

A Qualitative Exploration of Food Tourism as a Lever for Food Systems Transformation

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Abstract

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Objective: This research aims to explore stakeholder perspectives on (1) a growing interest amongst the public in food tourism and (2) the intersection of food tourism and food systems with the potential to drive transformation.

Methods: Using qualitative research methods, structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants in the US and Europe in 2023. Participants represented key stakeholder perspectives from government agencies, academia, and public and private sector organizations.

Results: Participants described the importance of media and social media in shifting consumer values to favor food tourism and experiential travel. Though most participants did not explicitly articulate the potential impacts of food tourism in terms of its ability to influence food systems, many participants described impacts that were related to food systems components, characteristics, and goals, such as the potential for food tourism to contribute to local economies, pride in place, and resilience.

Conclusions: It is of high importance that stakeholders from food systems and food tourism recognize their collective power in influencing systems dynamics that impact food system transformation. Moving forward from this research, food tourism and food system entities must expand and invite conversations on the relationship between these two sectors.

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Introduction

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recognizes tourism and specifically food tourism as a potential lever to achieve the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs).¹ However, existing research on food tourism primarily ties the industry to tourism as a whole and discusses an economic perspective, highlighting how food tourism can offer income diversification through increased tourism to a locale, and how that, in turn, supports socio-economic development.²

Also referred to as ‘gastronomy tourism’ or ‘culinary tourism,’ the term ‘food tourism’ was coined in 1998 by researcher Dr. Lucy Long “to express the idea of experiencing other cultures through food.”³ While the terms ‘gastronomy’ and ‘culinary’ were commonly used at the inception of this sector of tourism, organizations have begun to use the term “food tourism” as in English speaking languages, ‘culinary’ and ‘gastronomy’ implies elitism. The simpler term of ‘food’ is more accessible and for that reason will be used throughout this thesis.^{4,5} A more specific definition of food tourism states, “Any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition or culinary techniques of that region.”⁶ Thus, for the context of this research, food tourism will be considered through the lens of tourists traveling to destinations outside of their home base and engaging in food cultures that are not their own. This could include, but is not limited to, traveling to Michelin star or otherwise recognized restaurants, visiting restaurants favored among locals in a destination, taking cooking classes, enjoying street foods, learning how a certain food or beverage is produced in a region, or engaging with local food producers, distributors, or vendors.

For food tourism to be possible, it needs a food system as a foundation to build upon. The food system includes all aspects of food ranging from its production, processing, and distribution to its consumption and waste. Thus, it is imperative that food systems contexts are considered as the field of food tourism expands.^{7,8} Paraphrased and inspired by multiple group’s definitions, the food system...

Gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that contribute to and influence the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and drives the outcomes

*of these activities, including socio-economic, environmental, and population health outcomes. A food systems approach emphasizes the relationships between and feedback loops among these parts.*⁹⁻¹¹

The food system can be visually understood with a systems diagram adapted from a diagram of food systems proposed by the High Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition, seen in **Appendix I**.^{11,12} This diagram illustrates both the makeup of a food system, as well as its external drivers and outcomes. It has been noted in the literature that strong food systems are recognized as a linking factor between food security, nutrition, human health, the viability of ecosystems, social justice, and climate change; seen as both external drivers and outcomes in the provided diagram.¹³

There is active discourse around whether the food system is broken, with widespread calls for transformation and the recognized need to evolve modern food systems.¹⁴ The current food system is not conducive to sustainable systems that support social, economic, and environmental health for people and the world. Foods are exported hundreds and often thousands of miles to reach its destination, contributing to global warming along the way.¹⁵ Not to mention, public health officials across the globe have recognized the double burden of malnutrition—where over and under nutrition are leading to increases in non-communicable diseases and other health and environmental impacts.¹⁶

In response, there have been calls for food systems transformation. The dialogue around transformation of the food system highlights the need to improve food system sustainability, population health, and using food systems strengthening to achieve the UN SDGs, goals that UNWTO recognized as a potential outcome of sustainable food tourism.^{17,18} Many studies have acknowledged how sustainable and resilient food systems that support healthful diets can support eradication of poverty and malnutrition, protecting human rights, and restoring natural resources.^{12,19}

While the term “food systems transformation” rings through the literature as somewhat of a buzzword, researchers out of Stockholm conducted an overview and synthesis of the evolution of the term in order to legitimize its purpose within the field of food systems. While the research team recognized the lack of clarity around one solid definition, they proposed the following to guide use of the term:

