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Globalization vs. local. The role of street food in the urban food system

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Abstract

The street food sector offers ready-to-eat food and beverages that are prepared and/or sold by itinerant or stationary vendors, especially on streets and in other public places. Due to its low cost and convenience, street food is consumed by millions of low- and middle-income consumers, especially in developing countries. But it also contributes to authentic gastronomic experiences for tourists, offering a link between food, place, and tourism. Fast food on the other hand is generally associated with high-income countries where globalization is affirmed. The aim of this study is to provide an overview of street food and what it represents to the image of a region. Information from the study shows that vendors lacked training in food preparation.

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Keywords: Food Tourism; local food; authenticity; motivation; Italy.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a dynamic phenomenon, changing and consisting of a complexity of shapes. Throughout the last few years the availability of free time has resulted in new forms and meanings to answer the question of the tourist: this diversity of needs is met by a variety of tourism products, resulting from the different combinations of goods, services, and environment that the landscape offers, with the support information to align to the demand supply (Nica, 2014b). In the landscape tourists are not satisfied only with the contemplation of an authentic or romantic

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landscape, but they intend to turn it into an experience to feel a real part (Borghi, Celata, 2009). At the same time, on the supply side, the operators not only sell accommodations and services (Koplyay et al, 2014), but also the destination (not just the location that becomes reductive), with its cultural, historical, culinary, and social aspects.

The current economic and cultural development (Nica and Molnar, 2014b) leads to consumption patterns geared to meeting to even immaterial needs where the majority of trade is based on a market transaction (Glac, 2014), but the value created exceeds the economic component, including the contents that characterize the social and psychological experience of each. At the same time, in recent years there has been attention to the forms of marketing of food that, with different ways and under many definitions, aim to reduce the distance between producers and consumers, enhancing the direct relationship and understanding the link with the territory (e.g. dissemination of short chain).

Therefore, the decision-making processes of consumers (Nica and Molnar, 2014a) are influenced by the sites that bind to the products they buy, even when this does not derive from direct experience, but are “extensive relationships” in time and space (Renting, Marsden, Banks, 2003). In particular, the decision to purchase and therefore consume food also arises from the interaction with the land identified by the agent directed (the manufacturer, retailer, vendor, etc.) and consequently these plays an implicit and growing role in communication and sales of the “local product area.” The territory does not imply a spatial extension, a natural landscape, or an aggregate of natural entities, but it is also the place where the tourist-traveller finds satisfaction in the relationship with the spaces, events, and subjects that characterize the time of his journey.

Street food represents a moment in this “new” experience and relationship with the local area. This phenomenon connects to the cultural, territorial, and ethnic, has always existed, and also has a positive impact on local economies and ecosystems, because it is mostly traditional and thus made with locally sourced foods (Marras, 2014). It is an alternative to globalization, an instrument of socialization, a means to do business, and to communicate also with young people. Street food has an important role in the cities and towns of many developing countries in meeting the food demands of urban dwellers. Known examples are hot dogs in New York, the kebab in Istanbul, panelle in Palermo, and sauerkraut in Germany.

Cooked food hawkers are thus an interesting component of the tourism and hospitality industries which are more prominent in certain parts of the world, as evidenced by conditions, for example, in South East Asia (Henderson et al., 2012).

The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the relationship between tourism and street food as a tool to promote and enhance the area's identity, investigating the economic point of view, but also the social. Through qualitative analysis, we try to observe and reconstruct the reason behind an area's street food, in particular as the elements of street food play a leading role by better information and marketing of the territory or the best tourist destination. Given the nature of the study, the results are based on a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and aim to offer ideas to be taken for further in-depth studies.

2. The relationship and implications of food-tourism

In the last century, food became a central topic of public health, social sciences, and human rights in both Western and developing countries.

