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Local Food in Tourism: An investigation into food offerings at Irish visitor attractions—Are we telling the right story?

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**Local Food in Tourism:
An investigation into food offerings at Irish visitor
attractions—Are we telling the right story?**

A thesis submitted to Technological University Dublin in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the award of Master of Arts in Gastronomy and Food Studies

Kate O Hora

June 2020

Supervisor: Diarmuid Cawley

Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Master of Arts in Gastronomy and Food Studies is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. This thesis was prepared according to the regulations of Technological University Dublin and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University. The University has permission to keep, to lend or to copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Name: Kate O Hora

Date: 1st June 2020

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Abstract

This study's aim is to investigate food offerings at visitor attractions in Ireland. Recent comments by Fáilte Ireland regarding food at visitor attractions has called on operators to localise their food offerings. A sample of eleven providers of food at visitor sites were invited to participate in qualitative interviews, to conceptualise their experiences with the provision of local food. The results showed that the sector had an overall interest in local food with most of the participants recognising that not enough emphasis was being placed on its promotion. The results of the study reveal that provision of local food provides meaningful connections with tourists through storytelling and place making. The participants also associated local food with continuity within a site, particularly within sites with multiple attractions. Providers found that it was important to support local producers, but faced challenges with supply chains, reliability, and price. The study concludes that overall, providers of food offerings at tourist sites do not recognise their roles as potential promoters of local food, and their power as agents within a national food tourism network is underestimated.

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Glossary of Terms

CERT	Council for Education Recruitment and Training for the Hotel, Catering and Tourism Industry
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ITIC	Irish Tourist Industry Confederation
OCTA	Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WFTA	World Food Travel Association

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This thesis will investigate the benefit, if any, of providing a local food experience at visitor sites in Ireland. It looks to examine the benefits and challenges involved for the providers.

The chapter begins by providing a background to the study and the justification for carrying out the research. The research question will be outlined, and the aims and objectives of the research presented. The boundaries that apply to the overall scope of the research will be defined and finally a brief overview of each section of the thesis will be provided.

1.1 Background to the Research

Food plays a vital role as part of the tourism product. Recently, the quality of food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland has been highlighted, suggesting the need to improve and localise some of them (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b; Ó Conghaile, 2019).

1.2 Justification

The motivation behind this project is based on the rise in food tourism worldwide and the progress that Ireland has made in recent years in strengthening the breadth and quality of its food and drink offering. With an increase in academic interest in the traditions and culture of Irish food, and the emergence of award-winning chefs engaging with indigenous produce, Ireland is beginning to achieve recognition as a food destination (Mac Con Iomaire, 2018).

However, research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2018) has shown that tourists' perceptions of Irish food lag far below reality. Recent comments from Irish food and hospitality industry professionals, have highlighted the poor quality of food offerings at some of our major tourist sites in the country. Often a visit to a major tourist site

can be the first, last or only experience a visitor may have of Irish cuisine in the café or restaurant of the visitor centre.

The success of tourism and hospitality is based on its ability to service each specific moment of consumption, whether that is eating, getting on a bus, attending an event, or visiting a tourist attraction (Mulcahy, 2017). In tourism the overall experience can often be determined by the weakest link.

There is a paucity of literature written about food tourism in Ireland. Specifically, the impact of food offerings and their connections to visitor sites. With restaurants, cafés, pubs, hotels and guest houses all making huge improvements in raising their food standards, and Fáilte Ireland calling for the entire hospitality industry to tell a story about their food offering, it appears that some tourist sites may be missing a trick.

1.3 Scope of the Research

This research looks to examine food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19 during the research, field work could not be completed as planned, instead a qualitative study was carried out through semi-structured interviews with 11 stakeholders providing food at visitor sites in Ireland. The primary research was carried out between February and April of 2020.

One of the main contract catering organisations, responsible for some of the larger high-volume sites in the country declined to take part in the study. This was a setback, as their influential position within the sector would have provided meaningful insights into the issues that large food providers face at these high-volume sites.

With this in mind, the study looks to investigate the sector's use and attitude to local food, as shown through the sample of active participants.

1.4 Aim of the Research

The aim is to assess the benefits and challenges for the provider associated with the provision of a local food experience at visitor sites throughout Ireland.

The Main Research Question:

What are the benefits and challenges associated with the provision of a local food experience at tourist visitor sites in Ireland?

1.5 Objectives of the Research

- To examine the academic literature on food tourism, cultural tourism, visitor attractions and local food
- To examine the grey literature with regards to food tourism policy in Ireland
- To conduct qualitative primary research with 11 food providers at visitor sites in Ireland
- To assess the benefits and challenges associated with the provision of a local food offering at visitor sites in Ireland

1.6 Chapter Outlines

1.6.1 Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one gives background to the research, outlines the research aims and objectives, states the main research question, and defines the scope of the research. Justification for the study is given and the thesis chapters are outlined.

1.6.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two presents a review of the literature and published findings pertaining to the study. These include academic journals, policy documents and food tourism publications.

1.6.3 Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter three outlines the methodological approach undertaken. The objectives are presented again to remind the reader of the direction and aims. The credentials of the participants are charted and the sample data analysis and limitations are discussed.

1.6.4 Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter four highlights the findings of the semi-structured interviews. The coding process is outlined and themes are established. The main themes relevant to the research are discussed with the use of quotations from the interviewees.

1.6.5 Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to the literature review and the research questions. The correlations, or otherwise, are highlighted.

1.6.6 Chapter Six: Conclusion

Chapter six concludes the thesis and provides further recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present an overview of the research carried out to date in relation to the subject. This entails an analysis of published academic works pertaining to the study. Other sources include policy documents relating to tourism or food tourism. It is intended that this secondary research will inform the study and provide context in order to answer the research questions.

2.2. Background

The convergence of two cultural practices, tourism and eating, warrants investigation. Within the concept of tourist travel, tourist sites could be regarded as representing destinations, whilst performing an ambassadorial role for the country, for example in 2018, 1.8 million people visited Ireland's most popular tourist attraction—the Guinness Storehouse (Fáilte Ireland, 2020a). Most tourist sites provide food and retail offerings, ranging from restaurants to tea-rooms and cafés.

Food is a vital part of tourism, people must eat, and food can enhance the overall evaluation of the travel experience (Telfer and Hashimoto, 2003). Consumption is intrinsically linked to the tourist experience, a tourist will consume sights and sounds and above all, food. Erik Wolf, executive director of World Food Travel Association, explains the growth in food tourism, “100% of visitors must eat. Not every visitor will play golf or go shopping, but everyone has to eat” (2015, p. xvii).

Eating is not only a physical need, but it is a marker of social and cultural affinity (Lévi-Strauss, 1990 [1968]). The “incorporation” of food and “otherness” (Fischler, 1998, p.280) can strengthen touristic experience, allowing deeper engagement with local culture, by the very notion of, tasting the place (Trubeck, 2008; Lee, Wall and Kovacs, 2015). Tourism-related food provision has great potential to generate income for both producers and providers of food (Nummedal and Hall, 2006). Therefore, it

would follow that food at tourist sites should be an important marker of Irish culture, and an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to, and benefit from food tourism. What follows is an examination of the existing literature on cultural tourism and food tourism. Food—as an agent for enhancing cultural experience will be explored, while provision of local food at tourist sites will be examined from a provider’s perspective, to establish its value, if any, in servicing these sites.

2.3 Tourism in Ireland

Tourism is one of Ireland’s most important economic sectors. In 2018 foreign tourist expenditure in Ireland was estimated to be €7.4 billion. This combined with domestic tourism equates to an estimated total expenditure of €9.4 billion (Fáilte Ireland, 2020b). Overseas tourists visiting Ireland grew by 6.5% to 9.6 million in 2018 according to the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation. By the end of 2019, over 20,000 tourism businesses were supporting approximately 265,000 jobs, making it the largest indigenous industry and Ireland’s biggest regional employer (ITIC, 2019).

According to Fáilte Ireland’s (2017) “‘Overseas Holidaymakers’ Attitudes Survey’, most tourists come to Ireland for the spectacular scenery and for its culture and history. Fáilte Ireland identifies these visitors as ‘sightseers and culture seekers’, those for whom exploring a country’s sights and finding out about its culture are the key motivators for going on holiday (Fáilte Ireland, 2020c). Cultural tourism accounts for 40% of global tourism (Richards, 2009), and whilst every tourist visiting Ireland is not explicitly a ‘cultural tourist’, considering Ireland’s climate, it may be assumed that a large proportion are. In tourism promotion warm weather can often be a motivator for travellers to visit a destination, implying climate is a pull factor (Day, Chin, Sydnor and Cherkauer, 2013). Ireland has a reputation as being one of the wettest locations in Europe, and its ‘green’ imagery, is an expression of this (O’ Leary and Deegan, 2002). The following section will explore definitions of cultural tourism while considering the place of visitor attractions.

2.3.1 Cultural Tourism

In the past cultural tourism in Europe was linked to the elite of society. From the seventeenth century on, young aristocrats, accompanied by tutors, travelled around Europe on a 'Grand Tour'. Under the prevailing humanist education ideal, this consumption of culture was part of the educational process (Richards, 2007). Towner defined the Grand Tour as "a tour of certain cities and places in Western Europe undertaken primarily, but not exclusively for education and pleasure" (1985, p. 301). The favoured routes were through Italy, Switzerland, the Rhine Valley, and ancient cultural and archaeological sites. The tutor assumed the role of pathfinder and mentor, the antecedents to Cohen's (1985) theories of contemporary tour guide roles (Sherle and Nonnenmann, 2008). According to Richards (2007) tourism consumption has changed over the years, no longer an elite pursuit, it has become a basic leisure need of the masses. The traditional view of culture as 'high culture', relating to museums and monuments has changed with the emergence of a new generation of popular cultural attractions created by the heritage industry. At the same time consumption of all culture has increased, transforming the relationship between culture and tourism (Richards, 1996).

2.3.2 Definition of Cultural Tourism

Much of the literature on cultural tourism focuses on the complexity of its definition (McKercher and du Cros, 2015; Smith, 2003; Mousavi, Doratli, Mousavi and Moradiahari, 2016). Cultural tourism is not just about consuming cultural products of the past, visiting monuments and sites, it is also concerned with the culture of people and contemporary life (Mousavi *et al.*, 2016; Smith, 2003). All aspects of travel involve some connections with culture, especially with tourists moving away from homogenised package holidays in favour of more experiential trips (Richards, 2018). The UNWTO (2017) define cultural tourism as:

A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage,

literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions (UNWTO, 2017).

Cultural tourism, as defined by Mc Kercher and du Cros, is “a form of tourism that relies on a destination’s cultural heritage assets and transforms them into products that can be consumed by tourists” (2015, p. 211). Richards (1996) attempts to define cultural tourism using MacCannell’s (1999 [1976], p. 29) theory of “cultural productions”, which includes the practice of culture but also the products which result from the process. MacCannell (1999, [1976]) identifies tourism as the ideal arena in which to investigate this notion of cultural production. Urry (1990) goes further and argues that tourism itself is culture.

The most widespread definition of cultural tourism is in fact Richard’s (2007) interpretation, based on the motivational needs of the tourist. He represents it as the movement of people towards cultural attractions, beyond their places of residence, to appreciate culture in order to fulfil their own cultural demands; the modern tourists’ quest for unique and experiential encounters. McKercher also uses motivation to define a cultural tourist:

Someone who visits or intends to visit, a cultural tourism attraction, a gallery, museum or historic site, attend a performance or festival, or participate in a wide range of other activities at any time during their trip, regardless of their main reason for traveling (2002. p. 30).

At the same time, Mc Kercher and du Cros (2003), claim that cultural tourists’ motivations to travel, fall along a continuum like any other cohort of tourists. Some purposeful cultural tourists seek a more meaningful learning experience, but most cultural tourists seek enjoyable experiences that entertain them without challenging their ideology. Jovicic (2016) surmises that most authors agree that cultural tourism describes tourists who come in contact with culture, sometimes by accident, or more specifically by choice. With all sorts of holidays having cultural elements within them, this can refer to most tourists.

The reality is that cultural tourism often involves activities and experiences other than visiting monuments, historical or artistic sites (Jovicic, 2016). In Ireland's case, pubs, restaurants, and theatres are all part of the fabric of its culture. Culture is inextricably connected with tourism and not all cultural tourists consume culture in the same way. Some visit a destination with the intention of visiting cultural sites while others might feel obliged to visit a well-known attraction—to tick a box as such.

2.3.3 Cultural Tourism in an Irish Context

Research by Fáilte Ireland shows that overseas tourists visiting Ireland want to experience the real Ireland to find what is unique about being Irish. With the main reason for visiting being Ireland's unique scenery, followed by its culture and heritage, Fáilte Ireland has identified these areas as pull factors in their marketing campaigns (Fáilte Ireland, 2017). It is estimated that two thirds of tourists participate in historic and cultural activities (O' Donoghue, 2013). In 2011, overseas tourists who engaged in cultural and heritage pursuits were worth over €2.8 billion to the Irish economy. In a Fáilte Ireland survey for 2018 on domestic tourism, 21% said they visited houses and castles while holidaying at home, whilst 17% visited gardens, 15% heritage and interpretive centres and 11% visited museums and galleries (Fáilte Ireland, 2019a). They also claim that “cultural tourists tend to be affluent and highly educated; they stay longer and spend more” (Fáilte Ireland, 2020c). Ram, Bjork and Weidenfeld (2016) evaluate cultural visitor attractions as part of destination development and indicate that they can provide close relations between authenticity and place attachment.

