

THE S PLAN

by Dr. Diane Dodd



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Despite being in a world that is fortunately still rich with cultures, abundant with food variety and astounding in landscape diversity, we are at a critical point in time because of the alarming loss of biodiversity; unique plant and animal varieties that have given us over the centuries, not only sustenance but cultural traditions, rituals, festivals, crafts, education and life knowledge. According to some scientists, we are already below safe levels for the safety of our own species (Potenza 2016). Worse still, globalisation pressures are forcing an ever more homogenised world and what we have left in natural and built resources is often badly managed. Despite having industrial wastelands, new industrial zones are being built elsewhere; millions of tons of food are wasted, millions are spent on obesity programs and this when, according to Worldometers, an estimated 20-25,000 people die of hunger every day. According to FUSIONS (2016) in the EU alone an estimated 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually with associated costs estimated at 143 billion euros. At the same time, our education systems are hardwired to produce robots for factories: repeat and don't think, be uniform and conform, and don't be creative or stand out! All the while robots are being invented to take the jobs that younger generations have been educated for.

A massive step change is needed in the way we manage, nurture and support our world and this chapter hopes to outline why eco, creative and living-it tourism could be one of the solutions. This chapter is based on specific experiences from around the world and in particular, on the lessons learned through a project called Regions of Gastronomy, established by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism as a pilot project intended to address issues such as food and cultural diversity protection and promotion.

Through this project and observations of the global challenges, it has become clear that we need a two angle approach: top down (global level) and grass-roots up (regional level).

The UNESCO/UNWTO 2nd joint conference on culture and tourism in Muscat, Oman, 11-12 December 2017 showed both how recent but also how vibrant the opportunities are when culture and tourism collaborate to develop new visitor experiences. A full summary is available online and many of the interventions offered hope, as it was recognized that the next generation of travellers are more discerning, more informed, more educated and more selective than the past generation. This means that tourism experiences need not only be embedded with more meaning, but also fairer, sustainable and of benefit to local communities. Examples abound from around the world, such as visitors being invited to help clean the beaches in the Philippines as part of an ecovillage tourism project. This cluster of island resorts has been awarded and recognised in the country for its sustainable tourism practices that have become the benchmark in the region. Community engagement and environmental stewardship were incorporated in the company's performance measurements. Sustainable menus, ecological waste management, marine turtle conservation, community outreach, low carbon footprint-activities with guests, and many other similar initiatives, including beach clear-ups, are designed to ensure guests learn about and appreciate the natural environment and the level of work required to ensure traditional methods of stewardship survive (such as fishing). These initiatives contribute to a high quality leisure experience for the guest and helps the resort stay sustainable both environmentally and economically. The resort furthermore now counts on support from local government, NGOs, community cooperatives and the academia.

Another example, came from India, of a hotel-led, community heritage site clean up. Inspired by the hotelier and entrepreneur, Manvendra Singh Shekhawat who had realized that he could not operate in isolation and that it was in his own and the communities vested interest to clean and restore their heritage. He observed that people came to the city and then the hotel not the other way around. Therefore, in order to be successful, it would be important to change the way people see their responsibility towards Jaisalmer, because the city was a mess, despite housing the oldest fort in the world. After convincing a few volunteers to join his efforts, on 1st March 2013, the 'I love Jaisalmer' team set out to clean the legendary Jaisalmer fort. During the 70 days program, the volunteering team cleaned the fort premises, the ramparts, boundary walls and the hillock of the fort, which had fallen into a desperate state of neglect. As news of his efforts spread, more and more people joined the task and the result, besides a spotless fort, is a renewed community

spirit and willingness to coordinate to make the city beautiful not just for visitors but for the citizens themselves (for more info visit: www.ilovejaisalmer.com).