Today consumers are increasingly complex and have a critical respect for the food, with little interest in the amount, but with different expectations of price and quality. An informed consumer, who chooses from a market characterized by a myriad of products, innovative and not, with different criteria, complementary, and sometimes unconventional, often comes to ideological choices (Canali, 2010). In this sense, we highlight the behaviour-oriented food in line with personal and social welfare (Nica, 2014a), with ethical values, with knowledge of ethnic cuisines, regional, etc. This is demonstrated by the increase in the consumption of organic farming products, the fair trade of products with high nutritional value, and of foods with strong aesthetic appeal, tastes (e.g. cheeses, traditional sweets) that characterize and identify the territory, place of pleasure, etc.

Recent studies of tourism geography confirm the knowledge to interpret the landscape through the emotion and the use of the senses from which flows that tourism. It refers not only to the visual perception of the places, but also those relating to the other senses, understanding the soundscape, and smellscape, tastescape (Urry, 2002; Izis, 2010). The places to look are chosen because they elicit an expectation of pleasure; it is fed especially through daydreams and imagination, involving different ways for those used to routine. The reasons to travel, also, can be analyzed by

distinguishing the push factors (push) that lead to the desire to go on vacation and the factors of attraction (pull) that the various tourist destinations exercise on the tourist (Savelli, 2008). Food is an experience that each of us lives on a daily basis, in the sense of making society around food (Montanari, 2006). To be as one of the places you have to “eat” like it. When we think of a place, it is because of the food we have eaten and the people we have shared it with (Ricci, Ceccarelli, 2000).

Food and tourism are inextricably linked, and eating is a physical necessity for every tourist which generates substantial revenues (Hjalger, Richards, 2002).

Food products can therefore represent a way to emphasize a territory when we think of it as the outcome of an historical collective and local process of accumulation of contextual knowledge founded on a combination of specific territorial resources, both physical and anthropic, that give birth to a food tourism that has a strong, unique, and irreproducible bond with the area of origin of products.

From an economic and company perspective, typical products can be considered “specialty goods” for their unique characteristics (Popescu, 2014), or cultural goods, as they have deep symbolic and communicative connotations. These products are therefore entitled to represent the territory outside their own borders. For the consumer, they can fulfill different expectations, becoming a multidimensional entity; in fact, they have a functional value, as they fulfill a primary need, together with a social value when connected to a specific social group, and an emotional one, when able to awaken feeling and affection (Sum and Chorlian, 2014).

Local resources can be seen as distinct from a country as they are related to the physical and climatic characteristics of that country, and to the human resources responsible for emphasizing those characteristics. History, local tradition, and cultural identity all bring the necessary knowledge to keep and adjust food products and to strengthen their bond with the local population, making them become part of the territory identity, resulting from productive, natural, and cultural resources that are part of that same territory.

Data generated by food tourism industry escapes a rigorous measurement, also because of its non-specific definition. Moreover, although the assessment of the number of restaurants and bars in the area provides an accurate indicator definitely connected to the phenomenon in question, it is clear that these types of services can be enjoyed by residents, and as a major component of food tourism is geared towards itineraries that may relate, if not in part, to these types of structures (Pinto and Pacheco, 2014).

According to data from the National Tourism (Isnart, 2013), Italy is still the most popular destination for customers of foreign tour operators (71% of the buyers that the marketing), followed by France (56% of wholesalers operators) and Spain (44%), and is identified in the imagination of the tourist-type aliens with the combination of culture and gastronomy.