2.3.4 Definition of a Visitor Attraction

Tourist attractions are key components in a destination's tourism industry and can attract visitors to an area while providing a resource for visitors (Richards, 2002). Swarbrooke suggests that they are the most important component in the tourism system and that without attractions there would be no “tourism as such” (2002, p. 3). Leask (2010) proposes that their importance lies in the complexity of stakeholder involvement, and the effective management of this, which impacts the overall success of a country's tourism product. Middleton and Clark (2001) posit that they can provide

a sense of place for a destination to distinguish itself from another. Much of the research concedes that visitor attractions are crucial elements of any destination as they can instigate travel to regional areas while helping to divert tourists from cities (Prideaux, 2002). Development of attractions can also be linked to tourism destination development or economic regeneration of an area or community (Richards 2002, Benckendorff, 2006; Leask, 2009).

According to Benckendorff (2006), the term tourist attraction is difficult to define. Firstly, it is difficult to determine the number of visitors required to deem it an attraction, and secondly the purpose for visiting the attraction may be a consideration in determining whether a site can be classed as such (Swarbrooke, 2002). Leiper's definition of an attraction, as a "system comprising three elements: a *tourist*, a *sight* and a *marker*" (1990, p. 370) is an adaptation of MacCannell (1999 [1976]) and Gunn's (1988) earlier theories on attractions. Richards (2002) explored Leiper's concept using empirical research and discovered that tourists are pushed towards attractions rather than being pulled. Tourist motivation to travel is a major incentive and is influenced by sociodemographic characteristics. At the same time, providers play an important role in shaping the attraction system with regard to design and development, which can contribute to the pull factor (Richards, 2002).

Walsh-Heron and Steven's (1990) widely cited definition, cited in (Page, 2003, p.229), of a tourist attraction suggests that an attraction is a feature in an area that is a place, venue or focus of activity that:

1. Sets out to attract visitors and is managed accordingly
2. Provides a fun and pleasurable experience and an enjoyable way for customers to spend their leisure time
3. Is developed to realise this potential
4. Is managed as an attraction, providing satisfaction to its customers
5. Provides an appropriate level of facilities and services to meet and cater to the demands, needs, and interest of its visitors
6. May or may not charge admission for entry

A visitor attraction is a geographical area or an individual site, based on a defining feature, which motivates people to travel some distance from home, for a short period of time, in order to experience it (Pearce, 1991). According to Lew (1987), a visitor attraction, in its widest context, includes historic sites, amusement parks and spectacular scenery, but also the facilities that are required to service the needs of tourists, including food offerings. He describes how lines can be blurred in attraction definition between attractions and non-attractions (cruise-liners, resort accommodation and restaurants), and proposes a framework that can be applied in the comparison and evaluation of tourist attraction related research. Swarbrooke (2001, p.318) outlines four categories of visitor attraction:

1. Natural attractions such as beaches, mountains, lakes and forests
2. Man-made attractions that were not originally designed for tourism, but which are now seen as tourist attractions, such as cathedrals
3. Man-made attractions which are purpose built to attract tourists, such as theme parks
4. Events and festivals which are not physical or permanent, but which attract visitors

An analysis of the literature shows that the attractions sector is a heterogeneous entity, meaning it can be difficult to define what is and what is not an attraction. Weidenfeld and Leask discuss the growing definitional debate of the terms ‘visitor attractions’ and ‘events’ and concur that the difference lies in the spatio-temporality of events in contrast with the more permanent “visitor attractions nucleus” (2013, p.566). The issue becomes even more intricate when defining cultural attractions as to whether these could include shopping centres, theme parks, and casinos. Different countries have different definitions for categorisation (Leask, 2010). For this thesis, the term visitor attractions will apply to those regarded as cultural attractions: museums, art galleries, archaeological sites and sites of historic interest.

2.2.5 Visitor Attractions in an Irish Context

According to Swarbrooke (2002) visitor attractions are the heart of the tourism industry; he describes them as motivators that make people want to take a trip in the first place. Within an Irish context, Fáilte Ireland define a visitor attraction as:

.... a permanently established destination, capable of attracting day visitors or tourists, which must be open to the public, without them necessarily having to pre-book. The primary purpose of the attraction should be sightseeing, for which it may be feasible to charge admission. It should also allow access for entertainment, interest, or education rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances (Fáilte Ireland, 2018a).

To highlight the importance of tourism attractions to the Irish tourism industry the following table shows the top ten visitor attractions in Ireland in 2018. The population of the Republic of Ireland in 2021 stands at approximately 4.9 million. These are the most current figures available from Fáilte Ireland (2019b).

Top Ten Fee Charging Attractions	Visitor Numbers	Top Ten Non-Fee Charging Attractions	Visitor Numbers
Guinness Storehouse	1,736,156	Kilkenny Castle Parklands	799,032
Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience	1,580,000	The National Gallery of Ireland	775,491
Dublin Zoo	1,230,145	Glendalough Site	732,824
Book of Kells	1,057,642	National Botanic Gardens	655,609
Tayto Park	700,000	Castletown House Parklands	642,278
St Patrick's Cathedral	627,199	Irish Museum of Modern Art	505,891
Kylemore Abbey & Garden	561,657	Doneraile Park	490,000
Muckross House	550,649	National Museum of Ireland	466,038
Powerscourt House Gardens & Waterfall	472,523	Farmleigh House Estate	389,932
Blarney Castle & Gardens	460,000	Battle of the Boyne/Oldbridge Est	355,608

Figure 1: Top Ten Most Visited Attractions 2018

In 2019 Fáilte Ireland announced it would invest €150 million into developing visitor attractions across the country. Major new visitor attractions of scale were to be developed and existing attractions greatly enhanced through ‘Platforms for Growth’, an initiative that would run to 2040. A focus on developing ‘Immersive Heritage and Cultural Attractions’ would see investment in innovative and interactive experiences for the visitor to immerse themselves in, as “overseas visitors are increasingly seeking out more hands-on experiences which bring local culture and heritage to life” (Fáilte Ireland, 2019b).

Shining a light on the food offerings at visitor attractions, the ‘Fáilte Ireland Food Strategy 2018-2023’ states that there is a “lack of understanding among some tourism operators and the industry in general, of the value of improving and localising the food offering”. In particular the “lack of strong food offerings and stories at many visitor attraction sites (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b, p.28). It proposes to “implement a programme to ensure that, in Ireland’s visitor attractions, tourists encounter local foods that are seen as authentic products symbolising the place and its culture” (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b, p.42). In order to contextualise Fáilte Ireland’s food strategies, the next section will look at the growth of Ireland as a food destination and the development of food tourism.

2.4 The Growth of Ireland as a Food Destination

In 1955, Bord Fáilte Eireann was established to develop and promote tourism both home and abroad. According to Deleuze (2014), Ireland did not have a good reputation for gastronomy, and it was not until the 1970s that a concentrated effort by Bord Fáilte, aimed at promoting Irish food, made any impact. In 1972 they published the ‘Guide to Good Eating’ and invested in training and education projects to improve the quality of Irish food. The period between 1969 and 1994 saw an escalation in the conflict between Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland. Known as ‘The Troubles’ this period in Irish history was a lean time for tourism. During the 1970s and 1980s, Bord Fáilte concentrated on training and education projects, and worked in partnership with CERT (The Council for Education, Recruitment, and Training) to promote the training of chefs. In 2003 they merged with Tourism Ireland and became Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority (Deleuze, 2014).

According to Mac Con Iomaire and Allen (2016), the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years (1994–2007) brought unprecedented growth to the hospitality industry in Ireland. This growth was compounded by international recognition for Irish chefs and restaurants. They attribute some of the success of chefs in Ireland and abroad, to the transformation of culinary education from a vocational to a liberal model, with the establishment of the Bachelor of Arts (hons) in Culinary Arts in 1999 at Dublin Institute of Technology (now Technological University Dublin). The culinary landscape was shifting and in

2011, the editor of *Le Guide du Routard* remarked, “the Irish dining experience is now as good if not better than anywhere in the world” (cited in: Mac Con Iomaire, 2013).

In 2019 the Michelin guide granted five new stars to Irish restaurants within the Republic, two of them at two-star level, bringing the total of Michelin star restaurants in the country to 18 (Michelin, 2020). In 2015 the first ever Food on the Edge chefs’ conference was organised in Galway, with 40 speakers from 17 different countries. Along with the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium and the Ballymaloe Lit festival, interest in Ireland’s burgeoning food culture was being driven by professionals and academics (Mac Con Iomaire, 2018).

Research carried out by the WFTA in 2016 states that 48.5% of visitors to Ireland perceived that they would have a ‘high quality food offering’ pre-visit, when surveyed after the trip this number was 70% (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b). This shows the substantial gap between preconceptions before visiting Ireland and actual experience in the country (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b). The OCTA commented that “Ireland is a great example of an emerging culinary destination because it is not necessarily top of mind for culinary tourists” (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, 2015, p.13). This is also indicative of the progress being made within the food tourism industry in Ireland. With Fáilte Ireland’s latest initiative ‘Taste the Island’ in 2019 and their claims of Ireland experiencing a “food renaissance”, there is a strong focus being placed on food at every level. Recently some journalists and industry figures have commented on the lack of local food offerings at some visitor sites in Ireland, and implied that this food “revolution” might be passing them by (Ó Conghaile, 2019).

2.4.1 Definition of Food Tourism

Food tourism is a relatively new field of academic research. Lucy M. Long first coined the phrase “culinary tourism” in 1998 to express the idea of experiencing other cultures through food (Long, 1998, p.181). Despite the extensive literature surrounding food tourism, there is no clear-cut taxonomy, and the terms ‘culinary tourism’, ‘gastronomy tourism’ and ‘food tourism’ are used interchangeably (Mulcahy, 2017; Wolf, 2014). Hall and Mitchel (2005) state that:

Food tourism may be defined as visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel (Hall and Mitchell, 2005, p. 74).

According to the ‘World Food Travel Association’ the current definition of food tourism is “the act of traveling for a taste of place to get a sense of place” (Stone, Migacz, Garibaldi and Wolf, 2019). Everett and Aitchison describe food tourism as:

[T]he conscious acknowledgement by tourists that food is more than sustenance ... a cultural artefact with a myriad of facets that can be enjoyed in many locations and through many activities such as food trails, events, festivals and visitor attractions (2010, p. 151).

Hall and Sharples imply that food tourists are motivated by “the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region” (2003, p. 10). Commonly, all definitions of food tourism refer to the element of ‘experience’. Trying out new cuisines can help create memorable experiences (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004), and food can also be used as a lens to experience a destination’s local culture (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Long 2004).

2.4.2 The Experience Economy

Since MacCannell’s (1999[1976]) work on the tourist, where he explores the tourist’s quest for an authentic experience, tourism destinations have been viewed as a means to stage the authenticity that cannot be found in the tourist’s daily life (Oh, Fiore and Jeoung, 2007). Robinson and Clifford (2007) argue that a quality food service can enhance the overall authenticity of a visitor experience. Experience has served as a key construct in travel and tourism research since the 1990s through the shift from mass tourism to a more experiential form of tourism (Poon, 1994). Pine and Gilmore (1988) describe a new economy where work is like a theatre—every business is a stage and workers are like actors. Experiences are becoming more complex and consumers more demanding (OECD, 2012). This shift towards intangible experiences adds a challenge for food tourism providers, as the focus of the tourist has changed from “must see” to “must experience” (Richards, 2012, p.14). Moving on from the

‘Experiential Economy’ where experiences are staged, food tourists want to be more involved in authentic experience concepts, as this customer co-creation allows tourists to create their own vacation experience and thereby create value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

2.4.3 Food as Part of the Tourist Experience

The theory of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs (Figure. 2) states that at the most basic level human beings require food, water, shelter, and warmth. These physiological needs are the lowest needs, followed by safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation. Food is vital for tourists’ physical sustenance, and although Hall and Sharples (2003) warn about the risks of confusing food tourism with food consumption associated with tourism, the role of food is an inseparable part of tourism (Kocevski and Risteski, 2018).

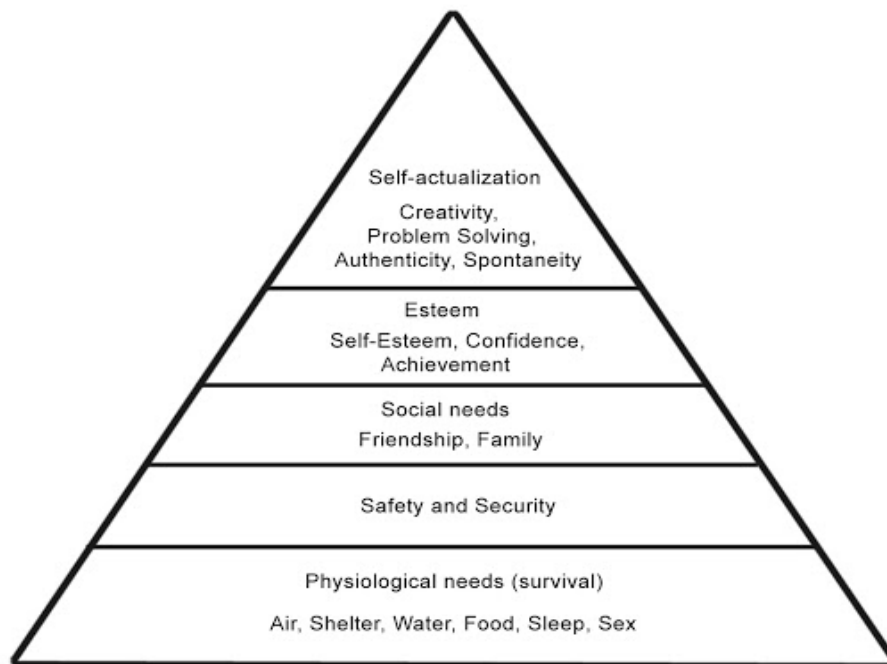


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Quan and Wang (2004) describe how food as part of the touristic experience can be defined. They propose a conceptual model of the structure of the tourist experience for

identifying the position and the role of various components with it. Food can act as a primary or secondary trip motivator, the former being the reason to go and the latter being food consumed as part of the holiday, and not essential to the success of the trip. Also, within the experience itself, the peak touristic experience and the supporting consumer experience can be interchangeable under certain conditions. An example would be that a tourist with the original motivation of sightseeing found that the local food at the destination was so good, it became part of the peak experience and intensified enjoyment and memorability of the whole trip (Quan and Wang, 2004). The desire to try different foods may be a primary motivator for some or can be part of the whole tourist package for others. McCabe (2002) points out that it is misleading to exclude the daily experience from tourism, advising that the tourist experience as a whole, consists of both the peak experience and the supporting experiences such as eating, sleeping and playing; each experience supports the other.

