in attracting tourism to a destination. It advocated for food as a marketing tool, as an aid for emerging countries to establish a profile that can be used to establish a tourism marketing presence. Mihailescu explored the role of pricing and quality perceptions of organic wines as tourist attractors in the paper *Can organic wine production create benefits for the tourism industry? An enquiry into South African markets*. Willingness to pay extra is mitigated by perceived lower quality, though this is mitigated by personal taste experience as well as recommendations from respected others.

On day two of the conference, Matt Coler's keynote address, *Eating is more than ingesting ingredients* was delivered. The rituals associated with diet and dining is an important dimension of the culture that differentiates one community from another. The work suggested that there needs to be some investigation of the differing meanings of food, meals and dining.

#### Track five: The future of local food

Revier's discussion paper, *Local food and identity in the Wadden Sea region* dealt with the issues around the notion of "local food" and the implications for food distribution, particularly in the form of re-emerging local markets where farm outputs are available for purchase by private and commercial customers. The emergence of the market segment of tourists seeking these "local" experiences impacts upon the "localness" of the market that ultimately restricts access to local residents. Seidel presented *Zooming out: local food at the border*, comparing two regions adjacent to each other in Germany and the Netherlands. It suggested that there are similar dietary tastes across the border, German tourism organisers were more explicit in promoting local food in the offerings to tourists. Losekoot and Hornby examined the eating practices of travellers who are dwellers in non-home settings in their paper *What is the future of foreign food experiences?*. International students in New Zealand originating from India, China and Europe are the subjects of the study. These visitors bring with them their own cultural traditions, and also see their overseas experience as broadening their experiences. The research explored the impact of their experiences on dining and impacts upon changing menus and/or retaining home traditions.

#### Track six: Taste local! A project for restaurants in Oosterwolde

Lunenborg and Olthaar's presentation was entitled *Logistics of local foods, the case study of Oosterwolde*. It discussed the tensions between local food that might be subject to seasonal availability as well geographical limits and consumer demands. Global food production and distribution are subjects that have created dining and eating patterns that are no longer constrained as they once were. Consumers are used to dining on foods "out of season" and attempts at producing local and seasonally sensitive menus may meet restrictions. Moreover, even when local producers are willing to cater for local restaurants, tensions between the producer's offer and the restaurateur's demand are signalled, both in terms of delivery timing and the product's quantity. Cavagnaro and Van den Bremer's presentation — *The guest gaze on local food, the case of Oosterwolde* — explored demographic profiles of customers choosing unfamiliar local dishes in a restaurant. A survey of restaurant customers as well as responses from local people and tourists was used. Most seemed to be happy to try unfamiliar local dishes, and demographics appeared to have limited influence. A lack of a clear understanding of the term "local" emerges. More particularly, a vast majority of restaurants' guests expect that a local dish should contain between 80% and 100% local ingredients, something which from a restaurant perspective is often impossible to realise. Mansoldo and de Oliveira Menezes presented a setting where local food production is an alternative to global food production and distribution. Their research explored the relationship between local farmers and tourist visitors in Leeuwarden. The presentation, *Zooming out: local food & tourism in Leeuwarden*, highlights some confusion about the nature of local food and local production.

#### Conclusion

The conference raised some fascinating themes in the study of local food. This is clearly a topic in the early stages of development, but one that will be a major field of study in the long term. The concept of local food needs the development of a framework of analysis because the same word is used to mean different things by different academics, tourism planners, food producers, and visitors. Researchers also need to consider the research methods employed. Of the abstracts presented that were not discussion papers, all used survey methods — questionnaires, interviews, or a combination of both. Given the nature of the research topic, researchers need to consider more use of both experimental and ethnographic methodologies.