Food system transformations refer to significant re-configurations of the assemblage of food system activities, actors, outcomes, and relationships (dynamics) to move away from the current globalized industrial model and ensure sustainable, resilient, and just models of production and consumption. These transformative processes demand the collective and inclusive re-designing (from re-imagining to re-governing) of food system components through platforms where governance, practices, power, and value-change can be debated and enacted at multiple scales.²⁰

As defined, food systems transformation, then, outlines the necessary steps and acknowledgements for positive food systems transformations.^{21,22} Main concepts within food systems transformation relevant to this research can be found in **Appendix II**. The impact of these aspects driving food systems transformation are multifaceted. Sustainable and resilient food systems that emphasize circularity and food sovereignty strengthen food systems— this has positive downstream impacts on climate change, community health, and sustainability.²³ Understanding of the role of food systems transformation highlights points of potential leverage for change within food systems and associated activities— such as food tourism.

Food tourism supports understanding and discovery of diverse local and regional cultures.²⁴ It is also noted to support rural development by forming a “hook” to attract tourists to less-traveled-to destinations.²⁵ Case in point, in 2002 Thailand began to promote its cuisine to attract more tourists. Since then, tourism in Thailand has doubled.²⁶ Culturally, food tourism tends to walk a thin line between supportive and destructive. In a study out of the United Kingdom (UK), researchers looked at food tourism’s role in sustaining regional identity. They heard two main opposing perspectives in how food tourism impacts regional identity: while food tourism that supports local businesses and produce can empower regional identity, the current approach to cater to tourist taste profiles degrades it.²⁷ This also highlights the nuance that globalization has brought to both dietary preferences and eating patterns locally and within food tourism. Regions, countries, and/or cities wanting to attract tourists to their locale were, for a long time, under the impression that they must provide the tourists’ cuisines of comfort to attract them. However, this approach has been shown to threaten a destination’s identity, and is beginning to be understood as untrue.² Notably, “... gastronomic tourism is better developed in

areas where the local cuisine is better connected to the local culture, and is less-so in areas where there is a weaker connection.”²³ This shift in mentality around how a destination can best draw interest emphasizes the need for sustainable and resilient local food systems and value chains.

Economically speaking, research demonstrates that food tourism supports rural development as well as income diversification. Similar to agritourism– a closely related tourism sub-sector that involves recreational, entertainment, or education to tourists on a farm or ranch that supports income diversification for farmers’ globally– food tourism is being shown to have similar benefits.^{28,29} The UNWTO recognizes tourism as a key driver of socio-economic progress. As of 2022, the food tourism market had an estimated worth of \$805.9 billion and is estimated to reach \$2,114.2 billion by 2028, with an expected annual growth rate of 17.68%.³⁰ A case study out of Houston, Texas, showed that food tourism that supports local foods can promote sustainable tourism from historical, cultural, educational, ecological, economic, and social perspectives.² Further, in the literature, there is a noted bidirectional relationship between tourism and economic development, where tourism increases economic development and economic development facilitates further tourism.³¹ This is a symbiotic relationship, where both see benefit from a strengthening of the other. Despite this coverage and recognition of food tourism and its impacts on culture, society, and economics, the literature continues to lack research that explicitly connects food tourism with food systems.

This study will mark one of the initial studies exploring food tourism’s importance in conversations of transformation within food systems. This information could support the food tourism movement and legitimize it and its principles within the context of food systems resilience and sustainability. This is of interest to industry stakeholders within food tourism, as well as stakeholders within food systems, both in the private and public sectors.

Methods

Qualitative research methods were used to broaden understanding in a newer area of research– as the relationship between food tourism and food systems has yet to be explored in depth, qualitative data was needed to understand key stakeholders current perceptions, values, and beliefs.³² Semi-structured interviews of key industry stakeholders in the United States and Europe (n=11 participants) were conducted in 2023 via Zoom video calls (version 6.0.2). With narrow scope on research objectives, the goal was to reach 9 interviews.³³ Through both

purposive sampling and snowball sampling, 21 potential interviewees were contacted.^{34,35} Expert sampling was used to identify individuals and organizations with knowledge and experience in food tourism such as food tours, cooking classes, foraging, gardening, or agriculture education within both the private and public sector. This approach to sampling was chosen as it was feasible on the intended timeline. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes. As the study considered food tourism from the perspective of management, I recruited participants with leadership roles in their organizations. Participants were from a total of 6 different countries and represented perspectives from academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, and the private sector.