3. Street food: definition and significances

The definition of street food provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 1995) is: “street foods are ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers especially in the streets and other similar places.” They represent a significant part of urban food consumption for millions of low- and middle-income consumers in urban areas on a daily basis. Street foods may be the least expensive and most accessible means of obtaining a nutritionally balanced meal outside the home for many low-income people, provided that the consumer is informed and able to choose the proper combination of foods. It is a vertical food—consumed standing—and despite changing social and environmental conditions continues to be a poor food, but fashionable and traditional at the same time (Cirelli et al., 2005). It is often typical of the place, but in some cases, the variety is the point of having lost the original cultural link with the territory of origin, characterized by multi-ethnicity and beyond (Steyn, Labadarios, 2011). A long list of street foods linked to specific cultural environments, today are examples of globalized food (e.g. Turkish kebab). In these cases the definition of street food refers to the mode of use or “...is proof that the slowness and the values of a slow food are not in the mode of use of the food itself but rather in the ingredients, in connection with the tradition, in stories related to its diffusion and creation, in people who prepare and conviviality that develops where it is sold and consumed” (Petrini, www.slowfood.it).

According to the definition of the Italian Association of Street food, street food is a culture to bring back that cannot be separated from the road or social experience in which it was born. Therefore, while reinventing the old traditions, recovering foods disappeared or extinct and also of rural areas and inaccessible interior, street food

intends to different paths related to common objectives: an alternative to globalisation, an instrument of socialization, a means to do business and communicate with target young people in a new way (Table 1).

At present street food is more than a fashion as the consumer on the road is part of the culture of the last generation; it is a necessity in line, looking for cheaper meals (given the crisis contingent), and at the same time flexible (reduced time of consumption), and the ability to discover new tastes and then get in touch with those places one does not know, realizing ethnic taste together with the emotion of being a tourist-resident. The coexistence of tastes, old and new, in dining experiences confirms the curiosity of those who approach street food to have new taste experiences, although there is also an attitude of preservation of tradition and the past.

In this framework regional products are opposed to exotic products but in fact appear more as a behaviour characterized by a plurality of models. In many cases, street food is united with junk food, but they are different products. In fact, the increase in the quantitative availability of food in developed countries has been to the detriment of quality, at least until the last few decades. They have become part of the daily snacks, and packaged foods with uncertain nutritional value and that are high in chemicals not healthy for the body, with a consequent impact on obesity, particularly in the younger classes. Nevertheless, the consumer buys constantly similar products because they meet both the needs of hedonistic taste, understood as sensory satisfaction of the palate, and that of convenience and comfort.

Table 1.Characteristics of street food (Italian Association of Street food).

1.	Respect history and tradition
2.	Contains a lot of typical ingredients produced in a local area
3.	Adoption of ethical respect
4.	Respect the link with territory
5.	Use traditional instruments
6.	Apply health legislation
7.	Combine nutritious foods
8.	Respect of environment
9.	Promotion of the territory
10.	Street food on the web

Hawkers are a tourist resource in some destinations, and the presence of cooked and uncooked food sellers brings life and colour to locations, drawing visitors as observers if not as customers. The vendors and their dishes have been hailed as symbols of local identity and difference, embodying aspects of the societies and cultures in which they work (fig. 1). They merit support and protection against the negative outcomes of globalisation and internationalisation (Consumers International, 2011).

The well-established street food phenomenon, particularly in developing countries, is linked to cultural, territorial, and ethnic aspects as the outcome of urbanization process (Goyal and Yadav, 2014). Existing as centuries-old tradition despite the socio-economic revolution (Misra and Mohapatra, 2014), global food has succeeded in the restaurant sector of American fast food. In most developing countries, local governments and authorities are responsible for establishing regulations for food hygiene and trade (Tinker, 1997).

It is found worldwide but is linked to the territory as it uses the traditional ingredients of the territory where it comes from and therefore in many cases respects traceability. A distinctive feature is the craftsmanship of the preparations also through the use of instruments that are handmade and original or revised for the preparation, cooking, and serving of the product, to the point where they are perceived as authentic and therefore reflects and differentiates the destination (Sims, 2009). In Italy, street food is particularly sought at itinerant markets, present in every urban center or festivals, a true mix of sacred and profane, a reason to return to their native places of the many emigrants, and prepared by tradesmen, often on a provisional banquet but also in vans equipped for that purpose, or from small local spread in the historic centers. In fact, given the characteristic “on the road” problem is the perception of hygiene on the part of the application that limits in part the success of street food despite strict federal, national, and community regulations that ensure food security to the consumer.