Fields (2002) adopts a typology of four motivational factors to evaluate consumption patterns of food tourists: 1. physical, 2. cultural, 3. interpersonal, 4. status and prestige. In the first instance, consumption is based on the tourist's physical need for sustenance. Secondly, while experiencing the local cuisine, the tourist is simultaneously having a cultural experience. Thirdly, as meals eaten on holidays have a social function, they can help to create new friendships or bonds, this serves as an interpersonal motivator. Lastly, experiencing new cuisines that are not available at home can be a prestige and status motivator, enabling tourists to develop cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Kim, Eves and Scarles (2009) proposed nine motivational factors influencing tourists' consumption of local food and beverages. These factors included exciting experiences, escape from routine, health concerns, learning knowledge, authentic experiences, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, and physical environment. They conclude that tasting local food and beverages offers local cultural experiences and enriches intellectual tastes. Food can enhance the overall experience and be used as a cultural lens.

Mulcahy questions the motivations of tourists on a more prosaic level and asks whether the ordinary tourist perceives food as an experiential event, or whether it is

just “a necessary fact and cost of daily living-touring, in the case of tourism” (2017, p. 185). This returns to the fundamental motivation of ‘basic need’, as the main reason why tourists eat. What is significant to researchers is that different tourists will place more emphasis on the importance of food, than others. The following section will discuss the traits of different groups of tourists around food.

2.4.4 Segmentation of Tourists Based on Attitudes to Local Food

When people travel away from their normal habitats this can influence their consumption patterns (Hjalager, 2003; MacCannell, 1999 [1976]). Hjalager (2003) asks whether tourists eat at destinations because they have no alternatives, and whether the spread in international restaurant chains may be a cause or effect of this.

As shown in section 2.4.2, tourists differ considerably in motivations and attitudes. Cohen’s (1972) early sociological analysis of the phenomenon of modern tourism identified four main typologies of a tourist: the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organised mass tourist. These typologies have framed much tourism research. Hjalager (2003) builds on Cohen’s fundamental typologies, presenting a phenomenological model of the tourist’s attitudes towards food. She recognises four classifications: the existential, the experimental, the recreational and the diversionary. The existential tourist seeks food experiences that foster a learning about local cuisine and culture. Hands-on cookery classes and visits to farms appeal to them. The experimental tourist is more inclined to seek out fashionable food and is drawn towards trendy restaurants. Recreational tourists eat to satisfy their hunger, food is not of paramount importance, and they will seek out the familiar. Finally, the diversionary tourist prefers to eat at multinational chain restaurants, the social aspect of eating is important and ‘quantity not quality’ can be a determining factor.

Mitchell and Hall (2003) also use Cohen’s typologies (1972) to consider the level of interest tourists have in food. Ranging from high level of interest to a low level or involvement in food, these categories are gastronomes, indigenous foodies, tourist foodies and familiar foods. Gastronomes will research a destination prior to travel and will have a high commitment to seeking out local food and cultures. Indigenous foodies, whilst eager to try local food, will engage in a lower level of involvement,

and may seek out ethnic restaurants. Tourist foodies generally do not eat out as frequently and are drawn to mainstream restaurants. They will always seek out tourist menus and like Hjalager's (2003) 'diversionary tourist', they are more interested in the social aspect of eating. Finally, the familiar foods group are generally on a package tour, they rarely eat out and have very little interest in local food or culture.

Segmentation of tourists based on food interest is explored by Cohen and Avieli (2004). Congruent with Cohen's (1972) argument that tourists travel in quest of novelty and strangeness, but also need a degree of familiarity, they propose that food can be an attraction or an impediment. Tourists can then be categorised by their 'neophobic' or 'neophylic' tendencies in taste (Fischler, 1988), that is, their quest for novel or strange food, or their reluctance to try any unfamiliar foods. These characteristics can be related to demographic and sociocultural differences in tourists (Cohen and Avieli, 2004).

Most of the literature around segmentation of tourists relating to food consumption, position different tendencies on a trajectory of familiarity to novelty. For some tourists seeking out local food and culture is a primary motive to travel to destinations (Michell and Hall, 2003; Quan and Wang, 2004; Kivella and Crofts, 2009), for others it only serves a physiological need, and therefore does not feature in destination choice (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016).

2.5 Local Food in Tourism

This section examines the role that local food plays within food tourism. Despite the growing interest in this area, there is no precise universally accepted definition for local food. A Bord Bia (2017) consumer survey defines local food as having four characteristics:

1. It is made or produced locally
2. It has a story
3. It is not mass produced
4. It is better for me

78% of those surveyed acknowledged that they felt they were supporting the community by buying local food and 74% felt that food produced locally is fresher.

The influential role of local food for tourists has been a focus for governments, researchers, and the tourism industry since the 1990s (du Rand and Heath, 2006). This growing trend which supports an ethical notion of consumption, contends that people are influenced by the environment, sustainability, and a desire to support local food networks (Enteleca Consultancy, 2000; Pearson, Henryks, Trott, Jones, Parker, Dumaresq and Dyball, 2011). Globalisation serves as a threat to local gastronomic identities, as global components are seen to pervade local landscapes (Mak *et al.*, 2012). Local food can be used effectively to counter the effects of homogenisation by building differentiation (Robinson and Clifford, 2007). This can motivate tourists to seek out local food to satisfy their own expression of local food advocacy and notions of cultural capital and distinction (Bourdieu, 1986; de Jong and Varley, 2017).

Tourists recognise local food as authentic, traditional, and simple (Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016; Miroso and Lawson, 2012).

Nummedal and Hall (2006) reflect on the importance of local food networks to the farming community, promoting local agricultural practice and allowing farmers to diversify. Local food also enables tourism providers to collaborate locally and to gain access to tourism networks, with potentials for success in business (Nummedal and Hall (2006). Local food is thought to heighten social relationships within food tourism networks (Mulcahy, 2015). This collective action resulting from the social relationships formed, is described as ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986). This term is used to describe “the goodwill, fellowship, friendship, tolerance and mutual respect from all individuals” involved in a network (Everett, 2016; Stafford and O’ Leary, 2013, p.15). This ‘social capitalisation’ of a destination can lead to tangible outcomes. Local food can appeal to tourists on many levels, enhancing the tourist experience, whilst helping to sustain the industry (du Rand, Heath and Albert, 2003; Sims, 2009).

2.5.1 Local Food and ‘Sense of Place’

Foodscapes have become strategic in destination branding. Food is considered a marker of the culture of a country and its people, making it an ideal product to use as

a marketing tool (du Rand and Heath, 2006; Lee, Wall and Kovacs, 2015; Mc Kercher, Okamus and Okamus, 2008). Hjalager and Richards (2002) posit that local food is an essential part of the tourist experience as it can serve as the gateway to both cultural activities and entertainment. Food represents traditions, stories, and symbols (Ellis Park, Kim and Yeoman, 2018). Local food gives tourists an opportunity to learn about local geography and traditions (Bessiere, 2001; Scarpato, 2002). Because eating local food gives a sense of place to the visitor (Tuan, 1977; Smith, 2015), it allows them to almost taste the destination. Bessiere and Tibere discuss consumption of local food as a link with the unfamiliar, the other, and relate it to Fischler's (1990) description of food consumption as "a machine for travelling into social space and imagination" (In: Bessiere and Tibere, 2013, p.3422). Through eating, the visitor incorporates the physical dimensions of the area along with the symbolic, integrating themselves into the local community (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013). Food incorporates all the senses—vision, tactility, auditory, taste and olfaction—and offers the tourist sensory pleasure that can fulfil the experiential part of the tourist experience (Kivela and Crofts, 2006).

McCannell describes in his sociological study of tourists how locality can be represented symbolically while consuming local food (1999 [1976]). This notion of locality has become an important cultural lens for those tourists seeking authentic experiences through travel. Parascecoli states that "place generates concepts connected with rootedness, such as *terroir* in France or *territorio* in Italy" (2008, p.134). Several authors have reflected on food and wine as an expression of place and how it is used to market a destination (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Hall and Sharpies, 2003; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Long, 2004; Richards, 2002).

Visitors can be attracted to places that are not frequented by many tourists, in order to taste certain foods; food can be the incentive (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014). Positive food experiences are important for customer satisfaction and can influence "positive word of mouth" (Cetin and Bilgihan, 2016, p.137) and revisit intention (Kivella and Crofts, 2009; Ryu and Jang, 2006).

2.5.2 Local Food and Experience

Bessiere and Tibere (2013) describe how local food discovery can reflect tourists' quest for cultural identity and learning. They profile tourists' interest in local food in three different ways. The gastronomic experience can be a vehicle of self-discovery, it can invite them to experience 'the other' or it can be a way of experiencing the destination. Food is an integral part of the tourists' trip and can either be considered a "memorable' experience" or merely an extension of everyday food habits (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013, p.3421).

Positive food experiences can leave unforgettable memories and can enhance tourist's identification and attachment to local attractions; food can unite visitors with local culture (Tsai, 2016). Kivella and Crofts (2009) state that food experiences transcend restaurants, and that positive food memories encompassing the whole holiday can be a reason to revisit a destination. Lin and Mao claim that food can help tourists to "appreciate an abstract culture via tangible means" and suggest that local food specialities are an important connection to local culture (2015, p. 26). Memorable food experiences can be gourmet or simple, like a visit to a Michelin starred restaurant or eating at a food stand. Travellers find memory in a variety of food experiences, high and low, implying that tourists are often cultural omnivores (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Stone, Soulard, Migacz and Wolf, 2018). Robinson and Clifford (2007) consider how food and beverage offerings at special events can enhance event authenticity when associated with the region, community, and culture.

2.5.3 Food Offerings at Visitor Attractions

Competition in the visitor attraction sector means that operators must ensure that they optimise the earning potential from their sites. Research has shown that the quality of the product and value for money is of key importance to the leisure consumer (Dewhurst and Thwaites, 2014). Garod, Fyall, and Leask (2002) propose that sites enhance and promote augmented tourist services, such as gift shops and restaurants, to respond effectively to pressures within the industry. Visitors to attractions including castles, historic houses, and gardens, often revisit on account of the subsidiary services, especially restaurants and cafés, as they see little value in paying to see the main attraction again (Dewhurst and Thwaites, 2014). Therefore, this would suggest

that a good food offering must be considered an important component of a successful visitor attraction. Leask (2010) recognises that visitor attractions and their services are an under researched field of study within the tourism system but advocates for the delivery of a strong food and retail offering.

Research by Fáilte Ireland on the criteria that impact the satisfaction of visitors' experience at attractions, shows restaurant and coffee facilities placed sixteenth out of twenty, even though 64%-70% of visitors use café and shop facilities at the cultural visitor attractions in Ireland, with usage rates being much higher outside Dublin (Fáilte Ireland, 2016). In their 'Tourism Toolkit for Ireland's Built Heritage' Fáilte Ireland recommend that site owners deliver "a really good experience" in their cafés to complement the story they are telling at their sites (Fáilte Ireland, 2020d, p. 23). Sociability is a sought-after experience with visitors to cultural attractions and many city-based museums offering fine-dining restaurants as well as producing temporary events (Kotler, 2001). The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is an example of a museum which has several restaurants, one of them at Michelin star level.

2.5.4 Tour Buses and Visitor Attractions

Often, bus tours provide a primary means for tourists to explore visitor attractions in a convenient and cost-effective way (Ryan and Gu, 2007). Shackley (1998) warns that large visitor numbers can impact the quality of the experience offered at visitor attractions. Tourists consuming a destination can contend with viewing sites through specified time slots—the 'been there, done that' approach. While this can be exhausting, it can also devalue their experience (Van Westering, 1999).

Research from 2014 shows that 47% of all visitors to the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare travelled there by bus. 52% of bus visitors to the Cliffs were on tours ranging in duration from three to fourteen days, usually originating in Dublin. For some attractions, 10% of their visitors are bus passengers but generally the proportion is between 25% and 65%, which is a considerable part of their revenue (Saunders Research and Communications, 2015). According to Fáilte Ireland (2012), coach tourists are an important part of Ireland's tourism infrastructure with 90% of coach tourists actively engaging with Irish culture and visiting sites of historical interest.

2.6 Food Tourism Policy in Ireland

After the global economic recession hit in 2008, the tourism industry witnessed a serious decline in overseas visitors. As gastronomy was a growing market segment, it was a focus to gain some competitive advantage. Fáilte Ireland recognised the need to approach food tourism in a different way and a working group of stakeholders and government agencies was established (Mulcahy, 2019). This led to the development of the ‘National Food Tourism Framework 2011-2013’. The overall vision for food tourism development was:

[T]hat Ireland be recognised by visitors for the availability, quality and value of our local and regional food experiences which evokes a unique sense of place culture and hospitality (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p. 16).