The email language used to recruit potential participants can be found in **Appendix III**. Informed consent was gathered from participants before the interview in writing, for the interview to be recorded in order for subsequent transcription.

In preparation for interviews, an informal literature review was done to inform the structuring of questions asked and inform the researcher of existing knowledge in the field of food tourism. This review informed the thesis project.

This thesis aims to better understand key industry stakeholders' perspectives on food tourism and its potential to catalyze food systems transformation. This research had the following questions: (1) How have key stakeholders involved in food tourism in the US and Europe experienced recent changes in public interest in food tourism? (2) How do key stakeholders perceive the potential connections between food tourism and food systems, including the potential of food tourism to drive food systems transformation? Interview questions were created to address the research aims. Questions asked during interviews can be found in **Appendix IV**.

Once interviews were conducted and recorded, the audio recordings were transcribed and uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose.³⁶ In Dedoose, thematic coding occurred deductively and inductively. Deductive codes were structured to support understanding of the research questions being asked. Then, inductive codes were used to highlight emergent themes within the interviews conducted.³⁷ Codes applied can be seen in **Appendix V**. Once line by line coding was completed for all transcripts, the codes were organized in a manner to understand the findings of the interviews.³⁸ Main themes were drawn from interviews conducted in order to understand food tourism's increase in interest and the industry's impact on food

systems. The study was deemed exempt from IRB at the University of Washington due to minimal to no risk expected to participants.

Results

Eleven participants were interviewed and represented various stakeholder perspectives within food tourism– participant demographics can be seen in **Table 2**, below.

Demographic Factor	N=11
Continent of Residence	
North America	5
Europe	6
Sector	
Academia	2
Food Tourism non-governmental organization (NGO)	3
Government Agency	2
Private Sector	4
Scale of Work	
Local or national	7
International	4

Participants within the two continents were based in the United States, Canada, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. In regard to their sector of work, academics were those who studied and researched food tourism as their primary role. Food Tourism NGOs mainly offered food tours and education courses on local cuisine in their destinations. Those from government agencies represented large bodies that oversee food tourism initiatives at a country level. Finally, participants from the private sector worked in food tourism consulting and/or had public facing roles in providing food tourism experiences. For anonymity, participants will be referred to as “P[number]” when quoted. This section describes the three main themes that emerged from the interviews: increased

interest in food tourism, the meaning of “authenticity,” and food tourism’s relationship to food systems.

Increased public interest in food tourism

The majority of participants expressed recognition of the active growth in the industry and in interest in food tourism activities from consumers. Main themes that arose as to why food tourism is seeing an increase in consumer interest focused on the role of media, society’s growing appreciation for food, and a global shift in economic values. In untangling tourist values, P8 shared “...[tourists] really wanna go local. They wanna dive deep.”

Notably, participants observed that food tourism is becoming more popular due to increased awareness. Participants emphasized the role of media in increased food tourism interest: “In recent years, I think social media has helped a lot to actually give an extra push” (P9). Outside of *social* media, another aspect to the media's role is the increase in cooking and food related shows and the promotion of food and gastronomy-related activities due to programs like the Michelin Star. As shared in another participant’s interview:

There's all the cooking shows now, and everyone's kind of in their own way exploring their connection to food and to cooking. So you know, I think there's a kind of bigger cultural thing happening. But I think on the travel side there is this desire to connect with those, with the sense of the local. Everyone loves food— people now travel for food much more. And it's just a very, it's a very kind of quick and accessible way to get into local culture and not just culinary culture, but sort of wider culture, and using food as a lens to explore other issues. (P8)

Another theme that arose emphasized the shift in what consumers are wanting to spend their money on and what they look for when traveling. Multiple participants highlighted that in the beginning of leisure travel, tourists sought out services while traveling— like all-inclusive resorts and cruises. However, as leisure travel has become more accessible and consumer values have begun to shift, there is now much higher value placed on experiential travel. This evolution was described by a participant representing a large food tourism organization:

Well, if you look at the evolution of economies, we went from an agrarian economy to industrial, to information, to service, things that were valued. And now we're moving into the experience and transformation economies. So, because food tours create an experience more than just providing a service— this is what people are craving. They're craving help with connections. (P1)

In conversations exploring the increased public interest in food tourism, participants echoed sentiments about tourists craving cultural connections to the destinations they travel to, emphasized through a growing media precedence, a growth in desire for experiential activities, and shifting trends in economic values.