The street food industry offers a significant amount of employment (Bensman, D. 2014), often to persons with little education and training (Latham, 1997).

In Italy there are many examples of street food, outlining a wide and varied gastronomic geography: the fritolini (Venice); the polentat in Milan, serving fried fish and polenta; the farinotti in Liguria and Tuscany; the tripe in Florence, which is specialized in the sandwich with the lamprey; the meusari in Palermo, etc. Often these are forgotten names today relaunched by a growing trend. According to a survey by Coldiretti (2013), there are 2.5 billion consumers of street food in the world, 35 million of which are Italians; 73% habitually consume street food, and 45% prefer local specialties, 24% international ones (between hamburgers and hot dogs), while 4% choose ethnic products (sushi or kebab). The success is evident from the numerous events on the road made of Italian cities (e.g. VIII International Festival of Cesena), as well as specialized guides on the subject (Lonely Planet, 2012).

4. Methods

In this current study we apply the scale developed for tourist motivation to taste local food and beverages in a tourist destination by Kim and Eves (2012). The final scale comprises cultural experience, interpersonal relation, excitement, sensory appeal, and health concerns (figure 1).

The study, part of a broader survey, in this first phase takes into account the figures of street food vendors (not counting tourists), imagining each of them as a possible choice for a tourist buyer. The administration of a semi-structured questionnaire survey of a sample of 32 vendors took place in the months of May–July 2014, in view of the mild climate and the flow of tourists compared to other periods. The study area refers to the city of Catania (and province) and Reggio Calabria, two cities in southern Italy (in Sicily and Calabria, respectively).

Despite the small sample size and therefore knowledge of its limits and an inability to generalize to the entire universe, it is thought that the information resulting from the survey is an attempt to collect, from a qualitative point of view, data on perceptions of actors on the phenomenon under investigation, considering the merits of the model in being able to bring out the opinions of respondents, although some considerations can escape because of the reluctance of some participants. The procedure has provided a set of key questions relating to specific areas of the model below, especially the emotions arising from the experience of gastronomic culture; the development of “integrated” in the exchange of interpersonal relations between the vendor and tourist; and perceptions appealing to sensory, emotional, and healthy street food. In Table 2 we highlight the socio-economic aspects of the sample studied.

Table 2. Socio-economic aspects of sample

Kind of supply	Location	Age	Informal	Structure	Genre
20% Sandwich	70% Historical center	55% Years 25-40	15% Declared	45% Fix	90% M
25% Meat	30% Neighbourhood			55% On the road	10% F
10% Beverages					
5% Fruit					
10% Fish					
10% Sweets and biscuits					
20% Cooked food					

5. Results and discussion

Based on the recommendations made by the interviews to the sellers, we identified elements to discuss the relationship between tourism and street food and rebuild the reason behind street food as a tool to promote and enhance the area’s identity.

First, important (90% of the sample) was the importance of the direct relationship between the vendor and tourist/customer, which element to “test” the satisfaction of the customer to buy the products and the link with the territory of origin. Meeting expectations as in the “stories” of production techniques, as in the description of the

bonds (e.g. climate, geomorphology, local traditions) with the area of origin of the product feeds and creates a “relationship” with the vendor with whom one has direct contact. To the question: “How much considers it important activity relationship and communication with its customers?” Respondent 5 (seller of sandwiches, hot dogs) states: “The tourists has time ... make me different questions: the sights to see, other foods to eat and I always say that here in Catania food is cheap.

The importance of direct talk is recognized as an element that tourists look for. The tourists heard from the vendor the perceived authenticity of the product tied to tradition, what aspects of production, culinary heritage, territorial, but is not fundamental. 30% of sellers do not believe that the food represents the gastronomic culture of Sicily; in fact, respondent 14 (a holder of gastronomy) responds: “I do not know ... but often to tourists I say what 's in their book guide ... and they ask for this (the reference and product “arancino”, traditional Sicilian food).”