In May 2010 an industry working group was established, advocating stakeholder driven development and collaboration. The objective was to ensure that food related experiences in Ireland were of a world class standing, particularly in relation to quality, availability and authenticity. With benchmarking, research, branding and promotion, Fáilte Ireland acted as a facilitator within the sector bringing stakeholders together for the common good (Fáilte Ireland, 2010). With tourists spending 30% of their overall spend on food and drink, the symbiotic nature of tourism and gastronomy was becoming clear, generating enough income to be of interest to enterprise and government (Mulcahy, 2014).

In 2012, Fáilte Ireland launched the Food Champions Programme, the brainchild of John Mulcahy (senior manager at Fáilte Ireland), who was inspired by a model of lifestyle entrepreneurship applied in the Hawkes Bay area of New Zealand (Quigley, Connolly, Mahon and Mac Con Iomaire, 2019). A group of fourteen ‘food champions’ were chosen, with eight ‘food ambassadors’ added in 2013 to support the Wild Atlantic Way brand. The ‘Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016’ was intended to collaborate with the food champions to develop food tourism in Ireland (Mulcahy, 2019).

More recently, the ‘Fáilte Ireland Food Strategy 2018-2023’ has been developed with the intention of focussing on Irish food and drink as a key component of Irish tourism.

The aim of the current policy is to “enhance the visitor experience through food and drink and make a strong contribution to overall tourism revenue growth” (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b, p.33). According to Fáilte Ireland (2018b) this policy will enable them to measure the impact of food in tourism and demonstrate how it contributes to the economic growth in Ireland. This policy was due to be reviewed by Fáilte Ireland in 2020, to identify its strengths and weaknesses (Quigley *et al.*, 2019). Fáilte Ireland’s (2020e) ‘Taste the Island’ initiative claims that “high quality and authentic food and drink products are at the heart of food and drink tourism”.

2.7 Food, Identity and Authenticity

Food is an important signifier of our culture and symbolic order and plays a vital role in our sense of self (Mulcahy, 2009). Hall and Sharples explain that food has:

... issues of taste, image, freshness, experience and quality [that] are now recognised as important, not only because of the role of food in the local economy, but also because of what, why and how we eat, says something about ourselves, why we travel and the society we live in (2003, p. 2).

Fischler states that “food is central to our sense of identity” (1988, p.275). How we eat, identifies us with other groups of people and defines our place in the universe. Identity is increasingly constructed through the consumption of leisure goods (Urry, 1994), with tourism being a modern leisure activity (Cohen, 1998). Personal connections to cultural places or historical events can help to define one’s own identity, with foodways being a fundamental intersection between culture and travel (Timothy and Ron, 2013). According to Claudia Roden, food is “an expression of identity and ideology. It touches on every issue of class, gender, race, and ethnicity. It is a clue to history, it has a language” (2000, p.vii).

Parasecoli (2008) relates identity to the threat of homogenisation and hybridisation, where tourists travel in search of authenticity to unfamiliar environments. Local food, a vital component of travel can satisfy this quest for authenticity, or at least, perceived authenticity (du Rand and Heath, 2006). Timothy and Ron (2013) suggest that destinations can benefit from food that is culturally accurate, rather than authentic.

Authenticity as a concept in tourism is often exploited as a promotional strategy, especially around cultural tourism (Timothy and Ron, 2013) and food (Jackson, 2013). The meaning and validity of authenticity plays a central role in tourism literature (Cohen, 1988; Heitmann, 2011; Sims, 2009; Taylor, 2001). Despite the numerous definitions of authenticity, the common themes are tradition, heritage, history, culture, and locality (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; du Rand and Heath, 2006; Kim, Eves and Scarles, 2009). Jackson (2013) highlights the frequent and arbitrary use of the word ‘authentic’ in relation to restaurants and refers to Appadurai’s (1986) essay in which he expresses doubts over whether the term should be used in relation to culinary systems at all. Appadurai claims that the concept of authenticity does not account for evolution of cuisines or cultures and is a state of existence rather than a classification.

2.8 Covid-19

In their end of year report in 2019, the ITIC predicted that 2020 would be challenging for the tourism industry for a number of reasons, the two most important being the government’s increase in the VAT rate in 2019 to 13% and the impending threat of a ‘no deal’ Brexit (ITIC, 2019). No one could predict the Covid-19 crisis which has all but decimated the tourism industry, making its future even more uncertain and challenging.

While this research is underway, the world is in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapid spread of the virus is bringing immense human suffering and significant economic disruption. Containment measures are having a huge impact on the tourism and travel industry. According to the UNWTO (2020) “the unparalleled and fast-evolving nature of the crisis” makes it “extremely challenging to estimate the impact of Covid-19 on international tourism”. The pandemic has sharply slowed manufacturing and worldwide consumption, making it impossible for economists to predict the future outlook for global recovery (Boone, Haugh, Pain and Salins, 2020). However, the UNWTO (2020) advise that the tourism industry is a sector with a proven capacity to bounce back and in a position to lead wider societal recovery to drive economic growth.

As much of the research for this thesis was carried out before the outbreak of the pandemic, and is continuing throughout it, the researcher looks to place the objectives of the project within the existing literature which precedes this crisis. Implications for the tourism industry in Ireland as result of Covid-19 are outside the scope of the research. However, it is hoped that the results of this study will be of benefit to all stakeholders trying to rebuild their businesses once the recovery starts.

2.9 Conclusion

Visitor attractions are an integral part of Ireland's tourism industry. Both Fáilte Ireland and members of the media and food industry have recently drawn attention to the food offerings at some of these visitor attractions. The 'Food and Drink strategy 2018-2023' states that there is a "lack of strong food offerings and stories at many visitor attractions" (Fáilte Ireland, 2018b, p. 28). This has been identified by Fáilte Ireland as one of the challenges to the food tourism industry, as there remains a disconnect between the story of Ireland as a country with great food produce and the reputation of Ireland as a great food destination.

Food is a fundamental part of the tourism product. Whether they want to or not, people must eat (Nummedal and Hall, 2006). For the benefit of this study, it is assumed that food tourism is an inherent part of a tourist's behaviour and is an essential part of the daily routine (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016), whether it is a sandwich on the bus, tasting cheese at an artisan provider, dinner at a Michelin star restaurant or lunch at a tourist attraction. In tourism the overall experience can often be determined by the weakest link.

Fáilte Ireland claim that "there has never been a more exciting time for the food scene in Ireland". Their 'Taste the Island' initiative looks to place a strong focus on Ireland's food tourism industry (Fáilte Ireland, 2020e). Food and drink expenditure accounts for 35% of overseas tourism revenue worth €2 billion a year.

Research shows that augmented services at visitor attractions can often be the reason for a return visit, reinforcing the requirement to have a strong food offering. Ancillary

services at attractions also add value to the peak experience, economically and culturally. The café or restaurant at visitor attractions serves as a means to enhance the time spent at the site and to offer a space to relax from the activity of viewing or participating in a cultural experience. Food is also a part of culture, implying that the convergence of these two practices must warrant some research. Serving local food at visitor attractions satisfies the tourist's quest for authenticity and allows the tourist to experience a 'sense of place'. Food is experiential, and can be representative of stories, traditions, and symbols. The provision of local food allows providers to connect with local food tourism networks. This collaboration empowers 'social capital' and strengthens the business of regional tourism (Fyall, Garrod and Leask (2001).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation of the research methods, techniques and procedures used throughout this investigation. Research can be defined as “a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic” (Kothari, 2004, p.1). The purpose of this research is to gather perceptions from tourism stakeholders, specifically, providers of food offerings at visitor attractions in Ireland. Firstly, the chapter begins by outlining the research gap and highlighting the research questions. Secondly, the philosophy of the research approach will be explained, and the methods used to investigate the research problem will be justified.

3.2 Research Gap

After conducting a systematic review of the literature, focusing on cultural tourism, food tourism and visitor attractions, an existing gap was identified. The literature highlights the interest in food tourism within the tourism literature (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014, 2016; Mulcahy, 2015) and the importance of food in the tourism experience (Kivella and Crofts, 2009; Tsai, 2016). Yet there are no studies directly related to food offerings at tourist sites. Much of the research around visitor attractions relates to attraction marketing and management (Swarbrooke, 2001; 2002). The benefits of a quality food offering and its linkages to experience enhancement remain unexplored.

3.2.1 Research Aims

The purpose of this research is to investigate food offerings at selected visitor attractions in Ireland. Food offerings at visitor sites are considered secondary to the main experience, therefore their value in relation to experience enhancement and networking with food tourism businesses will be explored. In order to understand the motivations and aspirations of the researcher, it is important to remind the reader of the objectives of the research.

3.2.2 Research Objectives

- To examine the academic literature on food tourism, cultural tourism, visitor attractions and local food.
- To examine the grey literature with regards to food tourism policy in Ireland.
- To conduct qualitative primary research with 11 food providers at visitor sites in Ireland.
- To assess the benefits and challenges involved in providing local food at food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland.

3.2.3 Research Methodology and Philosophical Underpinning

“Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (Creswell, 2007, p.15). Considering this exploratory study, qualitative research using an interpretative paradigm was chosen to examine the words, actions and viewpoints of the people involved in running the food offerings at tourist attractions (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). The qualitative paradigm uses “what might be thought of as a widely angled focus” (Miller and Deutsch, 2009, p. 21), appropriate to examining the social and cultural nature of this subject matter. As this research is from the viewpoint of the stakeholders, a pragmatic approach was required, in the absence of previous academic studies directly related to food offerings at visitor attractions.

Qualitative methods were favoured above quantitative, as the discourse around food and culture exists in the world of human experience, and the use of questionnaires might ignore the complex themes that emerged from the literature review. The researcher hoped that open ended, in-depth discussions with the food providers would uncover the attitudes and sentiments of those involved in providing food at visitor attractions, with emphasis on the scope of local food. Providing a “description of how things are experienced first-hand by those involved” has its theoretical grounding in phenomenological epistemology and gives validity and credibility to people’s everyday thinking (Denscombe, 2014, p. 95).

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Fieldwork

Initial fieldwork was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020, with visits to four major high-volume visitor sites. Two of these sites were in County Clare, one in County Galway and the other was in County Meath. A smaller site in County Kilkenny was visited at the beginning of March 2020. The intention was to visit each selected site initially, and then to approach the food provider by email or telephone to request their participation in the study. This initial fieldwork—visits to the sites and analysis of menus, menu boards, signage, and food on offer—was intended to frame the interview questions that would follow. With the outbreak of Covid-19 in Ireland in mid-March 2020, no further visits to other sites could be carried out. In addition, one of the larger food providers, a catering company responsible for two of the visitor sites food offerings, declined to take part in the study.

3.3.2 Sampling

The selection of candidates for this research was guided by the findings of the literature review, and the aims and objectives of the thesis. As it would be impossible to include every visitor site in Ireland, a sample was required. Simply put, sampling is the process of obtaining information about an entire population by examining only a part of it (Kothari, 2004).

Purposive sampling was chosen as the best method, as this is a non-random way of ensuring that certain categories are represented in the final sample (Robinson, 2013). Based on the *a-priori* theoretical research, certain types of sites needed to be included to ensure a varied perspective on the outcomes (Mason, 2002). The sites chosen ranged from large to small with high and low visitor numbers (see table 1.1). In addition, individuals that may have contradictory views based on the type of food offering they provided, were chosen to further test the research questions, and to avoid a biased piece of research (Yin, 2016). According to Patton, in-depth information from a small number of people, can produce very valuable data, “especially if the cases are information rich”, (2015, p.311).

The initial target was to interview between eight to ten food providers from varying sizes of tourist attractions. As the project progressed, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, and the unwillingness of one of the larger operators to take part, snowballing sampling was employed to recruit some of the final participants. Three of the providers were approached through connections of one of the existing participants. The final number of eleven reflects the progression of the data that emerged from the initial interviews, which required a more varied cross section, in order to represent the variety of food offerings at these visitor attractions.

Type of Attraction	Location	Type of Food Offering
Historical and Geological Site	Kilkenny	Tea Rooms
Museums x 3	Dublin	Restaurants x 2 and self-service restaurant x1
Distillery	Wicklow	Café
Historical Site	Galway	Restaurant, self-service café and takeaway café
Heritage Experience	Wexford	Restaurant
Geological Site	Clare	Restaurant and farm shop
Historical Site	Wicklow	Restaurant
Historical Sites x 3	Westmeath	Restaurant
	Laois	Tea rooms
	Galway	Tea rooms
Beverage Attraction	Dublin	Restaurants x 3
Historical Site	Wexford	Tea Rooms
Historical Site	Kilkenny	Café

Figure 3: Location and Type of Food Offering

3.3.3 Interviews

According to Marshall and Rossman qualitative research is “interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (2016, p. 2), with its basis often found in the narrative, therefore contingent on storytelling (Silverman, 2013). Considering the research shows that local food can be a vehicle for story telling (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013), it was decided that semi-structured interviews would allow for the participants to recount their own story, in a naturalistic setting, allowing freedom to talk, with the opportunity of providing rich data (Marshall and Rossman, 2016).

Without the option to visit some of the sites, due to restrictions around Covid-19, in-depth interviews were required to probe more deeply into the dynamics of running a food offering at a tourist site. In-depth interviews are a suitable method to build exploratory theory especially when the information is expected to vary considerably and in complex ways (Veal, 2006). As every site is different and the nature of the tourist business is unpredictable, it was assumed that each provider would have their own unique story to tell.