Authenticity as a contested topic within food tourism

One major theme that emerged through the interviews was nuance around the word “authentic” as it relates to food tourism. About half of the interviewees shared disdain for the word, stating that the use of authentic to describe foods and cuisines is a large misconception in food systems and food tourism alike. P5 shared: “Well, this is a tricky, tricky concept of authenticity. What's authentic? And when did it start being authentic? So what do we now reckon as authentic? Maybe it didn't exist like 50 years ago. So first, we have to consolidate this concept of authenticity.” P8 also commented, “I'm putting air quotes around authentic because authentic is a very complicated word; but, I think, you know, for a lot of people, that's how they would frame it.” Authenticity, then, was noted by participants to be fluid and informed on an individual level by personal perceptions.

While recognizing the fluidity of how the term “authentic” is defined, even those who showed disdain for the word recognized its inherent importance in consumers' understanding of engaging in food tourism: “So it's I mean again, I don't think authentic means anything. But if, like the average person's definition of authentic, [food tourism is] way more authentic tourism, and it's worth a ton of money” (P10). Thus, despite the nuance found within the word “authentic,” participants acknowledged the place that authenticity has within driving consumer demand for food tourism and the potential for food tourism to educate consumers about a location’s current definition of “authenticity” as it relates to local cuisines.

Connections between food tourism and food systems

In addressing how food tourism impacts food systems and vice versa, the results were less uniform, with varied participant understanding of the phrase, “food system.” When asked, some participants seemed uncertain about food tourism's link to food systems. Despite this, all participants discussed connections between food tourism and aspects of food systems, even if they didn't explicitly name it. For example, though they didn't explicitly describe them as “value chain actors in the food system,” participants described the role of growers, producers, and restaurateurs. While mainly done implicitly, participants discussed linkages between food tourism and food systems through discussions of economic and socio-cultural development, pride in place, resilience, and food sovereignty.

Rural and socio-economic development

Additionally, all interviewees discussed the impact of food tourism through discussion of rural areas and an “eat local” mindset. This was primarily explained from the perspective of socioeconomic development and food systems resilience. Multiple participants discussed the economic side of food tourism; for example, how food tourism can diversify producer's income or how food tourism initiatives can bring in money to the local economy: “it also spreads that money out of just the cities; that money goes into the rural economy” (P10). Further, the acknowledgement of socio-economic development through food tourism was notable, with multiple interviewees discussing the promotion of circular economies. This was summed up well in the following quote from Participant 3:

I would argue that tourism has a wider impact in terms of doing things that the state can't do very effectively. It brings business into small villages and towns. If you structure your tourism in your country properly– you disseminate, or you disperse the tourists to every nook and cranny of the place. And in doing that, then you're keeping transport systems going, you're keeping little shops going, you're keeping little restaurants going. You're creating little places for people to go- you're creating additional income. (P3)

Participants also discussed socio-cultural development in terms of education through food tourism– P5 sharing:

I think there's an inherent personal growth when you go to a place and you see how things are produced. When you see the origin of produce. when you get to know the actual producers of stuff. So there's an evolution. There's knowledge acquired. There's this personal growth. (P5)

These connections made by participants highlighted their perspectives of food tourism contributing to economic and socio-cultural development both with destinations hosting food tourism activities and the tourists engaging with them.

Pride in place

In addition to the economic aspects of food tourism, some participants also discussed what they referred to as “pride in place.” This referred to local pride of food and experiences available to tourists within the community. While still linked to economic benefits, it emerged as its own theme, as well. The importance of pride in place was expressed well by P5:

There's also a certain level of pride. If they see that urban dwellers or international visitors go to their tiny villages to find out about this very specific food that they have. Of course that also helps the export of goods. It might even also attract investment— somebody who wants to open a new hotel. So they have different elements that may come and be seen as positive benefits for them. (P5)

One participant also described the importance of pride in place in connection to understanding that pride in place, or local pride, could increase demand for local products by strengthening relationships between producers and consumers.

Resilience

Additionally, comments surrounding increased resilience further supported food tourism’s impact on food systems within a local/rural context. Within the context of resilience of local food systems, participant comments mostly related direct impacts on food tourism and value chains during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic:

We saw during the pandemic those restaurants [whom we worked with] that had relationships with their producers were much able to be... they were much more resilient and adaptable to the challenges of the pandemic than those who were really focused on getting, um, getting all of their food and product through, you know, a global distributor. (P4)

More general comments were also made around food system resilience such as: “...we fit with the local food system because we reinforce it and we are sourcing from it” (P1). Participants from across the spectrum of sectors represented within food tourism emphasized the importance of resilient systems supporting food tourism, and how food tourism could support resilient systems.

