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An Exploration of the Role of Food Tourism in Sustaining Cultural Authenticity in Ireland

Lisa O’Riordan and Dr Aisling Ward

Abstract

Authenticity is often a motivating factor for tourists. In many situations what occurs, however, is staged authenticity. Food is one of the few entities left that indicates true cultural authenticity. Food can bridge the gap between tourists and their understanding of and involvement in a place. Native cultures that are struggling to preserve their heritage and ways of life from globalising forces can use food as a defensive mechanism. This paper is part of a wider postgraduate study on food tourism and culture so will focus on the research completed to date, mainly the literature reviewed as well as initial primary research findings. The town of Kinsale, Co. Cork was the focus of the pilot case study, within which interviews were conducted with those involved in the food tourism sector including; restaurateurs, farmers’ market stall-holders, food trail guides and food festival organisers. Preliminary results indicate that food has played a key role in forming Kinsale’s identity and continues to do so, allowing traditions and culture to be maintained and rejuvenated.

Keywords: Food tourism, Sustainability, Local, Culture, Traditions and Authenticity.

Introduction

Cultural tourism involves visits from people outside of the host community who are interested in what the region has to offer by way of heritage, ways of life, art or history, with uniqueness and sustainability constituting key elements (Sillerberg, 1995). When travelling for the purpose of making new discoveries, food can play a key role, truly representing culture and marking out its distinctiveness (Fox, 2007). According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (2012 p.5) ‘food tourism includes in its discourse ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, authenticity’, and has grown considerably in recent years. This is no different in Ireland’s case. As suggested by Fáilte Ireland (2010 p.6) there exists potential for growth in food tourism in Ireland, to be achieved by highlighting the ‘variety of authentic, high quality experiences in key destinations across the country which provides greater exposure to proven unique selling points such as our culture and people’. Food tourism involves using local ingredients, as well as preserving and showcasing an area’s food traditions (López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore the role food tourism plays in sustaining an area’s cultural traditions as well as examining the potential food tourism has in sustaining those cultural traditions into the future. The link between authenticity and food tourism will also be assessed. This paper is part of a larger postgraduate study on the subject of food tourism and cultural sustainability. The research is at an exploratory stage, therefore, this paper will focus on secondary research explored to date with some preliminary findings from the first stage of the primary research.

Culture

Culture is a living thing and consists of elements of the past, outside influences and new locally developed elements. (Brennan et al., 2009, p.98).

Many definitions of culture are available, with common threads running through them all. Culture may represent ways of life, norms and ideas, which can reflect either a consistent environment representing the traits of the few, or may reflect a more varied structure encasing the features of a diverse locality (Brennan et al. 2009). Kneafsey (2001) suggests that cultural symbols may include native foods, local languages, crafts, literary citations, as well as flora and wildlife. Culture may also consist of intangible elements and can include entities such as those that are rich in historical or artistic value such as manners, communities, clothing and customs relating to food (Jokilehto, 2006). Tovey and Share (2003) suggest that cultures are made up of a mixture of origins, rather than being pure and homogenous, cultures which form as people purposely make their own fusions out of the imported and indigenous. Jokilehto (2006) advises that culture is not stable and unwavering but involves both endurance and adjustment, the traditional passing on of skills and know-how often means change, while simultaneously building up and preserving cultural identity. This concept is supported by Palmer (1999) who asserts that a nation's character is ever-changing and multiple identities may exist beside one another. Difficulties may arise when trying to preserve culture, however:

It is becoming plainly impossible to find communities that live completely outside the global network of economic, political, and technological forces.
(Aramberri, 2001, p.747-748).