Semi-structured interviews were thought to be the most appropriate way of structuring the discourse. A base set of questions were developed, to tie in with the literature review and to keep a focus point for the interview, with appropriate modifications for each participant (see appendix). As this is an understudied topic, the nature of the research is inductive (Adler and Clarke, 2011). The researcher started with observations about the subject and tried to develop tentative generalisations to connect back to the theories gathered through the literature review. The flexible nature of the questioning permitted the interviewer to give space to the respondents to add their own topics and issues that may have been unforeseen by the researcher. Miller and Deutsche (2009) advise that the inductive process of qualitative research often requires a researcher to return to the field to get answers to questions that arise throughout the process.

Only one interview was completed before the outbreak of Covid-19, this was carried out face to face in a hotel lobby close to the visitor attraction. The remaining ten interviewees then had to be contacted and arrangements made for alternative ways to carry out the interviews. According to Kothari “every effort should be made to create

friendly atmosphere of trust and confidence, so that respondents may feel at ease while talking to and discussing with the interviewer” (2004, p.99). With the general anxiety around the outbreak of Covid-19, especially within the tourism industry, it was of paramount importance to the researcher to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable participating in the study. Each participant was emailed, provided with a description of the study, and advised around their rights regarding anonymity and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) practice. Once confirmation was received to proceed, interviews were arranged at the convenience of the interviewee.

Without the option of meeting face to face, the researcher proposed to carry out interviews via Zoom video conferencing call or telephone call. Zoom was the preferred option for the researcher, as face to face connection was considered to be more conducive to building a ‘rapport’ with the participant. Oppenheim outlines the importance of building a ‘rapport’, describing it as an “elusive quality which keeps the respondent motivated and interested in answering the questions truthfully” (1992, p.89). However, some participants declined to be interviewed by video, so telephone call interviews were agreed upon. In the end, six participants were interviewed by Zoom conferencing call, four by telephone and one face-to-face. The interviews lasted from twenty-five minutes to one hour and were recorded; in the case of zoom, a recording facility exists within the programme; with the telephone interviews an application called ‘TapeACall’ was used. Each participant was notified prior to commencement of recording. Notes were taken during the interviews, which were appended to the typewritten transcripts for use during the data analysis stage.

All the interviews were preceded by an explanation, verbal and written, of the research. A brief outline of the topic, with a justification for the research was emailed prior to all interviews along with a consent form, which required signing and returning by email or post. The right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw at any time was outlined to each participant, along with the intended designated use of the interview material.

3.4 Ethics

“The basic ethical principle governing data collection is that no harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research” (Oppenheim, 1992, p.83). All participants received a participant information sheet, which outlined the direction of the study, including the fact that Fáilte Ireland had been critical of food offerings at some visitor sites in Ireland. The researcher reiterated this criticism through email or in telephone conversations, along with comment from various journalists and industry professionals in relation to food offerings at tourist sites in Ireland. Anonymity, of both identity and operation, was assured, and all names used within this study are pseudonyms. All participants were emailed a list of base questions prior to the interview. This was to permit full transparency, and whilst probing questions may have been introduced during the interviews, the rights of the respondent to refrain from answering was restated by the researcher prior to each interview.

Recordings of interviews were transferred to an external hard drive and the initial recordings were deleted from the mobile phone used, in the case of the telephone interviews. The consent form outlined the procedures required by the ethics committee of Technological University Dublin and confirmed that the research was being carried out within these parameters. Under GDPR, the researcher will retain a transcript of each interview in which all identifying information has been removed, for two years. All participants agreed with this.

3.5 Data Analysis

An emic perspective was adopted throughout the interview process and the data analysis. This was aided by the fact that the researcher works in the hospitality industry and had been in a similar working position to some of the participants. Emic research is accomplished by studying behaviour from inside the system and can provide deeper insights into the phenomena, and a reflexive hermeneutic cycle, which in this study, continued into the analysis and findings stage (Robinson, Solnet and Breakey, 2014). Hermeneutics are a foundational principle of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962) and provide a methodological framework for the researcher and participants to arrive at a mutual understanding (Robinson et al., 2014).

The interviews were transcribed and subjected to qualitative inductive thematic analysis. This method was chosen as it allows for themes across a set of data to be recognised and observed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first step entailed close reading to implement coding. A code in qualitative inquiry “is most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing and/ or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data”. Coding helps to create more manageable units to facilitate analysis (Saldana, 2013, p. 120). Each transcript was coded using handwritten notes at first; codes were then collated based on themes and their properties and dimensions. A second and third round of coding helped to condense and group the subject matter. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise the use of a thematic map to aid in this process, advice which the researcher adopted to provide a clear picture of the themes and patterns across the set of data. Once the themes were defined, and connected back to the literature review, the process of analysis could start.

3.6 Limitations of Research Methods

Merriam (2002) states that surveys, questionnaires, randomised control tests and rigorous peer-evaluation scales all contribute to quantifying and proving facts for quantitative research. However, it is different for qualitative researchers, as it is their stories and words that probe theories. This can be seen as a shortcoming, in the sense that the research instrument is human; the researcher must be able to look beyond their own biases. This also relates to the sample, participants must be selected on the basis that they too will exercise impartiality for the benefit of the research (Merriam, 2002).

Whilst wishing to assume an emic position within the study, there is a possibility that the participants may provide answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear. A certain amount of trust must be placed in the truth of the participants responses (Denscombe, 2010).

A further potential limitation is how frank the participants wish to be, although guaranteed anonymity, there may be an element of fear, a reluctance to tell the full

story. Especially as most operators were working within a franchise situation, with complicated tendering regulations, and some strict operational guidelines.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological design of this exploratory study. An analysis of the extant literature has provided *a-priori* codes, which the theoretical framework for the thesis is based on. Qualitative interviews with eleven food operators provided the primary data which was then coded and analysed using thematic analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

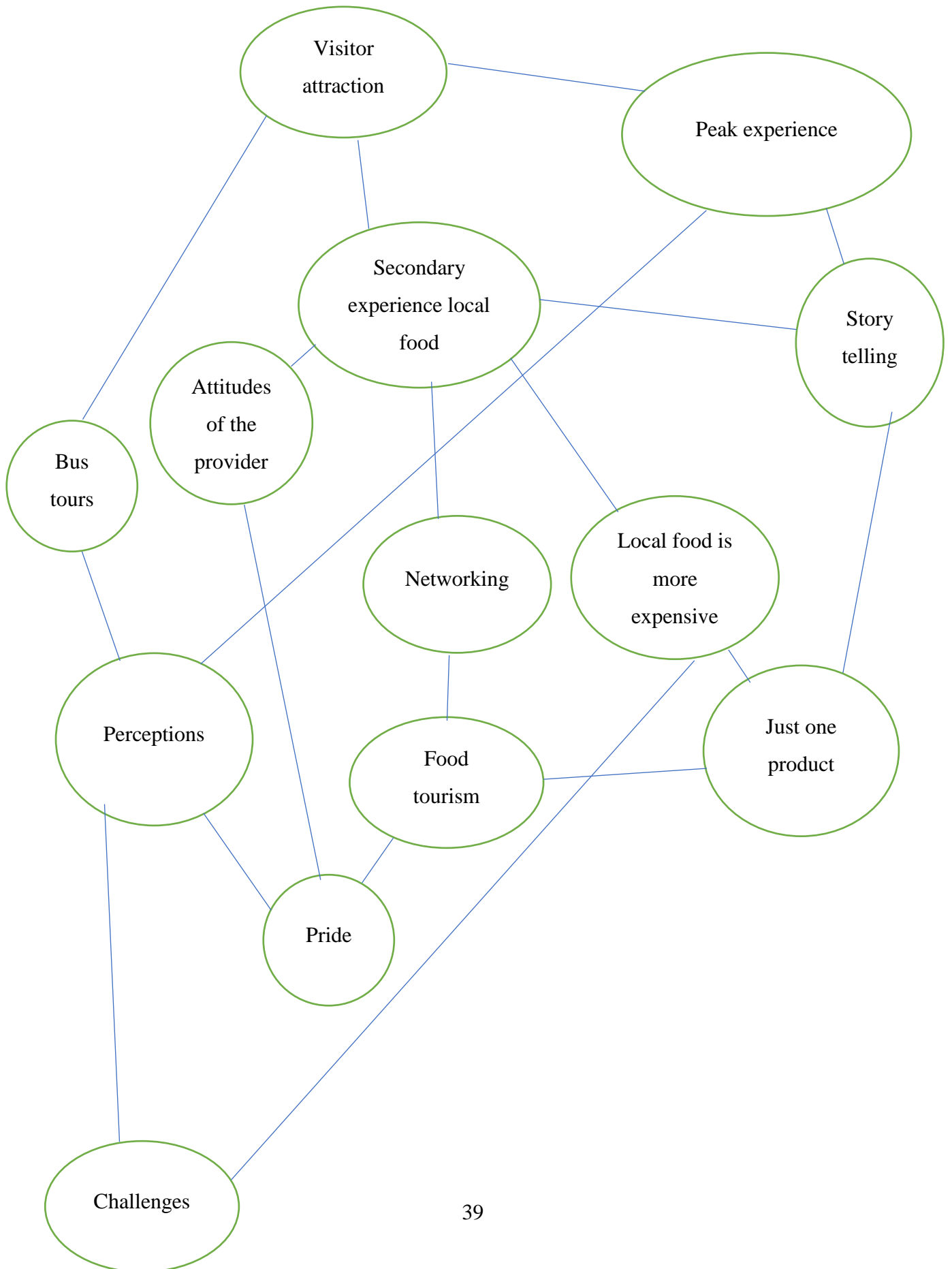
The following chapter outlines the findings from eleven semi-structured interviews carried out with stakeholders from various food outlets, all situated at visitor attractions. The range of attractions varied from small to large and from low to high volume. Some of the participants were responsible for single units, others ran more than one, but they were all directly connected to visitor attractions in Ireland. Figure 3. shows the breakdown of participants, with the number of units they were responsible for along with the geographic location of the sites.

Four of the participants were running tea rooms, three were responsible for cafés, or self-service style cafés and seven respondents described their offerings as restaurants. Within this breakdown, two of the participants had multiple sites and three of the sites had multiple offerings. It was decided that this was a comprehensive sample of the range of management structures responsible for the food offerings at visitor attractions in Ireland.

4.1.2 Thematic Analysis and Coding

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data from the interviews. It was chosen, as it is suited to the analysis of phenomenological research; it is flexible, whilst still allowing the researcher to remain proximate to the participants (Braun and Clark, 2006). Examples of how the interviews were coded and themes arrived at are also presented in this chapter. The process of thematic analysis requires that transcripts are first coded, then reviewed, and related back to the research themes and questions. In order to define the themes, the codes were filtered down or combined with other codes to arrive at the subjects that are relevant to the area of research. The following graph, figure 4., outlines the initial thought process and the route to defining the themes.

Figure 4: Initial Recurring Subjects



4.1.3 Themes for Discussion under Thematic Analysis

Recurring topics were mapped and the emergent themes through which the findings are presented and defined were established. The following overarching themes were selected to represent the findings, with sub-themes relating to the data most relevant to the research questions.

1. Connections
2. Continuity
3. Challenges

Figure 5: Main Themes from Coding

Theme	Sub Themes
Connections	Storytelling through food Food tourism and collaboration Provider's pride of local food
Continuity	Visitor experience Food helps the flow of the site Memories and souvenirs
Challenges	Local produce is more expensive Dealing with artisans High volume and tour buses

4.1.4 Participant Profile

Male interviewees constituted 36% of the sample while female interviewees accounted for 64%. All of the participants have a long history of working within hospitality and tourism. Six of the participants are franchisees, with two of them having food offerings across multiple visitor attraction sites. Two are restaurant managers employed by the sites, both are very involved with the management of their respective sites, coordination of tours and marketing and social media. One of the participants is an executive chef working for a franchised catering company at a high-volume visitor site, overseeing three restaurants and corporate entertainment facilities. The remaining two participants work as site managers, one of them part owns the site, both run their own food offerings; they do not have franchises. The participants were all articulate, and willing to share their experiences in the hope of highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with providing local food at visitor attractions.

Figure 6: Visitor Breakdown by Percentage

Attraction	Percentage of visitors to the attraction using the catering facilities	Overseas tourist/ Domestic tourist Percentage	Name of interviewee and role (names have been changed for anonymity)
Historical and Geological Site	70	80/20	Mary: independent franchisee
Museums x 3	30-50	32.5/60.5 *	Jane: director of catering company (franchisee)
Distillery	80	50/50	Amy: café and tour manager
Historical Site	70	65/35	Claire: restaurant manager
Heritage Experience		30/70	Ann: site manager
Geological Site	30-35	52/48	Una: site proprietor
Historical Site	60	50/50	Mark: head chef, independent franchisee
Historical Sites x 3	35	n/a	Lisa: director of catering company (franchisee)
Beverage Attraction	30	n/a	Peter: executive chef
Historical Site	25	20/80	Tom: independent franchisee
Historical Site	40	n/a	Ruth: independent franchisee

*Fitzgerald (2016). These figures represent the breakdown of overseas/domestic visitors to all Irish museums from the Irish Museums Association. Individual figures were not available.

4.2 Connections

A dominant theme of connectivity emerged almost immediately, with all the participants agreeing that the greatest value of a local food offering was the opportunity it gave them to connect in a more meaningful way with their visitors. Connections through networking with local food tourism groups, producers, and farmers was also mentioned as a benefit to providing local food. This was underpinned by pride in their food offering and, in their region's local food.

4.2.1 Storytelling

The results show that all the providers associate local food with the opportunity to tell a story, enhancing the connections with the visitor. This was the most dominant theme emerging from the interviews. Ann explained that:

Local produce allows us to connect with the customer—the beef is from ‘that butcher’, he is on the Main St. in Wexford, they are butchers for the last 120 years, and that is the story, and it’s not just that, you are actually trying to say, well we are proud of what we are serving.