A third example, refers to a former industrial site in South Korea. Seonyudo Park is a popular park and open space located on the island on the Hangang River. The land which the park is now located on was formerly used as an industrial water treatment plant. The small island, located west of Yeouido, was opened in 2009 after city officials realized that the island could be better used as an urban park instead of an idle industrial plant.

These three isolated examples, indicate good practice and the signs are, that the next generation want and have the energy to volunteer for good causes and participate in a more active way in the conservation of our natural, built and intangible heritage. It is not just about community engagement and participation however, even if this is definitely going to be key in the future. Therefore, IGCAT decided in 2012 to launch a project that would incentivise regions to experiment in good practises by providing the accolade European Regions of Gastronomy to encourage regions to consider sustainable practises in the protections and promotion of their food and cultural diversity. The lessons can be summed up by in what I am now calling the S plan: Sector convergence; Storytelling; Strategic planning; Sustainability; SME development and the Surprise and shine elements!

Sector convergence

How can destinations cater for the next generation of travellers that want to be surprised and delighted when they travel, they want new experiences and they want healthy foods as well as to know where their ingredients come from? The ability to constantly innovate and create is required to consistently respond to visitors needs. "This at a time when the arts, creativity, food and cooking have been absent from most European school curriculums for decades. So, therefore your average food producer, businessman or woman, hotelier, farmer or retailer will need some help." One solution is cross-sectorial collaboration. The Regions of Gastronomy are awarded by IGCAT because they have developed a programme of events to raise awareness about their rich cultural and food diversity. The first criteria for this to work, is to have a strong alliance across sectors with public, private, third sector and academic involvement. Working across sectors, raises awareness, creates new synergies and provides inspiration for innovative products and services.

Through cross-sectorial dialogue, regions like Catalonia have been able to develop a Gastronomy Plan that responds to the agricultural sectors needs as well as the tourism sectors needs. It became clear, as 2016 and 2017 awarded region celebrated their title year that regional authorities need to have the power to prop up and promote local products and services because local food and culture are the unique selling point for a region.

The raw material for many creative initiatives – directed at locals, visitors or tourists are derived from intangible heritage assets. This can be anything from handicrafts to food. To illustrate the point, consider cheese festivals – that can have the same format in every city but as soon as they all sell the same cheese, there will be no reason to visit – no knowledge or reason to build interpretation centres, no reasons for guided tours through factories or exhibitions related to local life, or food gifts or possibilities to innovate. There will be no connection to the territory or the stories associated with the territory. Neither will there be opportunities for courses or educational activities related to the cheese produced in the region. This is why protecting local recipes, handicrafts and traditions is so important. Preserving intangible heritage is key for building opportunities and to promote this heritage you first need to protect it. That is why sectorial dialogue is urgently needed.

Building citizen pride in the use, consumption and practise of unique plant and animal varieties, local recipes, crafts and traditions is imperative for this to be successful. Events therefore play an important part. Food festivals and cultural events are great vehicles for promotion of local products and services and are considerably attractive for both locals and tourists seeking new experiences.

Storytelling

Connecting to the stories of local people and the region is essential to provide meaningful experiences. To do that, communities need to delve into their past and the aspirations for the future to agree on the tales they want to tell and how to tell them. Sometimes a region has little choice, for example Transylvania and the myth of Dracula, made famous by an American author, has in many ways driven a tourism image that is not always appreciated by the locals. Sibiu, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2019 is aiming to tell a different tale, the one of organic, fresh, healthy untainted food. More than 50% of the land is a protected area and so nature, wildlife and healthy food is an asset that can now be promoted. Moving steadily away from the image of Dracula to one that provides more opportunities for agriculture, eco, health and well-being tourism has become an important part of their strategy.

Another example is North Brabant, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2018 that is similarly beginning to tell a new story about gastronomy. Having developed a programme on the Values of Food, their greatest challenge was internally to convince the region that they had something worth offering to the international visitor. One of the highlights for the year then has been a pop-up restaurant, GAST that celebrates local cuisine and 28 top local chefs (12 Michelin Star chefs) during the year. This has been hailed as an awareness-raising exercise in the local community about the high potential of gastronomy for the region. It hasn't been without challenges but the lesson learnt is that the local community needs to feel engaged and committed and telling their stories is one way to do that.