Food sovereignty

Simultaneously, however, food tourism was also recognized as a lever for advancing food sovereignty, as previously discussed, through its promotion of pride in place and creating demand that allows traditional foodways and practices to sustain the producers and communities involved in them.

And we've also seen, interestingly, many products and traditions being recovered because there's extra demand when you would have maybe only the local demand. It would not be economically sustainable to maybe keep some of the businesses. (P9)

Participants shared comments regarding food tourism's potential to uplift and empower traditional food ways, improving food sovereignty and ultimately food security.

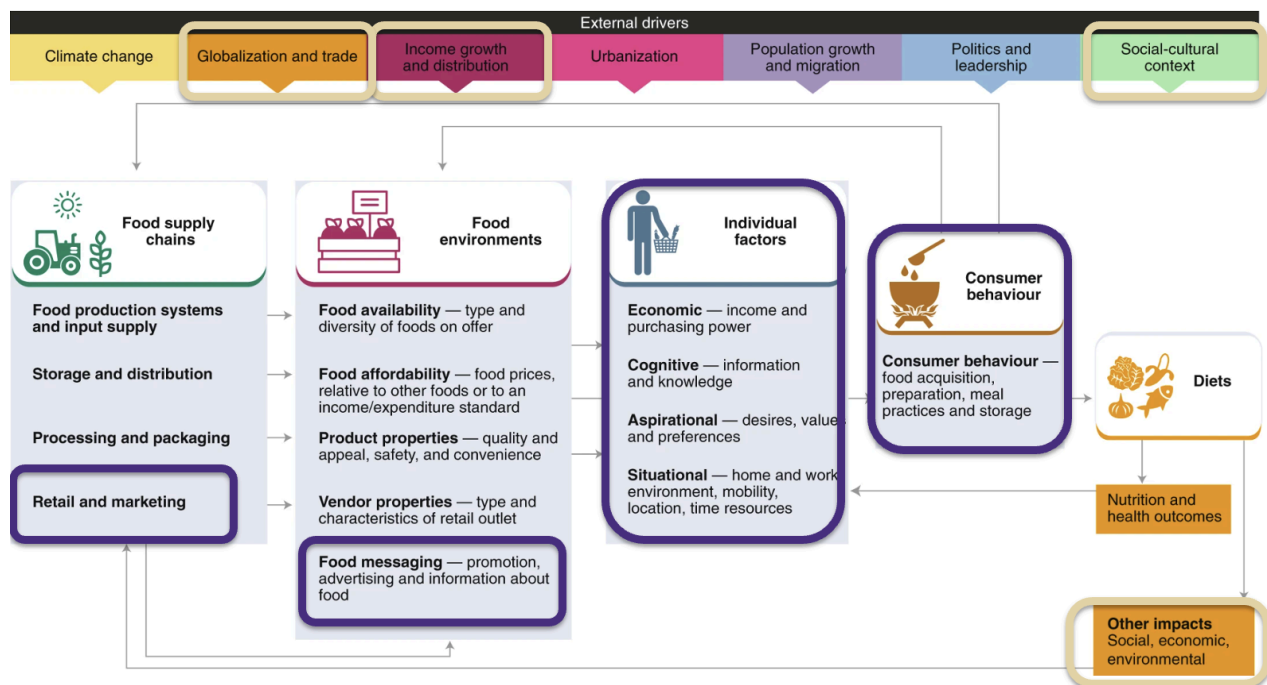
While the results highlight various perspectives amongst interviewees, they also highlight the current understanding of food tourism; the industry's increase in popularity; and the impact of food tourism on food systems as it is broadly understood. Within food tourism's increase in public interest, aspects of media and shifting global values were discussed. With regard to participants' knowledge of connections between food tourism and food systems and the potential

of food tourism to impact food systems transformation, stakeholders discussed aspects of economic and socio-cultural development, pride in place, resilience, and food sovereignty.

Discussion

This study investigated participants’ perceptions of trends in public interest in food tourism and the connections between food tourism and broader food systems. This section describes the growth of food tourism and connections between food tourism and food systems. Using the food systems diagram introduced in the introduction (**Appendix I**), this annotated version– shown in **Figure 1**, below– pinpoints intersections between food tourism and food systems discussed by participants.