Trans-national businesses, global media companies, supranational political and economic organisations may be counted among the threats to the survival of distinct communities and cultures, institutions which oftentimes operate with scarce regard to distinct social ways and values (Day, 1998). Globalising forces, proposes Nasser (2003) leads to cultural values and identities being compromised. This leads to the issue of cultural preservation and protecting native cultures, for which cultural tourism is often a vehicle. Nuryanti (1996) proposes that tourists have started to turn against the traditional mass tourism product in favour of more authentic, specified experiences. Cultural tourism refers to those from outside the host destination who have come to visit as a result of their interest in the place's history, art and lifestyle (Sillerberg, 1995). Teo and Yeoh (1997, p. 195) when referring to what constitutes a cultural tourism product counsel that it is a very loosely defined term: 'Locally-rooted traditions, lifestyles, and the arts are often compressed into a space and presented in a legible fashion for leisure consumption,' suggesting that local customs and culture may be taken apart and reassembled to present an acceptable tourism product. There is a concurrence that the tourism industry may take whatever aspects of culture and history it feels are the most saleable and focus on their promotion (Palmer, 1999; Yan and Bramwell, 2008); that cultural identity runs the risk of being altered to suit commercial opportunity. Kneafsey (2001) suggests that the countryside is gradually becoming more of a merchantable product representing traditional cultures, ease and authenticity. MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) concur advising that rural areas, especially those in economic decline, tend to preserve traditions and customs between generations, which can then be marketed through the route of cultural tourism. In addition, Russo and van der Borg (2002) point out how an increasing number of cities are turning to cultural tourism attractions as a means of generating economic activity. Bachleitner and Zins (1999) propose that cultural tourism can boost business for already established tourism enterprises, create new economic opportunities, and can contribute to a feeling of identification and help preserve local heritage.

Cultural tourism can highlight the need for the conservation of natural and cultural resources explains Lowenthal (2005) suggesting that this is due to the rapid pace of change in the world, resulting in local traditions and customs disappearing and suggests that human nature has a deep yearning for 'tangible relics' (Lowenthal, 2005, p.82) of nature and culture, and it is this longing which pushes their preservation and defence. There exists a fixation with the past and preserving culture proposes Nasser (2003). As highlighted by Nuryanti (1996) there exists a desire among people to return to their roots and find solidity and tradition. The concept of authenticity is considered a key feature of this desire (Nuryanti, 1996; McKercher and du Cros, 2002).

Cultural Authenticity

According to Chhabra *et al.*, (2003, p.704) 'authenticity connotes traditional culture and origin, and a sense of the genuine,' that is, authenticity implies unaffected, original, traditional culture. Tourists are often motivated by the quest for authenticity, which the host tries to provide but frequently results in staged authenticity (Besculides *et al.*, 2002). Cultural tourism which is built on a solid foundation of authentic offerings such as unique cultures, lifestyles and traditions, can be a lucrative economic activity (Sharpley, 2002). McKercher and du Cros (2002) advise that it is considered that in order to be authentic, the cultural space, that is, the actual physical environment in which the experience occurs must be genuine, and if the experience takes place outside of its original setting then the authenticity is lessened, providing the example of different ethnic groups showcasing at international festivals, proposing that moving outside its associated environment causes a decrease in authenticity. There is a contrasting view to this, however, as noted by the following:

Authenticity is not a 'known entity' but rather a 'negotiated concept' that is open to change, and an outcome of the relationship between tourists and their consumption of cultures and environments. In other words, what one views as authentic or what one would like to be authentic depends on social and cultural norms, the role of history, experts and tastes.
Sigala (cited in Sigala and Leslie, 2005, p.184)

The concept of authenticity is debatable, depending on varying viewpoints, that is, what one considers genuine might be completely unrealistic to another (Sigala and Leslie, 2005). A study by Chhabra *et al.*, (2003) shows how an event, though far removed from its original situation, was considered authentic by those attending and participating. The research was carried out in North Carolina, at a Scottish Highland Games event, organised by those from the area with Scottish heritage. Traditional Scottish dress was worn and traditional games played at the event. The majority of those surveyed felt that it was a true reflection of Scottish culture, not lessened by its surroundings. A similar study by Xie and Wall (2002) correlated with this, advising that the originality of the setting is not indispensable to the authenticity and it is a judgement by the observer. It is often the case, note Xie and Wall (2002) that authenticity is created and operated by tourism providers, which they highlight in a study carried out on folk villages in Hainan, China. The study showed how ethnicity is the theme of the villages which re-enact ceremonies, sell ethnic food and souvenirs, and revealed how distinctions were not made between different ethnic groups, with a generic offering on display. It was highlighted how the perception of culture was pre-formed by the tourists from various media, with tourists seeing what they expected to see rather than realising that the cultures had evolved over time, thus resulting in a superficial experience.