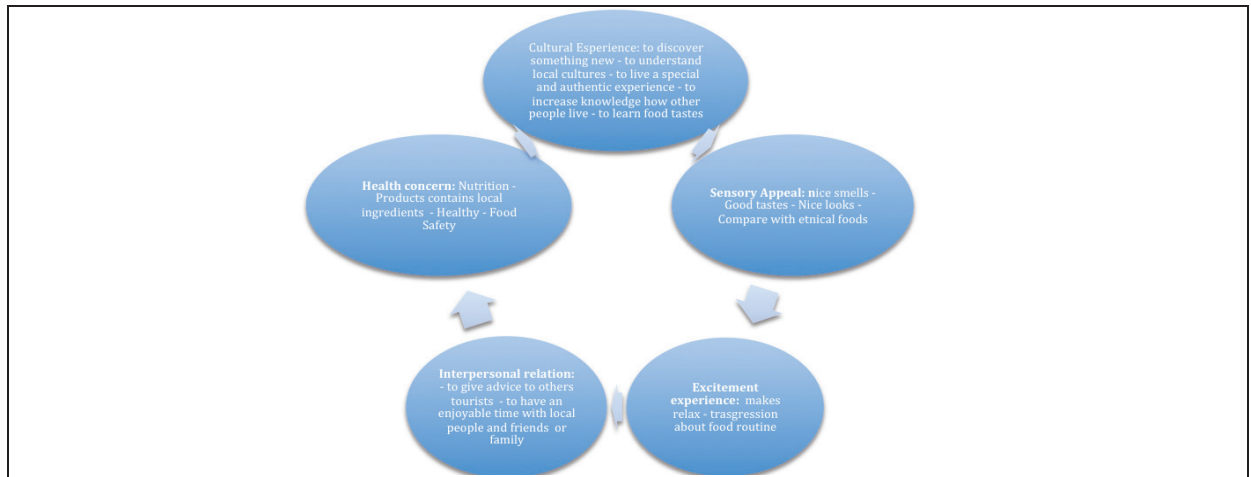


Fig. 1.Items of tourist motivation to taste food street (elaborated from Kim, Eves, 2012)

Recently interest in food tourism has certainly increased. Street food is also curious because the vendors have significantly improved their offers, although the prospects of development of the street food appear strongly influenced from choices of urban and commercial policies, and the territorial government. In fact, more sellers do not exactly know the regulations on urban and commercial planning (Herr and Ruoff, 2014). Important is the conquest of urban space, one that lets him survive daily. Some comments regarding food scares of tourists (in terms of food safety) show a state of concern founded by information relating to the products and production conditions, which result especially in a request for more controls of hygiene and food conservation. A good part of the respondents don't specify control tests but put trust in their regular supplier, justifying because they sell the products transformed. The almost totality of the sample (70 %) confirms the request by tourists to want to know ingredients, but prevailing interest is more for the pleasure of tasting products rather than in healthful aspects.

“Very often they do not know the product (oxblood cooked). They want explanations in the way of cooking and composition ... And then taste it and say that good!” The new dimension of traveling is to “absorb a territory.” This is done with the knowledge of its history and ways of life and the desire to establish a familiarity with the inhabitants. In many cases this means trying gastronomic experiences (including street food) for the spirit of the place. Street food is a culture to bring back which cannot be separated from the road or social experience in which it was born; therefore, while reiterating the old traditions, recovering foods missing or endangered, it intends to different pathways related to common goals. As Calloni(2013) affirms: “street food is the modern embodiment of an archaic past, when food could have poisoned. It is represents the worries unknown changes in respect to daily routine” but street food has an important role in the cities and towns of many developing countries in meeting the food demands of urban dwellers. It feeds millions of people daily with a wide variety of foods that are relatively cheap and easily accessible.

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