Figure 1: Annotated Food Systems Diagram



While these connections will be further explained in their respective discussion sections, food tourism can be understood within a food systems context specifically by those characteristics highlighted by a purple or gold box. Food tourism and its increase in public interest can be represented by retail and marketing, as well as food messaging, specifically related to media playing a role in increased food tourism interest. Further, shifting global values can be represented through globalization and trade and social-cultural contexts, adding to food tourism’s

increase in popularity. Participants also discussed individual factors and consumer behaviors that drive demand within the food system, demand that supports the growth of food tourism and the bridging of value chains— creating relationships between producers and consumers, strengthening resilience of systems and promoting circularity, as well as bolstering feelings of local pride, or pride in place. The following sections will outline the results pulled from this study and the implications of them.

Food tourism is growing, but who defines it?

Overall, a majority of participants shared sentiments related to the world’s love of food and tourists’ interest in integrating into communities they are visiting. Participants articulated with detail and clarity food tourism’s positionality within the tourism industry. They acknowledged the sector’s growth and offered further insight into what is driving the increased interest. Participants described that tourists are seeking out experiences that bring them closer to the culture of the locations they are visiting, and food tourism offers a prime way to do this. In large part due to media, both social and mainstream, promoting different foods, cuisines, and destinations, has made food tourism more accessible to the consumer than ever before. Recognition programs as well as the virality found on social media platforms have skyrocketed the speed and audience size for marketing these experiences. Participants also confirmed what is seen in the literature, that the industry will continue to expand and that there is still plenty of room for growth and innovation.³⁰

Participants’ comments on authenticity highlight the question: who defines a region’s cuisine? While provoked by the wording of a question asked in the interviews, the emergent theme of authenticity fuels a conversation around the public understanding of food tourism and food culture. The acknowledgement of the fluidity of the term “authentic” encourages education surrounding food and cuisines and a continued effort towards cultural understanding— education regarding what is ‘authentic’ to a community at any given time, acknowledging that this can evolve. One potential implication of this is that food tourism can be used as a lever to strengthen food sovereignty. By using food tourism as a mode of cultural promotion and understanding, this can increase pride and sovereignty that a community feels towards its food system, strengthening the system as a byproduct. However, as previously mentioned in the introduction of the case

study out of the UK, food tourism done unsustainably, by catering to a tourist taste profile, degrades regional identity– highlighting the nuance of this aspect.²⁷

Food tourism and food systems

Though most participants did not use the technical terminology of “food systems,” all participants described ways that food tourism influences or is affected by different food systems goals, components, or processes. When asked about food tourism’s intersection with the food system, just 5 of the 11 participants had immediate and detailed responses, while most of the remaining 7 participants requested clarification on this question. Though those who requested clarification did eventually share perspectives on certain aspects of implicit overlap between the two, this lack of familiarity with food systems terminology reveals the potential to connect food tourism with the growing discourse on food systems and food systems transformation. Participants discussed the potential for food tourism to support food systems through recognition of food tourism’s role in rural socio-economic development, food sovereignty, and food systems resilience– all of which are intertwined. While these connections posit a positive feedback loop between food tourism and food systems, the lack of familiarity from over half of the participants highlights the gap in the current understanding of how food tourism could impact food systems and what the downstream effects could be.

Rural and socio-economic development

A large theme discussed by the interviewees was that of food tourism’s role in supporting rural communities and their socio-economic development. This theme indicates food tourism’s benefit to smaller supply chains not only in promoting circular economies, but also in promoting resilience amongst producers.²⁵ As participants discussed, producers with stronger connections may have been more resilient when faced with a system stressor, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food tourism in rural communities was also highlighted to support social development through increasing demands for traditional foodways, providing essential demand to support the livelihoods of local producers, where they might not have sufficient demand for self-sustenance just from their small community. This external and additional demand created from food tourism can be seen as a driver of food sovereignty– it is often seen that there is not enough local demand

to uphold labor- or resource-intensive culinary practices, or traditional foodways, without the additional demand that food tourism brings.³⁹ When there is additional demand coming in from tourists, this could help keep jobs in the local economy and support these unique culinary habits of a location.

Resilience

Finally, the interviewees addressed food tourism's impact on food systems resilience through the discussion of bridging value chains. In order to support food tourism activities, the local food system must be strong enough to meet demands and resilient enough to adapt to varying circumstances. Food tourism promotes this by bringing together growers, distributors, producers, and consumers, who are necessary to create a foundation for food tourism to occur. These relationships promote the resilience of the food system. Bringing together economic circularity, pride in place, and food system resilience was a theme of how food tourism bridges multiple value chains.