The selling of unique cultural attractions can help communities to preserve and revitalise traditions and customs, as well as providing economic opportunities (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). Su (2011) provides the example of 'Nong jia le' or 'Happy Farmer Home'

studying certain parts of rural China. This 'Nong jia le' tourism concept draws on the contrast between modern, rapid-paced city life and the ancient, simple, undeveloped quality of rural life, and allows urban dwellers to experience the countryside by staying with local farmers where traditional values, customs and heritage are still a part of everyday life, with tourists able to engage in activities such as fruit picking, making herbal medicines and cooking local cuisines (Su, 2011). The study points out how this has allowed younger generations to return to their home regions for employment, as well as allowing local arts and traditions to be revitalised. It is also noted in the study, however, that while a certain degree of success has been enjoyed by both tourists and locals, the tourists often have pre-conceived notions of an idealized countryside setting and lifestyle that is far from the actual reality of the labour intensive work experienced by the majority of the countryside dwellers. The study also makes the point that farmers who are supposed to be tending the land are now playing host to tourists, which is not an accurate representation of their actual lifestyle.

Likewise, MacDonald and Jolliffe's (2003) examination on the Evangeline Region of Prince Edward Island in Canada highlighted the opportunities as well as the difficulties encountered by locals when using cultural tourism as an economic means. The study outlines how the people of the Evangeline Region have a distinct French-Acadian background which is manifested in their music, language, food, festivals and art. The study shows how tourism based on the authentic offerings of this culture was introduced as an economic aid when traditional industries such as farming and fishing began to wane. The study illustrated how cultural tourism has allowed Acadian culture to be preserved through replica pioneer buildings, arts and crafts. It was also highlighted however, that locals perceived that their culture was in danger of being adapted to meet the pre-defined expectations of the tourist, leading to a decline in the veracity and authenticity of their culture. Palmer (1999) makes the point that although what is considered true identity and authentic is made up of a multitude of elements such as language, religion, politics, ceremonies, symbols, as well as built and natural heritage, the tourism industry has often been criticised for selecting certain elements to represent culture. Such representations Palmer (1999) believes, allow individuals to connect with a place and helps in the discovery of identity, which allows communication between past and present traditions and values.

There is a concurrence that when authenticity is a selling point for cultural tourism, it represents a potentially profitable economic opportunity. From the point of view of the tourist, they are fulfilling their need to connect with genuine cultures, and witness and participate in these cultures. From the local community view point, it allows for the creation of jobs and a method of preserving and revitalising traditional arts, crafts and customs. It is acknowledged, however, that what is on display is not always a true reflection of a culture, with selective elements being chosen. Food tourism is often recommended as a means to represent authentic culture.

Food Tourism as an Authentic Cultural Representation

Food Tourism includes in its discourse ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, authenticity, which is something it has in common with current trends of cultural consumption. (WTO, 2012, p.5).

Okumus *et al.*, (2007) propose that increasing numbers of people are now travelling for the purpose of finding authentic food. Tourists are becoming increasingly more attracted to destinations which will allow more use of their senses and for this reason, food or culinary tourism has grown, as it engages all the senses (López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Food is a significant tourist attraction for many, and may indeed be central to the experience (Henderson, 2009). Mak *et al.*, (2012) outline how globalisation is causing the

world to integrate more fully and impacts all areas of life, not least food. There are a number of arguments defying this suggestion, however, advising that local foods are being promoted and re-invented to counter globalisation. Okumus *et al.*, (2007) on their study of Hong Kong and Turkey proposed that food could be a 'cultural marker' (p.257) for a destination. Gastronomy is a part of the social and cultural history of regions, signifying customs and beliefs, and, can help in understanding local culture and community (López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Food can be as much of a display of culture as are museums and cathedrals, but is rarely considered as a cultural entity in its own right (Fox, 2007). Visiting a farmers' market can be as much about getting involved in the culture as well as the food (Zittlau and Gorman, 2012). As proposed:

Local cuisines represent a core manifestation of a destination's intangible heritage, and through its consumption, tourists can gain a truly authentic experience. In addition, food is one of the few elements of intangible heritage that has retained its authenticity.
(Okumus *et al.*, 2007, p.253)

According to the WTO (2012, p.11) food tourism is about 'the conversion of the territory into a culinary landscape'. Fox (2007) explores the concept of a place having a culinary identity in a study of Mallorca, showing how foods can represent authenticity and can be a true symbol of an area, using the examples of Japan and rice, Burgundy and blackcurrants and Italy and pizza of being synonymous with one another. The study further notes how Mallorca is reviving its old-style gastronomic customs by returning to traditional ingredients, such as offal, to attract visitors. Mkono *et al.* (2013) advise that the simple act of eating delves deeper than just nutritional purposes; it gives an insight into a culture's politics and sociology, highlighted in their study in Zimbabwe. The study on tourism-focused restaurants in Zimbabwe showed how tourists felt they were getting a genuine representation of the country when served foods such as buffalo and warthog.

As noted previously (Okumus *et al.*, 2007; Fox, 2007), food can be a distinctive symbol of a place and give insights into its culture. Although it may be considered that Ireland does not possess a distinctive culinary tradition, this could not be further from the truth (Mac Con lomaire and Cashman, 2011). As maintained:

Although today the hearth is physically absent from many modern Irish houses, the site of its birth, the kitchen, is still the focus of family life, the centre of activity and the place where body and soul have been sustained and nourished for generations. (Connery, 1992, p.8)

Indeed, Irish legends and folklore are steeped in references to food and feasting (Mahon, 1991; Sexton, 1998). Such folklore includes the tale of the how milk from Kerry cows makes a child grow up beautiful, good-natured and wise (Linehan, 2006). Apples are recognised for their healing properties and the prosperity they bring (Mac Coitir, 2003). Bilberries are frequently referenced in Irish folklore, in particular for their connection with Garland Sunday at the beginning of August (Cowan and Sexton, 1997). Other references to food in Irish folklore and legends are highlighted by Mahon (1991) including how the salmon of knowledge gave great wisdom to those who feasted on it; how bees belonging to St Gobnait defeated an invading army; and how poor milk produces were caused by interference from supernatural forces. The medicinal herb St John's Wort was picked at Midsummer, usually between the end of June and start of July, thought to be at its strongest at this time of year (Danaher, 1972). Connery (1992) advocates that farmers collected seaweed to use as fertiliser from the closest spring tide to St Brigid's Day, legend having it that St Brigid dipped her foot in the water, thus making it the greatest tide of the year. The ancient Brehon Laws give an insight into the role of food at the time, with farmers being required to provide the Chieftains with gifts of food

such as butter, milk and pork, with the laws also giving special status to fishermen, recognising the importance of their role (Connery, 1992).

When discussing Irish cuisine, it is perhaps unsurprising that the potato is frequently mentioned, as pointed out by Mac Con Iomaire and Gallagher (2009), the potato has played a key role in Irish culture noting that 'Few plants have been as central to the destiny of a nation as the potato has been to Ireland' (Mac Con Iomaire and Gallagher, 2009, p.1). Furthermore, as maintained by Okumus *et al.*, (2007) food plays an important role in identity formation and eating habits can give an insight into social structures. Wheaton (1998 p.13) proposes that 'The ceremonies of the table underline class differences as much as they dignify sociability.' Indeed, even with regard to the potato and Irish society, it was not just the preserve of the poor advise Mac Con Iomaire and Gallagher (2009), who note that how the potato was eaten could provide an insight into the urban/rural divide, with rural dwellers believing that those in urban areas did not recognise a good potato. As noted by Jokilehto (2006) culture is not stationary and will evolve over time, influenced by social and global forces. This has happened to Ireland's relationship with the potato with competing carbohydrates now existing in the form of pasta, rice and noodles, a result of increased immigration into Ireland, and also as a result of increased travel among Irish people (Mac Con Iomaire and Gallagher, 2009). Irish food in the past hundred years has seen major changes in its growing, preparing and selling due to a mix of social, industrial and demographic changes (O'Donovan *et al.*, 2012).