Lisa highlighted the benefit of having a genuine food story to tell. She admitted she was proud to use local produce, especially when people asked where it was from, and she did not have to name a large generic supplier, “and root around for the box to find the origins”. She felt this knowledge and confidence also reassured the customers, knowing that the food was local, and knowing its provenance.

Claire explained how the food story adds extra layers to the experience, that local food gives opportunities for greater interaction and communication with visitors, “it’s a nice story to add to your menu, the Americans love it. It feeds into the whole story and it feeds into the goodwill and how you keep the customer”. She went on to explain how a simple gesture of writing down their “world famous homemade scone recipe” for tourists on a postcard can make such an impact, creating lasting memories for tourists to take away with them. Tom related the food story to the senses, “we make our own jam, and people will smell it when they walk in, and that’s an immediate conversation

starter, they love to hear the story”, he added “that is the story and memory they will take away”.

The story of local food adds value to the experience according to Amy:

The company has seen the value of adding the food story to [the experience], at the end of the day a plate of food is a plate of food, but if there’s something else to it, a story, it just adds value in so many ways.

Una has two food offerings on her site, and she admitted that in her main restaurant she struggles to maintain a high level of local produce due to the high volume of visitors and their needs. At peak times, it is just a practical matter of feeding them, “they are fuelling up”, however when they visit the farm shop where they make their own cheese, it is a different experience:

We bring them on the cheese tour, and they can watch David through the window, making the cheese, filling the moulds, they are literally eating out of our hands. Having the cheese hugely enhances the experience.

She explained that they started making the cheese in 1985 “to encourage visitors to stay a bit longer, it’s all about dwell time”. Local food is perceived to be ethical and sustainable—the cheesemaking at Una’s site, whilst not the main attraction, “contributes to the continuity of what [they] do, and that’s all about sustainability and [their] ethos”. She added that:

People are more aware of what they are eating. The farm shop has started to overtake the turnover in our retail shop for the first time in 25 years, in the last few years.

Six of the participants commented on the fact that local food can be a reason to revisit and was an attraction for locals as well as tourists. Tom explained:

We make our own wild garlic pesto, this helps tell a story about local ingredients, not just to tourists but for locals too, people appreciate the story that goes with food and if you go the extra step of going out and picking the wild garlic, people will come back because of food.

Three of the participants agreed that well trained staff are an important part of the story telling experience. Peter explained the importance of matching the food to the beer at the brewery attraction he was executive chef at: “food is paired with the beer. In order to tell the story of the beer correctly through the food, we need more than waiters— we have beer ambassadors, because this is an extension of the visitor experience”. Mark was of the same opinion, he explained how it was “important to train staff to know the history of the site and the food story, it’s very important that it all links up”. Mary talked about the importance of training staff, and the need for the food to connect the whole experience— “the food offering should 100% connect to the site, because otherwise you might as well be going to Mc Donald’s, if you are going to a heritage site, there needs to be a connection.” On her menu, she had used Viking terms to name some of the sandwiches, “to connect” and as a “conversation starter”. Mark had also named some of his dishes after the main attraction experience.

4.2.2 Food Tourism and Collaboration

All of the rural participants were benefiting from connections made through their local food offering, to food tourism networks. Most agreed that it was beneficial to use local providers for some of their produce, however, it was the general consensus that it was too expensive to have a menu of all locally sourced products. This is discussed in the next section.

Mary’s opinion was that “using local food helps raise awareness for producers and local farmers, it’s collaboration, it’s local support ... I am involved in Savour Kilkenny, great sense of collaboration”, she felt that the benefits were exposure and business support. Una and Ann both spoke about involvement in local food tourism networks. Una’s involvement with the Burren Food Trail has helped them develop their farm shop offering. She explained that “food has become so important, I never thought I would be having this conversation, four or five years ago, the light is really shining down on the food offering now, your thesis is very topical and timely”. She explained that they would be increasing the focus on developing the cheese that they make on site, as a visitor experience, she felt that this was the future, and helped with collaboration which ultimately attracted more tourists— “The collaboration with the Burren Food Trail and the Ecotourism network helps us to keep people in the county”.

She gave the following example as a direct correlation between the local food product, the cheese, and reciprocity for the attraction:

We get visitors who say “we had your cheese at ‘Seaview Guesthouse’ this morning, it was delicious and they told us to come here, that we could see how it is made”, so there you go, there’s the collaboration within the destination.

Amy also spoke of their connection with a food tourism network and felt the benefits were recognition and ultimately more visitors:

We have got involved with an initiative called Wicklow Naturally, interconnectivity that everybody will be promoting everybody else. You have to commit to providing a certain percentage of your menu as one of the other members in the group.

Tom also felt that he benefited from local collaboration, he explained that “it takes a group of people to create a food culture, and everyone benefits”. When asked what the benefits were, he said:

If you go somewhere on a holiday and you get good food in almost every place you go, you will come back, or you will recommend others to go there. The whole is better than the sum of the parts.

The operators at the urban sites had different views on the value of food tourism collaboration, although Jane had been involved with the Fáilte Ireland Taste of Place initiative as an instructor, not as a participant. When asked about connections to food tourism networks she answered:

Yes, this collaboration works very well in the countryside, we have nice relationships with our suppliers in Museum 1, and are involved in some small associations, it’s nice to be able to support.

Peter, executive chef of a high-volume distillery attraction, who have one dish in particular that is synonymous with the experience, explained that the food was intrinsically linked to the main experience, “it helps us a lot you know. It is something

that people are really looking forward to when they come here”. They read about it in the guidebooks. However, connections to food tourism networks were not important to him as the numbers attending the site were always so high, and it is an urban location. Una had also alluded to the fact that collaboration and networking within food tourism was much more effective in rural settings.

4.2.3 Fáilte Ireland Training

Six of the participants had taken part in Fáilte Ireland’s Taste of Place initiative, and three had been involved with Taste the Island campaign. All of them admitted that they found Fáilte Ireland initiatives and training courses greatly beneficial. Three of the participants took part in the initial Taste of Place programme, which was launched in 2017, with the intention of encouraging providers of food at tourist attractions in Ireland to use more local produce. This was primarily aimed at supporting high density visitor attractions. The other participants were involved in the second round of ‘Taste the Place’ launched in 2019. Although four of the participants admitted that they were already doing a lot of what the programme recommended, Mark claimed “it really pushed me that bit further”. Lisa said, “the Taste of Place has helped me to link in with other businesses ... and makes me look for more [local] produce”. All of them agreed that the courses encouraged them to seek out other local producers. The training also equipped them with ways of informing tourists that they were using local produce, by way of connecting the food to the attraction, and displaying maps of where the produce was coming from. Lisa also felt that it was “good for locals to see their produce being sold ... you don’t know what business you can get form all this”.

4.2.4 Pride

All of the participants were asked whether or not they used local produce at their food offerings. Although food at visitor attractions is considered a secondary experience, they all acknowledged the importance of a good food offering for their customers as well as for the destination. All the providers expressed a wish to use more local produce in the offerings and some of the challenges mentioned will be outlined further on. Varying levels of local produce were used and when questioned on their reasons for using local food, responses varied from personal ethics to collaborative

arrangements with local producers. In general, the sentiment was underpinned by personal pride in local food, or in many cases the food reputation of the region. Mary explained, “All our ingredients have to be fresh, all local produce. This has always been my ethos, I’m passionate about simple food”. Lisa also explained her preference for using local produce in her café was based on a personal choice:

Local food is important to me, I have three children ... we are very focussed on the environment. I always bought food for my own home that would be natural or organic or local. It was just a natural progression for me when I went into business.

This pride extended to regional pride, with most rural providers claiming that they have great local produce and relishing the opportunity to show this off to tourists, Ruth explained that it was beneficial to her business to use local produce:

I would use a lot of Goatsbridge Trout and Highbank Orchard vinegars. They are literally down the road from me, and I use ‘Mean Bean’ coffee from Waterford, I would be very much promoting them, they are great producers.

One of the larger attractions interviewed, felt this pride in food was based on a national pride, Peter explained:

I feel like we’re representing the country whenever anyone walks through the door, so you know that’s why I have to be proud in what I’m serving...the food is an extension of the brand.

When asked whether tourists seek out or request local food, only four of the providers could say that they are regularly asked whether food is local. Tom felt that “cultural tourists are interested in where the food comes from, some will ask, where is that cheese from?” Una agreed that some tourists would be interested in food, but when they are travelling with kids, it is more of a pit-stop and that “local food is not high up on their priority”. Ruth highlighted demographic as a marker of interest in local food, she felt that visitors under 40 were “very thrifty” but those over the age of 40 will “look for local food, they very much want to arrive in the area and stay”. Ten of the participants mentioned that tourists were more interested in home-baking, and

every respondent mentioned scones as a food item that was popular. The term ‘homemade’ was mentioned by ten of the participants, and they all equated homemade with local, as did the tourists. Eight of the interviewees stated that they only use Irish chicken, but Ruth admitted that, “only twice in four years [she] had been asked, is this Irish chicken?”

Figure 7: Summary of the foods mentioned during the interviews with the participants.

Interviewee	Lisa	Claire	Peter	Mary	Jane	Amy	Mark	Tom	Una	Ann	Ruth	Totals
Product												
Air Dried Lamb						√						1
Apple Pie/ Tart		√									√	2
Avocado	√											1
Baby Bowl									√			1
Bagels	√											1
Black Pudding							√					1
Brie					√			√				2
Brown Bread	√	√		√	√	√						5
Burren Gold Cheese									√			1
Butter					√							1
Cakes					√				√		√	3
Charcuterie					√	√						2
Cheeses	√				√	√		√				4
Ciabattas										√		1
Irish Chicken	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
Chicken Pie											√	1
Chocolate					√							1
Chowder							√					1
Chutney				√								1
Coffee		√	√									2
Coffee & Walnut Cake											√	1
Cottage Pie		√										1
Crab Salad							√					1
Crackers						√						1
Dubliner Cheddar					√							1

Interviewee	Lisa	Claire	Peter	Mary	Jane	Amy	Mark	Tom	Una	Ann	Ruth	Totals
Eggs	√											1
Flour					√							1
Fish Fingers										√		1
Full Irish Breakfast	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
Home Baking	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
Product												
Home Cooked Ham				√								1
Homemade Burger	√											1
Honey						√						1
Ice Cream	√											1
Irish Stew		√								√		2
Jam	√				√			√				3
Kids Food										√		1
Lettuce							√					1
Local Apple juice	√											1
Meat & 2 Veg										√		1
Nuggets									√			1
Oat Bread						√						1
Paninis	√				√			√	√	√	√	6
Parmesan					√							1
Pastas									√	√		2
Pastries			√									1
Pie			√				√					2
Quesadilla											√	1
Quiche	√	√										2
Salads	√				√					√		3
Sandwiches		√	√						√	√		4
Scones	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	10
Seafood	√						√		√			3
Smoked Fish	√				√				√			3
Soup		√		√								2
Sourdough Bread				√								1
Stew			√									1
Tea –Brack		√									√	2
Toasties										√		1
Wild Garlic Pesto								√				1

Ten out of the eleven participants mentioned home baked goods, in particular homemade scones, and they all commented that tourists associated homemade with local food. Traditional full Irish breakfast was the next most popular item mentioned,

Ann was using her breakfast offering to namecheck the producers, who were all local. Ten of the participants also used only Irish chicken, “even though it was more expensive” (Ruth).

Paninis were mentioned six times—Una referred to “the dreaded panini ... sure we can’t take that off the menu”, explaining that that was what people wanted. Jane also referred to the panini, “do I think we should be serving paninis? No, but if I served everything on brown bread sandwiches ...”

4.3 Continuity

The theme of continuity emerged when the participants were discussing the benefits of local food offerings within experience enhancement. Food was perceived as a focus in a visitor’s itinerary, providing continuity to a trip. Within an attraction, the food offering was described by some of the participants as an important link in the continuity of the site. Whilst some participants described how local food experiences could provide memories for the visitor, both cognitive and physical, by way of food souvenirs.

4.3.1 Visitor Experience

From a practical point of view, food is a basic human need and from the site aspect, it can ensure continuity within the convergence of tourist activities. Some of the sites offer multiple attractions and the food aspect can act as an intermediary activity, providing structure to the whole experience. According to Claire, “food and the tourist experience go hand in hand. They have travelled to come to us, food is part of it, they are hitting us for a lunch ... it gives everyone a break ... a focus”. A good food offering can keep people at the site, increasing the dwell time—Jane explained, “a good food experience enhances a visit, just not having to go off and find a neighbouring restaurant, having something on site that can tick that box”. Nuala explained how food can help in destinations where there is more than one attraction, “visitors come to visit one or both of our attractions, during this time we hope that they eat so that every department is being visited and that revenue is being generated across the site”.

Mary described how tourists arrive, weary from travel. They may have had a poor experience along the way, they are seeking out some comfort, “I have people coming in ‘hangry’, so I give them an extra dose of kindness, we have all been there and they may have been fleeced somewhere else, they are asking, where is the Ireland of the welcomes?”

4.3.2 Food and the Flow of the Site

Una discussed the importance of having continuity within the attraction and how her food offerings help to provide this:

I would never consider having a franchise, people chat about the cave, while they are making the coffee for the people the chat is consistent throughout the whole site, and that connection has to be made, whether they are having a cup of tea in the tea room, a sandwich in the farm shop, or whether they are at the main attraction.

