

Co-creating food tourism experiences

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Objectives | Nowadays, the concept of co-creation is becoming more relevant in literature and is applied by different authors within diverse sectorial frameworks. Perceived as “an important dimension of value creation in contemporary tourism” (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016, p. 276), where the consumer is a crucial element (Grissemann & Stockbueger-Sauer, 2012), this concept may be related to food tourism. This paper focuses on the importance of offering co-creation opportunities in the context of food experiences, and highlights an initiative offered by Portuguese tourism stakeholders as a good practice example in order to illustrate co-creative food experiences and the most highlighted dimensions, also connected to the overall destination experience. As food has been progressively perceived as a central element in the tourism experience, this paper discusses how specific, locally-based co-creative food experiences may contribute to enhance destination image.

Methodology | This study on co-creative food experiences is still in progress. A literature review on co-creation experiences and on food tourism was developed in order to identify key elements required to improve a food tourism experience and to develop co-creative food experiences. A secondary data analysis, based on web-information retrieval and netnographic approaches with respective content analysis to identify key components (already referred to in the literature review) of a particular Portuguese co-creative food experiences- “Taste of Lisboa Food Tours”. Also links of the food experience to local culture and other aspects of the destination experience are studied, as well as the reactions of the public regarding the particular offerings, as available in a food and tourism-related online forum (Tripadvisor).

Main Results and Contributions | Food tourism has been highlighted in the academic literature as a relevant factor in the tourist experience, contributing to destination attractiveness and satisfaction. As a main or secondary tourism motivation, gastronomy is part of tourists' daily travel (Björk & Kauppinen-

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Räisänen, 2014), influencing their level of engagement in the tourist experience.

Promoting a destination's image based on its gastronomic heritage means combining culture, tradition and lifestyle into creative and appealing symbiosis, providing unique and memorable experiences through local identity flavours (OECD, 2012). An integrative tourism supply is crucial to promote a co-creative gastronomic destination and reinforce its positioning. Additionally, engaging food experiences should contribute to "add value to the eating experience in order to make it memorable" (Richards, 2002, p. 11), not only in the taste experience but also in socializing contexts. Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2014) identify three factors that contribute to positive food experiences on-site: "food", "environment" and "behavior", stressing the importance of considering different elements in a co-creative experience.

Due to its gastronomic diversity, Portugal offers unique resources that may be used by the tourism supply to promote distinctive and customized food experiences. The project "Taste of Lisboa Food Tours", located in Lisbon, is an innovative initiative that promotes the genuineness of Portuguese Cuisine through diversified food tourism experiences contextualized in touristic and traditional points of Lisbon. Cooking classes are also promoted where food knowledge transfer is guaranteed, reinforced by a cultural and historical environment that contributes to its uniqueness. A co-creative process seems to be implicit as the food experience comprises a visit to the market, the purchase of local produce, the cooking class and the food tasting resulting from it. According to the "tripadvisor", the reactions of the tourists who had enjoyed the food tours reveal a very positive impact. Customers express enthusiasm for having tasted Portuguese flavours and dishes and refer to food experiences as an important element to create memories of the destination. Educational factors are also mentioned, in particular the learning experience promoted by local guides, who enhance the cultural and historical food context in the visits, which is actually appreciated by clients. Both Portuguese and foreign customers highlight the interaction with other customers and with locals as another positive feature of their tour. A common aspect mentioned by all of them is their intention to repeat the visit and get to know other food tour experiences that are available.

These perspectives show that the city environment, the quality of the products and the knowledge transfer are crucial elements to promote a memorable co-creative experience, with the travel guide playing a special role as "cultural broker". Hence, the increased relevance of food experiences should reinforce the bonds between local culture and tourism, promote local gastronomy and its unique features and contribute to the enhancement of the overall destination experience.

Limitations | It would be relevant to consider benchmarking studies from international contexts, where food tourism is already a marketing strategy for enhancing the destination's image and an added value for tourists. Besides, a systematic approach for assessing the tourists' perspective of the role of co-creative food experiences and their most important dimensions, as well as their impact on tourist satisfaction and the overall destination experience and image would be worthwhile.

Conclusions | Local gastronomy has been recognised as a destination's asset that promotes cultural identity and should therefore be perceived as an intangible element that stimulates attractiveness and tourists' engagement in the tourism experience (OECD, 2012). The development of tourism industry has stimulated the investment in creative offers aimed for enhancing the unique features of a destination and promoting its identity through food experiences, to which more value is added if the concept of co-creation is involved. Hence, besides being given the chance to learn, tourists can also develop

personal skills through the tourism experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Gastronomy may be considered an integrative part of creative industries, which might result in the co-creation of innovative and distinctive products that are part of a more appealing and competitive destination experience and image.

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