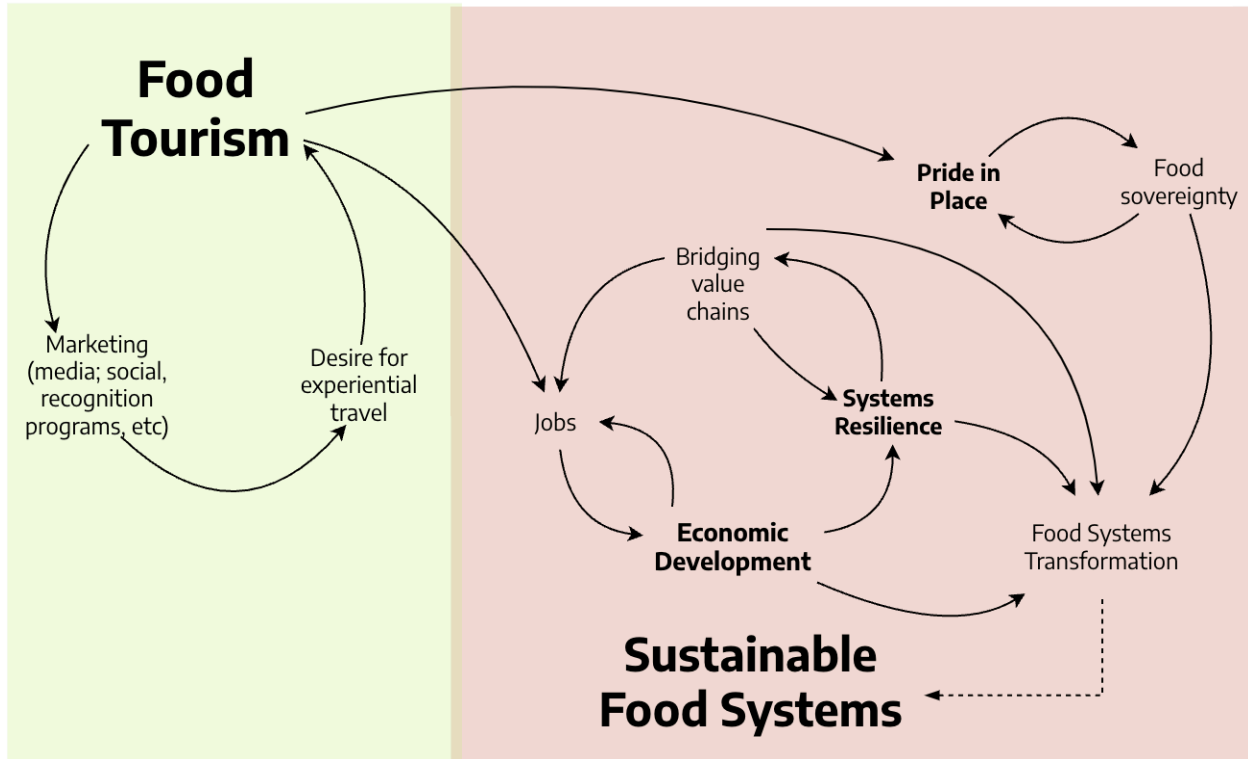
Pride in place and food sovereignty

In interviews, the discussion of pride in place emphasized food tourism's role in further promoting food sovereignty. Multiple participants discussed how in its nascence, food available in tourist destinations was catered to the tourist palette, which as previously discussed with the example in the UK, can be harmful to local food systems.²⁷ However, as the food tourism industry has blossomed and become a larger topic of conversation and interest, destinations are beginning to realize that tourists *are*, in fact, interested in local cuisine that is authentic within a given moment to a respective community. While this was related to the media's role in perceptions around food, as expressed in interviews, the recognition of shifting values further supports communities and the ways that strengthened local food systems minimizes the forced westernization of local cuisines for the benefit of the tourist.

Synthesis: visualizing connections between food tourism and food systems transformation

Figure 2 shows a causal loop diagram that visualizes connections between food tourism and specific mechanisms of food systems transformation, as discussed by participants and synthesized by the researcher.

Figure 2: Causal loop diagram visualizing impacts of food tourism



Beginning in the green shaded section, connections explaining the increase in public interest in food tourism can be seen. Where global shifts have harbored a consumer desire for experiential travel, leading to increased engagement in food tourism. With a growing engagement in food tourism, consumers are in turn posting more to media regarding these experiences; writing reviews, posting photos, sharing their experiences. This increase in marketing expands to new and different networks, continuing to inspire desire for experiential activities, and the cycle continues.