Similarly, Ann was against franchising her food offering for reasons of quality and continuity:

When people step into your park or site they expect the same quality that you are giving within your experience, all your values, standards, in your restaurant, so I have been totally against franchising our restaurant out.

Jane, whilst operating as a franchisee, agreed with this, “ideally you all want to be pulling in the same direction to make sure that the visitor experience is really good”. When asked about the importance of connecting the food offering to the site (a museum) for cultural reasons, she replied, “yes, there have been times when we have been able to join the dots, with different exhibitions, we’d try and tie in maybe the food to the exhibition, just so you’re telling a story, it’s beneficial to make that connection”.

Mark also spoke about the importance of linking in with the site, he has the franchise at the attraction, but stressed the importance of visitors feeling like it is all one. He uses the historical themes of the main attraction in the naming of some of his local

dishes and has insisted that all his staff are trained on the history of the visitor attraction along with the food story.

4.3.3 Continuity of Experience

Mary, Tom, Claire and Una all related local food to memory creation for the visitor, enhancing the experience by way of story, tasting the place and authenticity. Claire described how the signs in the restaurant state that they use local flour and that the apples for the apple tart come from their own orchard—and that this adds to the memories that the tourist take away. According to Mary, “our memories are over food, while food is the invisible part of our experience, it really contributes so much ... the food must have a connection, then it will stick in the mind of the visitor”. Tom told how making his own wild garlic pesto and jam evoked the sense of memory that visitors take away with them.

Una had observed that visitors increasingly wanted to purchase food souvenirs and had noticed a remarkable increase in sales of their homemade cheese (over gift shop souvenirs). Claire also mentioned how the simple scone recipe that they were famous for, allowed them to create connections with visitors as they ask for the recipe to take away with them. She explained, “we write the recipes on postcards, it’s authentic, they love getting the scribble or they might email afterwards looking for the recipe. We just give it to them”.

4.4 Challenges

All of the participants stated that they would like to use more local produce, but due to margins, or lack of support or vision from site owners, it was not always possible. The smaller franchisees were all struggling with seasonality and staffing issues, so in order to make their businesses work, it was not always possible to use local produce.

4.4.1 Local Produce is more Expensive

All of the participants admitted that local produce was more expensive to use, but Lisa, Amy and Mary all agreed that “you get what you pay for” and that Irish produce was far superior. Amy pointed out that it was not mass produced, so therefore was going

to cost more, she explained— “it’s more expensive, but it lets us tell a story, where it’s come from, and the ethos behind it, it adds value in itself”. Most of the participants said they tried to use as much local produce as possible, with Jane saying, “wherever appropriate we will use an Irish product” —referring to price and availability.

All of the participants referred to tourist feedback, claiming that Ireland as a whole was expensive for food, and that they were all trying to balance local food offering with value for money. With this in mind, many of the interviewees mentioned just one dish or product which they would use as part of their food story, allowing deeper connections with the tourists. Mark was using a local black pudding and claimed to be the first restaurateur in his town to use this product, which has now become synonymous with the area. He described it as an important part of his menu, and his food story— “I love to tell them how most of the people from Wicklow town if emigrating or visiting family abroad, will be bringing Dunn’s Pudding with them”. Ann mentioned an ‘Irish Stew’, that was their signature dish, Una was making her cheese. Amy was providing all local sharing platters and she said that listing the products and their provenance “really resonates with the tourists, as sometimes they will have relations or ancestors from these places”.

One of Jane’s sites is offering mostly local or Irish produce, “it lets the artisans speak for themselves”, but at one of her other sites, with higher volume, has a self-service restaurant and when asked about the offering of local food at it she replied:

Yes, there needs to be a good reflection of Irish food. At the same time, the really disappointing thing is, the things that sell are teas, coffees, scones, soups and toasted sandwiches ... but we also try and appeal to as many as we can because that’s our remit.

4.4.2 Dealing with Artisan Producers

Issues with dealing with artisan producers were also highlighted—Jane commented on working with artisan producers in high volume attractions; the service was not as efficient from them, “they have difficulties scaling up”. Mary had also experienced issues with some of the local suppliers and although she was using nearly all local produce and had hosted ‘Meet the Maker’ events, she commented on the inefficiency

of some of the producers, “their customer service does not match my customer service”. Amy also commented on the difficulties of trying to source local produce for their menu:

It’s been a lot of work to find the products, especially with artisan producers, they are putting so much time and effort into actually producing it, the supply chain might not be great, or it might not be very visible or they’re not great on social media.

Tom highlighted the fact that sourcing local food could be difficult— “you have to source it yourself, there is an extra step, and the prices can be a little higher”.

4.4.3 High Volume and Bus Tours

Larger high-volume site operators admitted that there were challenges with the attractions to meet commercial needs. Claire explained that, “there is so much pressure now on museums, and attractions, to make money and a lot of them don’t charge in. That pressure is often put on the operator as they see that as a revenue stream”. In one of her other sites, she has a menu consisting of nearly all local produce, “that is our USP there”, and the reason is that the attraction management did not have control over what food they were offering. She admitted that she was very proud of that restaurant and explained that “you have to support from the museum” to be able to offer a good food experience.

Some of the participants found dealing with bus tours a challenge, for several reasons, the most predominant issue was price. They felt that the budget tours were difficult to cater for; in particular, it was difficult to showcase local food, due to the low profit margin. Lisa explained that “they want it cheap, cheap and cheerful” and she felt they were always in a rush. Claire agreed with this— “our car people have much more time to stop and talk, think, ask questions, coaches are on a time schedule”, she explained that the budget tours were mainly backpackers on a whistle-stop tour of all the sights and she asked, “if you’re willing to get on a bus at 6am to do a tour of Connemara, the Burren and the Cliffs of Moher in a day, is that your real sense of Ireland? Where’s your appreciation of the food”. Jane agreed and said that this was the reason why they had to have a self-service canteen style offering at the high-volume museum, “people

just need to get in around the gallery and get fed”. Ann admitted that she was reluctant to take bus tours and felt the pressure to offer low cost food was preventing her from offering local produce.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main findings of the interviews. The insights from the participants about the provision of local food at visitor attractions has been presented under the three overarching themes of connectivity, continuity, and challenges. The next chapter will discuss these themes in relation to the main research questions and the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The findings from eleven semi-structured interviews revealed how different operators conceptualised the importance of local food for tourism and for their businesses. The following discussion will address these findings and examine them in relation to the research aims and objectives and the secondary research—the literature review. The overall conclusions will be deduced along with the limitations of the study. Finally, the key recommendations drawn from the research conclusions will also be presented.

5.1 Aims of the Study

This aim of the study was to investigate food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland in order to assess the benefits and challenges for the provider associated with the provision of a local food experience.

The main research question is:

What are the benefits and challenges associated with the provision of a local food experience at visitor sites in Ireland?

5.2 Context of Literature Review

A review of the existing literature around the topic was carried out to contextualise the research question. From the researcher's perspective the convergence of two cultural practices, eating and tourism merited some research. However, owing to the paucity of academic studies in this area, the research net had to be cast wide to cover cultural tourism, food tourism and visitor attractions, whilst considering Ireland as a food destination. The review of the literature highlighted certain theories and findings which will be discussed in this chapter in the context of the primary research.

5.3 The Interviews

11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in providing food at visitor sites in Ireland. The aims of the interviews were to probe the providers for insights into the provision of food at visitor attractions. With Fáilte Ireland calling on some visitor attractions to localise their food offerings, the study looked to investigate the value of local food to these offerings and to establish the importance, if any, of providing a local food experience at tourist sites in Ireland. A list of the questions used to guide the interviews is available in the appendix 1.

5.4. Attitudes of the Providers

It may have been because of the sampling method, or the lack of participation in this study from some of the larger high-volume catering operators, that there was an overall enthusiasm and commitment to local food provision among the participants. This was unexpected, as the justification for the research came about through some negative comments made by certain industry professionals and a recent conscious policy decision by Fáilte Ireland to improve food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland. These positive results show that some operators are aware of the benefits of a local food offering and are invested in food tourism.

There was a feeling among most of the participants that they were part of an industry that was at times overlooked by tourism policy makers and that their importance in the sector was under appreciated. Most agreed that improvements were needed across the industry. The participants all recognised that tourists were looking for more than just a “pit stop” at visitor attractions, food was a huge part of the experience, and visitors enjoyed getting involved with the story of food. The findings showed that local food allowed them to create these encounters with visitors and thereby satisfy the experiential requirement of the modern tourist (Pine and Gilmore, 1988). No longer satisfied with just ‘gazing’ (Urry, 1990), tourists want to create their own itinerary, especially within sites with more than one attraction. Some of the participants commented that at larger sites the expectation is there to have at least one food offering, if not more. Visitors can go between the attractions as they wish, taking breaks for food or refreshment, creating their own itinerary, taking experiential

tourism to another level of co-creation, within the tourist experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

5.5 Storytelling and Connections

The study showed that local food provides operators with an opportunity to tell a story and this allows for meaningful connections with the visitors— “Local products have a story—and a meaning—behind them that can be related to place and culture” (Sims, 2009, p. 333). All the participants in this study claimed that to them, this was the greatest value associated with the provision of local food for tourists. They connected the story with pride, pride in their region, in their food offering and, in the produce, which created the story. Storytelling builds a strong sense of connection that can “bridge cultural and demographic divisions” (Smith, 2015, p.224), and they all agreed that local food stories enriched communication with tourists.

Individuality came across as an important component within this storytelling, with the providers adding personal touches to the stories to create differentiation. They use food stories to define their own regions. An example of this is how providers promote their own local cheeses by alluding to local flavour and provenance. In the case of the distillery in Wicklow, sourcing as locally as possible is important, to compliment the main attraction—the whiskey. Amy compared their whole visitor experience to that of visiting a vineyard. They are trying to link taste with place, enhancing the whole experience through the concept of “terroir” (Parasecoli, 2008, p.134; Trubeck, 2009). Associating a specific place with distinctive flavours, practises and geographies can create connections that can define a region (Trubek, 2008).

Offering tourists local food at visitor attractions also reinforces the sense of place as tourists can relate more to the surrounding area; the “visitor is *in* a place not just *at* a place” (Smith, 2015, p.224). The significance of this lies in the nature of touring where local food can be used as marker to define a region. The study revealed how providers use local food to retain visitors in an area, often recommending other eateries based on a food experience at their café or restaurant. They may also recommend a trip to the cheesemaker or to the farm shop of a producer. Una explained how their county

was traditionally a “drive through county” but the development of a good local food network was attracting tourists for a longer stay.

This study shows a direct link can be made between local food and storytelling. It also shows how local food can be linked to placemaking and can contribute to a taste of place while enhancing visitor experience. Placemaking has proven to be valuable in destination marketing (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Long, 2004; Richards, 2002) while also increasing the likelihood of a return visit (Mottiar and Ryan, 2019).

The study also revealed how providers are using local food to connect with local food tourism networks. Synergistic relationships with food tourism stakeholders and business networks are proving beneficial to many (8) of the participants, who are all actively collaborating and involved in the promotion of local food. The study shows that those reaping the most benefits from collaboration were situated in rural areas with established food cultures. Being involved with local food businesses helps heighten social relationships—increasing social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and adding to the goodwill and mutual respect within a network (Mulcahy, 2015). The main benefit for the participants, besides exposure and recommendations from other stakeholders, is the support from locals during the off-peak seasons, sustaining businesses and rural livelihoods. Local food can help connections with visitors, while allowing connections with local food tourism networks.

5.6 The Role of Local Food in Site Continuity

All of the participants agreed that a good food offering is essential to the success of the overall visitor experience. Throughout the literature review local food was shown to provide deep and meaningful connections for tourists (Scarpato, 2002; Bessiere and Tibere, 2013). All of the participants showed a positive attitude towards the usage of local food, and they all indicated a wish to increase this usage. They all associated a good food offering with local food and believed that it is important to promote the produce of their region.

The study shows that food offerings are important links in the continuity and flow of the sites; an intermediary activity providing structure to the overall experience. The importance of getting this right was reiterated by one of the participants when he said- “the whole is better than the sum of the parts” (Tom). Research by Quan and Wang (2004, p. 299) on food as an element of tourist experience states that, “once the supporting experience goes sour, the total tourist experience would be more or less spoiled, no matter how wonderful the peak experience is”. This implies that the overall quality of the tourist experience relies on the mutual support and reinforcement between these dimensions. An example of this would be a trip to visit the Cliffs of Moher, which represents the peak experience, and to have a disappointing lunch in the café, resulting in the overall experience being diminished.

The study revealed that in rural settings where the onsite café or restaurant might be the only place available to eat for visitors, it is vitally important that the offering is good. Increasing the dwell time for tourists offers potentials for further spending in retail or in other parts of the attraction. Consistency across the site was seen to be the primary objective for the site managers. This requires all the services to align to provide a meaningful visitor experience, with local food linking in with the main attraction. Through the convergence of these two cultural practices, tourism and eating, providers are finding ways of extending the concepts, values, and standards of their attractions. Therefore, it is a matter of course that the food should be local and integrated. An example of this is the linkage of dishes by name or concept to the main attraction theme, and the use of local produce to tell stories about the locality and the site to the visitors. This can in turn strengthen regional identity and image and add to the tourist’s perception of authenticity (Robinson and Clifford, 2007).

5.7 Tourists and Local Food

The literature review shows that local food for tourists has been a focus for governments, researchers, and the tourism industry since the 1990s (du Rand and Heath, 2006). In Ireland’s case, recent years have witnessed great progress in improving the breadth and quality of its food and drink offering. All of the participants were vocal about the profile of Irish food and the great improvements being made across the sector while showing an eagerness to be a part of this. Clearly food is not

the core offering at visitor attractions, research in the visitor attractions area generally centres on attraction management (Swarbrooke, 2001; 2002) while food at visitor attractions remains under researched.