In order to have an impact across all the regions, IGCAT also decided to foster young chef ambassadors for the regions, with the aim to tell stories and demonstrate how chefs can enhance their profile by promoting their region and regions' products and culture. This has proven to be a strong strategy played out through the Young Chef Award. This initiative offers a pan-European competition to identify a young chef of the year that can present a compelling innovation on a local product or recipe as well as tell a story about their region in a creative way. Each region holds their own competitions to find a finalist, recipe and products to promote in the international competition and the young chefs are asked to not only to compete in culinary terms but also in terms of making the linkage to the region.

Strategic planning

Where, when, how, for whom? Thinking strategically. How can you attract less visitors, but that will spend more and respect the environment and heritage on offer? How can we involve everyone in the value chain in the community as well as ensure better, more meaningful experiences for everyone? Tourists should not be seen as a necessary evil for the local economy, but as welcomed guests and for that to happen a balance of quantity/quality needs to be found. Strategic planning and long-term goals are key to this as well as raising quality standards. In Minho, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2016, the key challenge was to convince hoteliers and restaurants to innovate and provide more palatable experiences for visitors. While food production quality is high, the problem was more in the presentation of gastronomy, whereby traditional dishes tended to look overbearing and "traditional" in form, appropriate for a hungry farmer but inappropriate for the delicate stomachs of international foodies. Minho's programme concentrated therefore on innovation and representation of tradition in order to improve and widen but not change the quality of the gastronomic offer. This is essential to raise prices and cater for more discerning customers. Private partnerships and incentives for hotels and restaurants are paramount in this. How can a local hotel or B&B establishment compete with the comfort and services of a chain hotel for example? How can local restaurants offer something special, unique and original that can grow in fame?

Kuopio, awarded European Region of Gastronomy in 2020 is now working strategically with public, private, third sector and knowledge institutions to drive new gastronomic and well-being experiences in the region. The region is hard to reach and therefore it knows that to be competitive it has to maintain its remote beauty and therefore it needs to offer quality experiences for discerning guests. Recently, a delegation from Kuopio visited another awarded region, Riga-Gauja, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2017 which is also an example of how the European Platform of awarded regions is learning from one another. Riga-Gauja built a programme called Wild at Palate. Riga and Gauja have successfully encouraged new tourism experiences in the region from barrel making, to tastings of local products (flower wine, berries, beer, tea to name just a few). In fact, the barrel-making experience made it to IGCAT's Top Food Experience of the Year list

and is a wonderful example of sustainable, local visitor experiences that are keeping local traditions and crafts alive for future generations.

Another lesson learnt is that, if better and fairer markets are desirable, stronger regional authorities are required to ensure that balance and responsibility to society are met. That means powerful public authorities that are not subordinate to the markets and that markets become subordinate to citizen's welfare.

Local authorities should be allowed to:

- market and brand local producers and artisans;
- provide free sales points and low rents for production of local products;
- reduce taxes on local companies, hotels and services;
- regulate markets so that goods from further afield are taxed higher when they are readily available in the locality;
- protect by domination of origin, knowledge and creativity from the region;
- encourage cooperatives and support community actions;
- introduce rules for food safety;
- boycott or ban products that are harmful to the environment.

By encouraging hospitality establishments to sign up to a charter, committing to using and promoting local products and crafts, the Regions of Gastronomy are incentivising local businesses to join the cause and creating a more interesting offer for foodie and curious tourists.

Sustainable events

Sustainability is not just about economic sustainability but, cultural, social and environmental – and these are not the same. Economic sustainability often relies on replication and reproduction but, for cultural and social sustainability, duplication leads to fatigue. To preserve and promote cultural and food diversity also requires event innovation. Events are great for attracting visitors but unless visitors stay over night and spend, they can burden a locality rather than enhance its economy. Sustainable events planning is key and has to be realistic.

