

THE LOCAL FOOD GIFT CHALLENGE: FRAMEWORK AND AIMS

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"That's what food souvenirs do so much better than, say, key chains and T-shirts – they bring back all the sights, sounds, and flavors from time spent in another land."

K. Buczkowska (2012)

Buczkowska notes in a simple but effective way how the development of appealing food souvenirs or gifts can work as a powerful (though sometimes untapped) resource to promote a positive image of tourism destinations. Several studies² highlighted how souvenirs, and food gifts in particular, can be an important asset for the economies of tourism destinations in terms of generating revenues, employment and direct tourist expenditure. Shopping is one of the main activities performed by tourists during their holidays,³ "with souvenir purchases forming a significant component of the shopping expenditure."⁴ Swanson⁵ further indicates how "locally made souvenirs" – meaning products produced by local manufacturers working in the area where the souvenirs are sold – can strongly contribute to local growth by allowing revenues to remain within the local community and reducing "economic leakage from imported souvenirs." According to the author, outsourced souvenirs "are often mass-produced in factories away from the tourist destination" and "sold at relatively lower prices compared with host-country-manufactured souvenirs".⁶ As a strategy to counteract this tendency, Swanson suggests destinations to "clearly identify locally made souvenirs to encourage tourists to purchase authentic and unique goods."⁷

Special focus on the production and sale of local food and food-related gifts in destinations can help support local SMEs, encourage innovative entrepreneurship, reinforce local short chains, create a positive image of the

¹ N. Campoy-Leffler, "10 Perfect Food Souvenirs", *The Daily Meal*, 6 March 2012, <https://www.thedailymeal.com/10-perfect-food-souvenirs>, cited in K. Buczkowska, "Local Food and Beverage Products as Important Tourist Souvenirs", *Turystyka Kulturowa*, no. 1, 2014, p. 57.

² R. Sims, "Food, Place and Authenticity: Local Food and the Sustainable Tourism Experience", *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17, 3, 2009; K. Swanson and D. J. Timothy "Souvenirs: Icons of Meaning, Commercialization and Commoditization", *Tourism Management*, 33, 3, June 2012; K. Swanson, "Souvenirs, Tourists, and Tourism", in A. Lew, C. M. Hall and M. Williams (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Tourism*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2014; L. Lin, and P.-C. Mao, "Food for Memories and Culture – A Content Analysis Study of Food Specialties and Souvenirs", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 22, March 2015.

³ G. Revilla and T. H. Dodd, "Authenticity Perceptions of Talavera Pottery", *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 42, August 2003.

⁴ H. Wilkins, "Souvenirs: What and Why We Buy", *Journal of Travel Research*, 50, 3, May 2011, p. 239.

⁵ Swanson, "Souvenirs, Tourists, and Tourism", pp. 182-183.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183

⁷ *Ibid.*

area concerned and, in general, revitalise local economies in a sustainable way, especially for what concerns rural areas. Lin and Mao highlight how “food specialties and food souvenirs can also facilitate other local industries, such as the agriculture, forestry, fishery, and dairy industries.”⁸ Sims offers a similar perspective when asserting “that ‘local’ food and drink products can improve the economic and environmental sustainability of both tourism and the rural host community through encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, supporting local businesses and building a ‘brand’ that can benefit the region by attracting more visitors and investment.”⁹

Additionally, locally-produced food and food-related souvenirs play a vital role in protecting and promoting local food and cultural diversity by contributing to “conserve traditional farming landscapes,”¹⁰ as well as safeguarding traditional know-how and preserving local identities. Revilla and Dodd claim that they can contribute to “the maintenance of certain original traditions,” as well as the safeguard of “aesthetic values, technical know-how, and high-quality craft skills”¹¹ – otherwise endangered by an extensive supply of outsourced, mass-produced gift items that have poor or no connection with the destination and its community.

It is precisely a connection with the visited destination and the local community that tourists increasingly seek during their holidays. The authenticity of local products is a chief component influencing tourists' buying decisions,¹² and food and food-related products appear to be the ideal purchase for visitors who “usually want to buy or get something ‘characteristic’ or ‘typical’” and increasingly tend to bring “home the local food and beverage products, kitchen utensils, photos or recipes as tourist souvenirs.”¹³ Lin and Mao emphasise that “compared with crafts such as cups, T-shirts and key chains, food is more closely linked with the local terroir, geography, climate and historical background of tourist attractions.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Sim's research on visitors to the UK regions of the Lake District and Exmoor, demonstrates the existence of a significant market for food souvenirs by revealing that “over 50% of the tourists interviewed said that they had bought, or were definitely planning to buy, food and drink souvenirs of their holiday, with less than 10% saying that they were not interested in doing so.”¹⁵ Finally, tourists' purchase decisions often seem to be guided by ethical concerns and a moral pursuit to *do the right thing*: according to Sims “‘local’ foods are popular because they are associated with a host of values, such as being better for the environment, conserving ‘traditional’ rural landscapes and supporting the local economy, and there is, therefore, a ‘feel-good’ factor associated with consuming them.”¹⁶