The motivation to reconnect with food, notes Nuryanti (1996) is as a result of nostalgia and the desire to return to the ideals of a past lifestyle. In Ireland's case, O'Donovan *et al.* (2012) advise that there is a perception that as a result of chasing economic rewards perhaps the country has moved too far away from its native soil when it comes to food, and there now exists a demand to return to Ireland's food roots. Connery (1992) acknowledges that although Ireland does not have an obvious food tradition, of late the desire has emerged to rejuvenate and develop indigenous gastronomic traditions and build a food culture, with many locations around Ireland now notable for their own speciality. Fox (2007) draws comparisons between Normandy and County Cork when exploring artisan cheese, noting that the pastureland of Cork allows for distinct cheeses such as Gubbeen and Durrus to be produced, which have been essential to developing Cork's gastronomic identity.

There is a concurrence that social, economic and global changes have impacted Irish food through the years but there is now a desire to reconnect with authentic cultures, and food is pushing the growth of food tourism in Ireland as it is elsewhere. As Connery (2001, p.11) surmises:

Although the myths, legends and fairy stories of Ireland's heroic and mystical past may seem to have small relevance in today's sophisticated society, they do still have the power to inspire and entertain, comfort and sustain. After all, the past lives on in our minds, in our landscape and the dishes we take to our table.

It can be seen that although Ireland may not have an obvious food culture, if one considers the many references in folklore and customs, this opinion could be challenged.

Methodology

Although various research approaches were explored, the chosen methodology is the case study. Hair *et al.*, (2006) believe that case studies are a form of exploratory research in which the researcher will undertake an in-depth examination of the area of interest. Case

studies are the appropriate means of research if the situation requires a 'how' or 'why' explanation, especially when a social phenomenon is being examined, and becoming all the more relevant when an in-depth examination of the situation is needed (Yin, 2014). Matarrita-Cascante *et al.*, (2010) suggest that case studies as a research methodology can provide a deeper understanding of localities, and because of this there has been an increase in their use in tourism research. Case studies are being carried out on a number of food tourism destinations in Ireland including; Kinsale, Cork's English Market and Dingle. These locations were chosen as they have many similar characteristics to the case studies carried out on the areas of food tourism and of authenticity (Sharpley, 2002; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Okumus *et al.*, 2007). As the subject of cultural authenticity is being examined, an in-depth exploration of the thoughts and opinions of key stakeholders in the food tourism sector is needed. Qualitative research was deemed most suitable to gain expert local views on the topic of food tourism sustaining cultural authenticity in Ireland. Qualitative research is unstructured as an exploratory research methodology (Malhotra, 1996) and aims to discover what may cause certain types of behaviour (Chisnall, 1997); it may provide insights into understanding problems (Malhotra, 1996); it is an effective way of understanding motivations and feelings in-depth (McDaniel and Gates, 1998).

Within the case studies, the interview will be used as a means of gathering qualitative data. Malhotra (1996) defines an in-depth interview as being unstructured, direct and individual, in which a single respondent is questioned by an interviewer to unearth incentives, opinions and stances on a particular subject. In-depth interviews were chosen for a number of reasons: they can uncover greater discernments of topics, and allow the respondent to be more truthful than in other exploratory research methods, such as focus groups, where there may be pressure to follow the group (Malhotra, 1996); the respondent feels like the focus of attention and believes their opinions and feelings are significant and needed; individual interviews allow greater flexibility in exploring respondents' answers; the nearness of the situation allows the interviewer to become more tuned in to non-verbal feedback (McDaniel and Gates, 1998).

Preliminary research has already begun in Kinsale. Kinsale is a town located in County Cork, with a population of less than 5,000 people (Central Statistics Office 2012). Food is a major part of life in Kinsale, with many pubs, restaurants, and artisan producers available, as well as hosting playing host to various food festivals (Kinsale Chamber of Tourism and Business 2014). Interviews were carried out with those who are food tourism representatives, including to date; restaurateurs, those who offer food and historical trails, organisers of food festivals, and farmers' market stall-holders.