In Galway, small businesses offering tours into the Oyster beds (complete with wellington boots) have people staying over night to catch the low tide and the hundreds of concerts and events each year, ensure that everyone, locals and visitors, have a good time on their stay. If the community is happy so is the visitor – so the first port of call in driving a sustainability policy is to respond to the citizens needs.

The South-Aegean, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2019 is confident that through a schools programme they can re-instil values to do with growing food and healthy eating, that aims long-term towards more self-sufficiency in food production. The tourism industry in the South

Aegean have tended towards importing many products during the high season to cater for differing tourists tastes but now there is a movement to promote the local products and especially local breakfasts to create more opportunities for agricultural enterprises on the islands. This links with environmental sustainability, which is another key factor in our efforts. It is not just about food production about encouraging events, restaurants and hotels to be more responsible and then use this as a selling point. The younger generation of foodies are very discerning – and fair trade, organic and waste control can become deciding factors in selecting one establishment over another. With the millennial generation now reportedly spending more than the boomer generation¹ this a factor that needs to be taken into consideration.

An opportunity lies in creating sustainable events that link the arts, music, food to environmental awareness. Large events are increasingly being pressured to be more sustainable, use biodegradable or reusable cutlery, use water fountains instead of plastic water bottles (or ban plastics altogether), promote local food, organic food, vegetarian options (reduce or ban unhealthy foods available). IGCAT together with the European Regions of Gastronomy have developed a list of recommendations for events organisers that want to embrace the opportunity to be more sustainable.

SME development

SME development is key to any community and not just for economic returns. The cultural and social development of SMEs will depend on the next generation becoming creative entrepreneurs and sporting new ideas that can lie side by side with tradition. In fact, they can provide a neat contrast. IGCAT has developed the Local Food Gifts Challenge with the European Regions of Gastronomy Platform. The aim is to work with local producers, local tourism agencies, crafts people, farmers, designers and storytellers to come up with food gifts that tell a story about the region. The overriding aim is to replace imported, impersonal and unoriginal tourism souvenirs with the option to take home a taste of the region. It is also to innovate and give a contemporary twist to age old crafts – thus holding the traditions and skills alive for future generations. In the first edition of the Local Food Gifts Challenge, East Lombardy, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2017 came up with an innovative gift that consisted of a small box, printed with a local artists' impression of the landscape of the region and filled with miniature proportioned ingredients to make the typical local dish, Polenta. The box came complete with the recipe and information about the region. Beautifully presented this food gift is an example of initiatives taken by entrepreneurs in all the regions to find interesting ways to share an appreciation of the landscape and food traditions in creative ways.

¹ (2018) Millennials the foodie generation

<https://corporate.univision.com/blog/demographics-culture/2014/12/15/millennials-the-foodie-generation/> [accessed 12 April 2018]

In Aarhus - Central Denmark, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2017, a conversation between the city, region, local producers and NGOs has created new avenues for SME development, promotion and international visibility that tells the story of innovation, fusion and high quality Danish food products. "Rethinking Good Food" was their motto that began a food and arts revolution that now has become part of the branding of the region and city and spurred on a new generation of food innovators. A food tour of the city is testament to the innovation and ingenuity of the younger generation.

Sufficient variety is needed for locals to remain happy and open to new experiences. In Galway-West of Ireland, awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2018, an enterprising businesswoman started making sushi with local products such as turnip. The result is surprisingly good and has captured the hearts and minds of locals and now visitors. You can't visit Galway without trying this unique and contemporary local delicacy.

Local interests and the next generation are essential for the well-being of local economies. IGCAT's main goal is to empower local communities, especially the younger generation, to value their past, their uniqueness and to act and think both sustainably and creatively.