The opinions of the participants were mixed when asked whether tourists seek out local food. Naturally, those with smaller operations who have more direct contact with visitors are more positive in their responses, with some of the operations providing over 60% of their menu as a local offering. The study also shows that some providers are attempting to change this by either providing local food on their menu or by associating themselves with artisanal activities (on-site cheesemaking in one case) or by collaboration with local food networks.

However, busier sites admitted that families and younger tourists are not that interested in local food, and often people are just refuelling before returning to the business of tourism. Results from the research shows how different activities attract or influence different eating characteristics, implying that the offering can determine what and when a tourist will eat. Hjalager (2003) explains why all tourists' foodways cannot be treated uniformly as they are based on the distinctions integrated into tourists own lifestyles and beliefs. A 'gastronome' (Mitchell and Hall, 2003) may visit an attraction with a limited food offering and decline to eat, deciding to wait until later to visit a restaurant serving local food. The same tourist may have chosen to lunch at the attraction if the offering had been better. This example can be used in relation to the 'tourist foodie' —a tourist with a limited interest in local food (Mitchell and Hall, 2003) who may have a new experience at an attraction offering authentic local food—they may be surprised, and this may lead them to seek out local food for the duration of their stay.

The fact that providers state that tourists at larger sites are not interested in local food corroborates the theory that food is considered a secondary experience at visitor attractions. It implies that tourists do not expect to receive a quality offering at a tourist site. This needs to change—just because they do not expect good food does not mean they would not appreciate it.

Research shows that although visitors do not actively seek out local food, they are happy to try it when they come across it (Enteleca, 2000). Food offerings at visitor attractions can help to guide and influence decisions made by tourists in relation to purchasing local food and are strategically placed (geographically) to influence further intentions in supporting local food networks.

5.8 High-Volume Visitor Sites

Participants were vocal in their criticism of the large contract-catering organisations responsible for food at some of the iconic high-volume sites in the country. Some commented that these operations were devaluing the industry, “especially when we are all working so hard to make something of it” (Tom). The lack of participation of these organisations in the study has been discussed in the scope of the research—and as a limitation. The sample includes a representation of high-volume sites, which provided valuable insights into the challenges around providing a local food experience when dealing with high-volume business. Three of the participants are listed in Fáilte Ireland’s most popular visitor attractions list 2018 (fig.1).

It clearly appears that without support from the proprietors or management of the site, food offerings at visitor sites are regarded as merely an extension to the revenue stream of the attraction, rather than an opportunity to enhance the visitors’ experience. Insights from one of the participants running several sites across high volume attractions confirmed this, remarking that in one of the sites that their vision for a local food offering is being supported by the proprietor. Interestingly, this offering had the highest conversion rate of all their sites, with 50% of the visitors to the attraction visiting the restaurant, compared with 20-30% in their other sites. She also claimed that the tourists are very supportive of their “artisanal” food offering and that they themselves were very proud of it.

The study showed that in the case of some high-volume sites, the unpredictable nature of tourism restricts what providers can offer, “you could have 10 buses pulling up at once” (Jane). However, another other high-volume site involved in the study had a conversion rate of 70% (70% of visitors to the attraction visited one of the food offerings.) The management of this site were fully invested in the provision of local

food and the story of food was fully integrated into the story of the attraction. They had a commitment to using as much local produce as they could and admitted that “food and the tourist experience go hand in hand” (Claire). They acknowledged that the provision of local food was more expensive—offering lower margins and higher labour costs, but they felt it was important “to show the true picture of what Ireland is like” (Claire). They were also proud of the fact that they were operating at high volume, while still managing to use local produce as much as they could.

These examples show that high volume sites can provide local food for visitors if the management structure are invested in it. It also shows the demand for local food at larger sites, whether tourists actively seek it or the interest exists because the food is available. This reinforces the research by Enetelca (2000), who notes that although visitors do not actively seek out local food, they are happy to try it when they come across it.

5.9 Bus Tours

Many of the participants revealed that they found it difficult to provide a local food offering when dealing with bus tours and tour operators. The literature review described how essential bus tourism operates within the tourism sector in Ireland and considering 47% of all visitors to the Cliffs of Moher arrive by bus, concerns exist around their needs and requests (Saunders Research and Communications, 2015). Some providers feel that it is not possible to offer local produce when dealing with the low budgets required by some of the tour operators. The time constraints around tours also poses problems, and the general consensus remains that the whole experience is diminished for the tourists. The operators feel they cannot not spend time with the visitors, nor offer the produce they would like to showcase, and they all agree that it is a missed opportunity.

Research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2018) shows that tourists’ perceptions of Irish food lag far below reality. All of the participants in this study had concerns around the nature of feeding bus tours of visitors on low budgets. They admitted it was difficult to showcase Irish produce while dealing with groups, when guides were negotiating such a low return for the provider. At this point the difficult questions of whether this

is the right impression to give tourists of Irish food and whether the right story is actually being told arise.

5.10 Purchasing of Local Produce

Two issues emerged with relation to the purchasing of Irish produce. Firstly, every participant acknowledged that it is more expensive to use local produce. Whilst they were all in agreement that they would prefer an Irish product every time, it is not always possible to attain the required margins for their business models. Secondly, they all mentioned difficulties dealing with small or artisanal producers. Artisan producers are usually producing their commodity themselves, leaving little time for administration or customer service. Many of the participants cited this as a negative and felt that customer service is often better from larger distributors. This is a challenge for food offerings who wish to provide local food.

5.11 Fáilte Ireland Training Courses

A total of nine participants have previously taken part in Fáilte Ireland initiatives aimed at food businesses; six had been involved with the Taste the Place initiative and three with Taste the Island. They all admitted that they found them very beneficial, and that the training helped them to seek out more local produce, link in with other businesses, and understand ways of promoting the produce they were using.

5.12 Limitations of the Study

This study was carried out on a small sample (n=11) of food providers at visitor attractions in Ireland. The sample was restricted by circumstances dictated by the outbreak of Covid-19. Necessary fieldwork to corroborate qualitative interviews was inhibited which meant the word of the interviewees was taken at face value. Further research could delve deeper into the nature of food offerings at visitor attractions and examine attitudes to local food at these sites from the point of view of the tourist.

Without the participation of the larger contract catering organisations, it is difficult to give a complete overview of food offerings at visitor sites in Ireland. Their insight

would be beneficial in attempting to establish the reluctance that much of the sector has towards providing local food offerings at these sites.

5.13 Recommendations

This study examined the experiences that 11 food providers at visitor attractions had in relation to providing local food. In order to gain a more complete view of the attitudes towards local food provision and the availability of local food at visitor attractions in Ireland, a larger research study is required. It is essential to include a greater representation of high-volume visitor sites, as these sites impact the most tourists. Their input would highlight the difficulties of dealing with high volume business, particularly bus tours. Insights into procurement issues and overheads associated with franchising in large sites would significantly add to the findings.

As it stands, providers of food at tourist sites do not recognise their roles as potential promoters of local food, and their power as agents within a national food tourism network is underestimated. The fact that tourist attractions are spread all over the country makes them ideally placed, geographically, to influence the promotion and usage of local food. In addition, the nature of tourism, and in particular visitor attraction tourism where all the emphasis is on experiential value, local food is well placed to enhance this concept. Connections need to be firmly established between food tourism and visitor attractions to ensure the quality of food is based on a local offering and thus telling the right story about Irish food.

The study showed how important Fáilte Ireland training programmes were for providers in educating them about the benefits of offering local food and in using local food for the benefit of their businesses. This knowledge can help counteract the challenges associated with local produce being more expensive than mass-produced imported and generic products. Some of the providers equated the quality of local food with its capacity to add value to the overall experience. This concept must become commonplace for food offerings if they are to use more local produce. The participants who benefited from these initiatives have acquired insights into how to assimilate local produce into their menu, while making it cost efficient. Training initiatives

coordinated by Fáilte Ireland are invaluable to these providers and should continue and be scaled up to include the larger visitor sites in the country.

These results also suggest that artisan producers in Ireland face difficulties with managing their businesses and with accessing supply chains. In order to ensure that cafés and restaurants across the country can avail of local produce, and localise their offerings, producers need support from local authorities, including prioritisation by the relevant government departments in relation to distribution and financing.

5.14 Summary of the Findings of this Study

- The provision of local food provides meaningful connections with tourists through storytelling and place making.
- The participants associated local food with continuity within a site, particularly within sites with multiple attractions.
- Providers found that it was important to support local producers, but faced challenges with supply chains, reliability, and food cost.
- Providers found it difficult to showcase local produce due to budgets, and to offer good service due to time constraints when dealing with high volume business, particularly with economically vital bus tours.
- Support from proprietors or site managers is seen to be pivotal in the successful provision of local food offering.
- Although some of the providers in this study appreciated their roles as potential promoters of local food, this is not the case across the whole sector.
- Fáilte Ireland training programmes are valuable in promoting an understanding of the usage of local produce and could help in managing the increased costs associated with providing local food.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The findings of this study show that food offerings at visitor sites are uniquely placed to influence and develop food tourism in Ireland. The benefits of a local food offering showed how deeper connections could be made with tourists and how collaboration within food tourism networks could be achieved.

The literature review showed that local food can satisfy tourist's desire for authenticity when travelling, and that gastronomic experiences play a part in determining perceptions and satisfaction with the overall experience of a destination. Often localities forget or are unaware of what they have around them. The multiplier effect of tourism is an additional source of business for food industries and farmers, who can directly benefit from the support of visitor attractions. It has been shown that visitor attractions attract large numbers of tourists to rural areas that would not normally attract visitors.

The results of the study translate beyond the immediate relationship between providers and the provision of local food. The importance of the overall tourist experience means that every opportunity to connect with a visitor is a chance to make an impression. If tourists leave with a positive food experience, they can develop lasting memories, and this can be a reason to return.

Although most of the participants in this study recognised their roles as regional promoters and stakeholders within a wider national organisation, it would appear that this is not consistent across the sector. Visitor sites are strategically placed around the country to have an impact on areas, defining regionality and providing a sense of place for visitors. It then stands to reason, that local food promotion should be directly linked with these sites. If providers show an interest in the provision of local food and a willingness to tell a story in order to make connections with their sites, this provides a unique opportunity to promote and grow the Irish food story.

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Appendix. 1: Questions for Participants

1. How would you describe your food?
2. Do you serve Irish/local food? Do you think it is necessary to serve Irish/local food?
3. Do tourists ask for Irish/local food?
4. Is it more expensive to use local produce?
5. Is it easy to source?
6. Would you like to use more?
7. What percentage of local food do you use?
8. Do you list your suppliers on your menu?
9. What is the most popular dish on your menu?
10. Do you get tour buses visiting? Do those visitors eat?
11. Do the customers that visit this site have any interest in food?
12. Do domestic tourists visit?
13. Do domestic tourists eat?
14. What are the difficulties you encounter running a food tourism business?
15. Have you ever been involved with Fáilte Ireland's 'Taste the Place' initiative?
16. Does the site owner (OPW or other) provide any guidelines or requirements with regards to food offering.?
17. Do you think that a good food experience enhances the whole visit?
18. Do you think it is important/necessary to make a connection between your food offering and the site? Do you tell a story?
19. Do visitors to your site ever seek advice on other places to eat nearby?
20. What benefits are there, if any, to the surrounding areas, business, farmers etc to using local produce?

Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form

Kate O Hora D18124113 Master's Thesis

Consent to take part in research.

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves an interview with the researcher.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the finished dissertation and any conference presentation, published papers etc.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected PC, which only the researcher will have access to.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Kate O Hora, researcher. kateohora@gmail.com

Diarmuid Cawley, supervisor diarmuid.cawley@tudublin.ie

Signature of research participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Date

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

An exploration into tourist site food offerings; does local food enhance the visitor experience?

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Please read through all the information before you decide to take part. If there is anything that is not clear or you need any more information, please get in touch with me at kateohora@gmail.com

My name is Kate O Hora, and I am a student at TU Dublin, studying an MA in Gastronomy and Food Studies. For my thesis I am researching food offerings at tourist sites in Ireland. Research carried out by Fáilte Ireland has shown that tourists' perceptions of Irish food lag far below reality. Tourists spend 30% of their overall budget on food and drink and sometimes their first impression of the local cuisine can be in the café or restaurant of a tourist attraction.

Fáilte Ireland's latest food tourism policy calls for the quality of food offerings at major tourist sites in Ireland to be improved, with a particular emphasis on story telling.

This thesis looks to examine food offerings at selected tourist sites, and to establish whether and how the food offering enhances the overall experience for the visitor.

Your participation will involve an interview of no longer than 45 minutes, based around a set of questions. The questions will cover everything from how you select certain dishes for your menu to what dishes sell the best with foreign tourist compared with domestic tourists. Although there will be a set of questions, they will be open ended to allow for discussion and reflection of your own views. The interview will be recorded with your permission.

With the current restrictions around Covid-19, it is proposed that this interview would be carried out via Zoom, Facetime or Skype.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have every right to refuse to take part in the process. You may also refuse to answer any of the questions or withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

Within the thesis itself the interview results will be anonymised, ensuring your confidentiality. Non-anonymised consent forms and recordings will be collected and retained as part of the research process but will not be available for public access. The final research product containing anonymised results may be used in teaching, conferences or publications.

If you require any further information, please contact my supervisor Diarmuid Cawley at diarmuid.cawley@tudublin.ie

Thank you,

Kate O Hora.

Note*

The transcripts of the eleven interviews have been omitted as part of a confidentiality agreement with the participants. These transcriptions can be made available on specific request to above email addresses.