Preliminary Findings

The following section will introduce initial findings from Kinsale, along with a brief discussion. The main findings that were uncovered during the initial primary research in Kinsale were; food tourism includes the selling of a story; there are pre-conceived notions from tourists regarding food; there exists a demand for local food traditions; food is an authentic representation of Kinsale's culture; food tourism allows traditions to be maintained and rejuvenated; and local producers are and need to be supported.

Selling the Story as Much as the Food

Respondents felt that there was a keen interest on the part of the tourist to learn the story behind the food, that it was nearly as important as the product itself. In particular, stall-holders at the Farmers' Market felt that the ability to see the producers, whether on a photograph on

the wall of a restaurant, or face-to face in the market was important. The following quotes from stall-holders at the Farmers' Market outline this:

It has been said to us by people who have bought our products; it was because of the story behind it and because of its uniqueness

People come back... they know they're all handmade... It's genuine traditions... they tell us it's really old-fashioned values that we have with our product... we learned to make jam at a very young age.

There is a demand... becoming more so.

As Nuryanti (1996) proposes, people have a desire to return to their roots. The ability to be this close to the source of the food was thought to foster a sense of trust and the demand for traditional food products was deemed to be becoming more popular.

Pre-conceived Notions Regarding Food

Initial findings indicate that tourists often have pre-conceptions about what should be on offer. One restaurateur outlined how tourists would come to the restaurant and ask if Irish stew was on the menu, and if not, they would walk out. This coincides with Su (2011) who proposes that tourists often have pre-conceived notions about culture. It was mentioned also that as part of the food tours, people are often surprised at what's on offer, and by what they learn about the area's culture as a result. It emerged that tourists are often surprised by the quality. One restaurateur advised:

People coming from Canada, America, are surprised at the quality of the food here compared to our reputation. Years ago they used to joke that people came to Ireland despite the food and now people come because of the food. There's been a revolution.

Food is an Authentic Representation of Kinsale's Culture

When the concept of authenticity was examined, there was a consensus, that for the most part, what was being offered was genuine. Many restaurants studied were family businesses, going back generations. Restaurateurs, Farmers' Market stall-holders, and trail guides all acknowledged Kinsale's food ancestry:

One thing that would define Kinsale... food would be the common denominator (Trail guide).

Kinsale historically has a food tradition. Restaurants were the biggest draw to the town... food traditions in Kinsale go way back (Stall-holder, Farmers' Market).

It's kind of built into your genes... my father has seen three recessions, you know what it's like to bounce back (Restaurateur).

The food that is available authentically reflects the area, as much as possible of local produce is used. As acknowledged by the respondents:

We have a fifty mile radius competition... you have to source ingredients within fifty miles (Restaurateur).

It's a direct communication to them (Stall-holder, Farmers' Market).

What I'm using is all natural ingredients as opposed to a lot of bakeries using additives and essences. I try to get all the ingredients as locally as possible. I get my cream and my butter locally... I buy Irish flour... from an Irish company (Stall-holder, Farmers' Market)

Food is a key part of communicating the town's traditions. Many felt strongly that the food that was being offered was as true a representation as was possible to provide. This concurs with Okumus *et al.*, (2007) and Fox (2007) who maintain that food is a cultural representation. It also coincides with the WTO (2012, p.11) who advise that food tourism is about *'the conversion of the territory into a culinary landscape'*.

Food Tourism Allows Traditions to be Maintained and Rejuvenated

It emerged during the research that a culture of good food and values underlined many family restaurants in the town, as well as among the Farmers' MAGADarket stall-holders, but also allowed the younger generation to re-invent and diversify as well. Responses from the interviewees included:

His flair and creativity would be different from his father's, introducing newer things while keeping the traditional items – he would have certain, newer views, more modern... but you've got the underlying core values taught from the generation above (Food Festival Organiser).

During the last recession Irish chefs travelled and learned abroad. I'm a chef with about ten years... I was in America... I was working as a chef over there and I was doing small farmers' markets. I came home and took over the restaurant. It's a family restaurant (Stall-holder, Farmers' Market).