Building a better future however also depends on the education of consumers. For consumers to buy and act sustainably there needs to be sustainable, exciting, unique products and services on offer but there also has to be a hold on global companies that are already trying to capitalise on local culture.

Joost Smiers' recent paper **Solutions for an unfair world** (2017) outlines very clearly the need to break-up large transnational companies as well as the global acceptance of capitalism as a democratic unifying model. Leakage from global companies is at a terrifying levels, exasperating the gap between rich and poor. According to Rana Dasgupta, 94% of Apple's cash reserves are held offshore. The International Institute for Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) encourages support for small and medium size organisations, due to evidence that they are competing in a very unfair world. For example, in food industries, OXFAM found that just 10 companies own 70% of the brands on our supermarket shelves. The uphill struggle against cheap supermarket goods and convenience store services is one reason that SMEs will continue to struggle unless there is some intervention at a global level. Going back to the 'good life' might be a lifestyle choice for some, but it is a near impossibility for many living on the breadline. Joost Smiers (2017) therefore claims that "global, regional and bilateral trade treaties must be recalibrated. At the moment the purpose of these treaties is to give corporations and financial institutions the greatest possible freedom of action." (2017, p.9) A system is needed to track transnational money flows and tax the tax avoiders thereby re-investing in public services and local businesses. A strengthening of regions within this

global rewriting would be recommended because it is in regions where landscapes, agriculture, heritage, food, culture and innovation come into play.

In international trade agreements between countries, there needs to be an acknowledgment of what makes up a global giant, and the values and instruments needed for the protection and promotion of local food and food cultures. The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression in its wider interpretation could include food, food ways and traditions as well as creative diversity and innovation. At a very basic level, if these were enshrined in all trade agreements there would be some level of protection. Joost Smiers call for "human-sized economies, in which companies are embedded in the societies in which they operate" (2017, p. 13) resonates.

Surprise and shine

If a destination surprises and shines, social-media will do the rest. The next generation are fast at what was once termed "word of mouth" but, now could be termed *insta-mouth*. Catalonia, awarded European Region of Gastronomy in 2016 launched their Year of Cultural Heritage Tourism campaign by making the tourists the ambassadors for the year. The video launched for the year has had unprecedented success as a result.

In short, the next generation want to be involved, need to feel useful, enjoy taking part and are more passionate about environment, health, well-being, fair economies, peace, co-existence and justice than the tourism industry, local authorities and hospitality services fully appreciate just yet.

Paul Schafer in his article **The Case for Culture** (2017, p.13) aptly notes that "developing culture in depth means opening up a commanding place for culture's most cherished ideals at the very heart of development, especially the quest for peace, order, equality, and justice, the necessity for freedom, migration, and the truth, the priceless value of the cultural heritage of humankind, the search for beauty, unity, and the sublime, and others. Could there be anything more important or urgent than this, given the state of the world at present and prospects for the future"?

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression goes same way to provide legal possibilities for interventions to protect food diversity. Yet, if we lose our cultural and food diversity we lose a great deal of our cultural specificity. The challenges outlined by Joost Smiers are real, the danger is close and we therefore need to take action to enact change.

IGCAT came together, as a network of concerned intellectuals and practitioners from around the globe that realized that only by working together we could find solutions. Many of us have had to learn a great deal about other sectors and are sometimes baffled by the complexities of our planet

but, together we can play our part in educating for a better, more creative and fairer world. A world we will be proud to be travellers in and a world that re-values the natural, cultural, social wealth of every region.

IGCAT is witnessing a changing tide and a growing movement towards the S Plan. The European Regions of Gastronomy Platform is developing in harmony and collaboration, not through competition and division. The added-value of the joint projects, shared learning and international visibility has proven to be warmly received in the regions taking part. IGCAT is now exploring how to open up this project to regions around the world so that we can have a great and more positive impact worldwide. To borrow Paul Schafer's words, this will be a noble cause indeed.

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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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