These ethical concerns seem to be reflected in some of the attributes that tourists usually look for in food souvenirs, as demonstrated by Lin and Mao's research and recommendations.¹⁷

⁸ Lin and Mao, “Food for Memories and Culture – A Content Analysis Study of Food Specialties and Souvenirs”, p. 20.

⁹ Sims, “Food, Place and Authenticity: Local Food and the Sustainable Tourism Experience”, p. 322.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.334.

¹¹ Revilla and Dodd, “Authenticity Perceptions of Talavera Pottery”, p.95.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ K. Buczkowska, “Local Food and Beverage Products as Important Tourist Souvenirs”, p. 47.

¹⁴ Lin and Mao, “Food for Memories and Culture – A Content Analysis Study of Food Specialties and Souvenirs”, p. 20.

¹⁵ Sims, “Food, Place and Authenticity: Local Food and the Sustainable Tourism Experience”, p. 328.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Lin and Mao, “Food for Memories and Culture – A Content Analysis Study of Food Specialties and Souvenirs”.

The Local Food Gift Challenge designed by IGCAT finds its rationale in and builds on the above outlined framework by encouraging the Regions of Gastronomy and their local producers to re-think and re-design their products in creative and innovative ways. The challenge lies in the effort to reflect in the products using a list of attributes that tourists look for. The aim is to deliver food and food-related gifts that are attractive, sustainable and strongly connected with the territory they come from. Borrowing from Lin and Mao's recommendations, the criteria used by IGCAT to assess Food Gifts include:

- Packaging material (recyclable and sustainable);
- Attractiveness of design and branding;
- Taste/aroma/texture, or Usefulness (for kitchenware gifts);
- Use of local food varieties, or Use of local raw materials (for kitchenware gifts);
- Ease for transport (size, volume, fragility);
- Connection to the territory;
- Story of the producer/product;
- Innovation on tradition;
- Price-value relation.

The project aims to raise producers' awareness of the importance that food gifts can have in shaping the image of a destination, highlighting that high-quality, local and sustainably manufactured food products can strongly contribute to create a favourable perception of the region on the part of the visitor. As Pine and Gilmore's suggest, "the design of a souvenir can be a vital part of gastronomic tourism strategies."¹⁸

The innovative approach fostered by the Local food Gift Challenge encourages cross-sectoral synergies between SMEs and the creative sectors, stimulating dialogue and cooperation between artisanal producers and creative people such as artists, designers and storytellers at the stage of product development. The ultimate aim is to innovate local gifts and present them effectively through attractive and sustainable packaging and engaging storytelling.

Benefits for the European Regions of Gastronomy are manifold:

Cultural. The Local Food Gift Challenge supports the preservation and promotion of local cultural and gastronomic traditions, making them relevant to the contemporary visitor through innovation and captivating storytelling.

Social. The project contributes to reinforce collaboration patterns within the local community and the community's ties to the territory, reinvigorating local identities.

Economic. The initiative favours the strengthening of local, short value chains, encouraging producers to source raw materials locally. At the same time, it reinforces synergies between different stakeholders in the territory, highlighting the important role that the creative sectors can play in regional development. As a result, the

¹⁸ B. J. Pine and J. H. Gilmore, "Welcome to the experience economy", *Harvard Business Review*, 76, 1998, cited in Lin and Mao, "Food for Memories and Culture - A Content Analysis Study of Food Specialties and Souvenirs", p.27.

value of local food gifts is enhanced and contributes to boost the region's image both locally and internationally.

Environmental. The short value chains developed from increased manufacturing of locally-made and locally-sourced gifts enhance the sustainability of production, distribution and consumption processes. At the same time, the use of sustainable materials for packaging is encouraged.

The Local Food Gift Challenge is thus hoped to allow local producers in the Regions of Gastronomy to capitalise on the ever-increasing demand from tourists for high-quality local products, paired with their search for authenticity and uniqueness, and enhanced concern for sustainability. In order to do so, particular attention needs to be paid to the development of a possible certification or labelling system to help authenticate food and food-related gifts from the Regions of Gastronomy.

This paper was written in 2019.

IGCAT's mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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