When the chefs returned from abroad, they brought with them new ideas and methods of cooking and selling food with Irish ingredients. This coincides with Palmer (1999) and Jokilehto (2006) who maintain that culture is ever-changing and evolving.

The Necessity of Keeping it Local

The point of supporting local producers emerged constantly from the interviewees. Such support is critical for the sustainability of the food tourism sector in Kinsale. When asked about the source of ingredients many respondents made the point that they will support local produce as much as possible, for the purpose of sustaining small businesses, and also to be confident in what they were getting. It was admitted that although this was not always the cheapest way to do business, it was the most sustainable, acknowledging that sometimes price was sacrificed:

You will find sometimes that the small local producers can't afford to be as price competitive... it's like striking a balance... but you do try... If you have a choice of two good cheeses – French and Irish - and there's 50c of a difference, you would go for the Irish cheese. You can't be a hypocrite (Restaurateur).

We definitely know what we're getting, you can stand behind it. We try to use the same suppliers to the best of our ability... within the fishing industry it tends to be a couple of families (Restaurateur).

It was highlighted that the ability to source high quality local ingredients was a key factor in the town's success as a food destination:

We can source the best ingredients – to be able to harvest that and show it out there to the tourist, and that’s what they want to see – from farm to fork (Food Festival Organiser).

The ability of the stakeholders to work together goes back a long way in the town. A member of the Farmers’ Market outlined how if tourists were staying at a local guesthouse, the guesthouse owner would recommend the Farmers’ Market as a place to source their picnic lunch. The tourists would then buy from one supplier at the market who would in turn recommend another member for another product:

The guesthouses would recommend me if they wanted to take something out for a picnic. They would buy a quiche from me, then I would say to them get a salad off... there’s nice bread from... (Stall-holder, Farmers’ Market).

Community involvement and collaboration amongst the various stakeholders was deemed to be a critical factor in sustaining the food tourism sector in Kinsale. The use of local suppliers supports authenticity with the food travelling as little as possible, and offering a true representation of the locality, coinciding with findings in the literature review (WTO, 2012; Fox, 2007).

Conclusion

Tourists are often motivated by the quest for authenticity, leading to the host trying to provide a genuine cultural offering, frequently resulting in staged authenticity (Besculides *et al.*, 2002). The point is made (Palmer, 1999; Yan and Bramwell, 2008) that culture can often be packaged and the most saleable elements promoted. Food seems to be a way of combating this (López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Food can play an important role in indicating authentic cultural heritage (Okumus *et al.*, 2007; López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). This is very significant for the tourism sector (Mkono *et al.*, 2013). Food offers the tourist the opportunity to experience other cultures and local gastronomic traditions can lead to a genuine understanding of ways of life (Mak *et al.*, 2012). Having a distinctive food identity can allow a place to showcase its true heritage and for visitors to experience this authenticity (Fox, 2007). Food is a significant part of Ireland’s cultural makeup (Cowan and Sexton, 1997) and has played a key role in forming national identity, with many links to festivals and mythology (Sexton, 1998). This seems to be evident in Kinsale. Kinsale appears to have a successful food tourism sector which substantially contributes to maintaining traditions and ways of life. Food in Kinsale plays an important role in indicating the town’s authentic cultural heritage. Food traditions are being rejuvenated and are also evolving with a mixture of indigenous and imported customs, coinciding with research from Palmer (1999) and Tovey and Share (2003) who maintain that cultures are in reality ever-changing and developing. Tourists who visit Kinsale and engage in food tourism-related activities seem to be experiencing genuine culture. The need to support and give credit to local producers arose throughout the primary research. The concept of putting a face to the product and giving a physical connection by naming and showing photographs of suppliers was highlighted as being of critical importance during the research carried out in Kinsale. The ability of those involved in the sector to work harmoniously seems to be a key factor in Kinsale’s successful ability to offer the tourist a genuine understanding of the town and its culture. The availability of good local food contributes significantly to providing an authentic experience. The restaurateurs, Farmers’ Market, food festivals, suppliers, and those offering food trails, allow Kinsale’s long association with food to be maintained and authentic culture to be experienced.

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