Moving to the pink shaded region, this section of the causal loop diagram represents connections made in interviews between aspects of food systems and food systems transformation, as seen through food tourism. Participants discussed food tourism bridging value chains to create a food tourism experience; the bridging of various stakeholders to create an experience. These relationships in turn create jobs in the destination, another byproduct of food tourism. Increased employment supports economic development through the concept of circularity. When a local in a place makes money from food tourism, they will likely use that money in their own town or location, keeping that money within the local economy. With more

money in the local economy, this also supports increases in job opportunities and the community expands. As the economy of a destination develops, the system becomes more resilient– or more able to withstand shocks and stresses to the system. Resilient systems provide a strong foundation for stakeholders across value chains to build relationships, which could support food systems transformation, with an end result of working towards sustainable food systems.

Food tourism was also discussed in interviews within the context of pride in place and its ability to improve a community’s food sovereignty, by creating demand that may not have previously been sufficient to support traditional food practices. This could have downstream impacts on aspects of sustainability– social, economic, and environmental considerations, influencing food systems transformation. I, as the researcher, see these connections made between various aspects of food tourism and food systems and their downstream impacts as potential actors in food systems transformation with an ultimate outcome of sustainable food systems.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of this research include that this thesis offers an exploration of a research gap within food tourism and how it connects to the systems that uphold it. As the discourse around food systems and food tourism grows, it becomes ever important to recognize and acknowledge all intersecting industries and evaluate them to understand existing relationships and room for improvement. This research also finds strength in using a qualitative approach in a space needing formative and exploratory work done in order to guide future research avenues.

This research has limitations that can be related to the short timeline, limited resources, and positionality of the researcher and food tourism stakeholders. Primarily, as this study was conducted as part of a master’s thesis, time to collect data was limited. This study was completed within the span of one year with just one researcher. Secondly, as all participants worked in North America and Europe, findings from this study may not be applicable to other geographic contexts, which may have different food tourism dynamics.

Recommendations and conclusions

This study furthers current understanding of food tourism’s intersection with food systems. The data collected and analyzed were some of the first connecting food tourism to food

systems, explicitly, and are of benefit both to food tourism and food systems stakeholders who can use this research to further strengthen ties between these sectors. The research is of particular interest to younger audiences and researchers who are looking to connect food culture, health, and sustainability through work in food systems.

In moving forward from this research, I recommend further strengthening stakeholder relationships between food systems and food tourism. Promoting education and understanding around the intersection of food tourism and food systems could have a symbiotic effect and further support resilience and sustainability within food systems. This avenue of research is new and exciting and demands further attention. Other areas of research should include attempting to conduct research from a tourist perspective to better understand any educational benefit or longer-term impact food tourism has on tourists. In diving more into the emergent theme of authenticity, future research could also support both food systems and food tourism by deepening the understanding of the role of globalization and traditional foodways and how that impacts food tourism.

Moving past calls for future research— I recommend food systems stakeholders be included in dialogue around food tourism. That food tourism focused webinars, symposiums, and conferences include voices from the food system. I further recommend that as this is a newer avenue of research, that support in the forms of infrastructure, job opportunities, and working groups be promoted to younger researchers, program managers, and coordinators in a way that is accessible and allows those wanting to get involved in this work to do so.

Overall, this research furthers the conversation of food tourism's place within food systems. This research can be used to bring food systems stakeholders into conversations of food tourism. There is significant room for innovation in the sector of food tourism as it continues to expand— such as increasing consumer knowledge on options available, promoting resilient and sustainable food systems that provide solid foundation for food tourism to occur, and allowing food systems and food tourism to support each other for the health of communities. Food tourism can increase education around food and food culture for tourists, but also increase the pride of people sharing their food culture. Understanding the positive connection between food tourism and food systems should be leveraged to create projects encouraging governments and local municipalities to put more funding into food systems, with the understanding that it will benefit both the community and increase revenue coming in through tourism. This may come through

the development of policies supporting food tourism related activities, creation of programs to strengthen local food systems, or creation of programs to promote food tourism for a destination. I recommend that any destination wanting to strengthen their food tourism offerings include perspectives from the food system. I also encourage food systems stakeholders to engage in the food tourism sphere to assess any potentially symbiotic relationships. There is much to be gained from more fully leveraging food tourism to advance the goals of food systems transformation.

For food tourism to continue to grow, it is of the utmost importance for food systems stakeholders to be brought into the conversation, and that food tourism stakeholders recognize the explicit role and potential power of food tourism to leverage food systems transformation. This will serve as not only an economic benefit, but also a socio-cultural one.

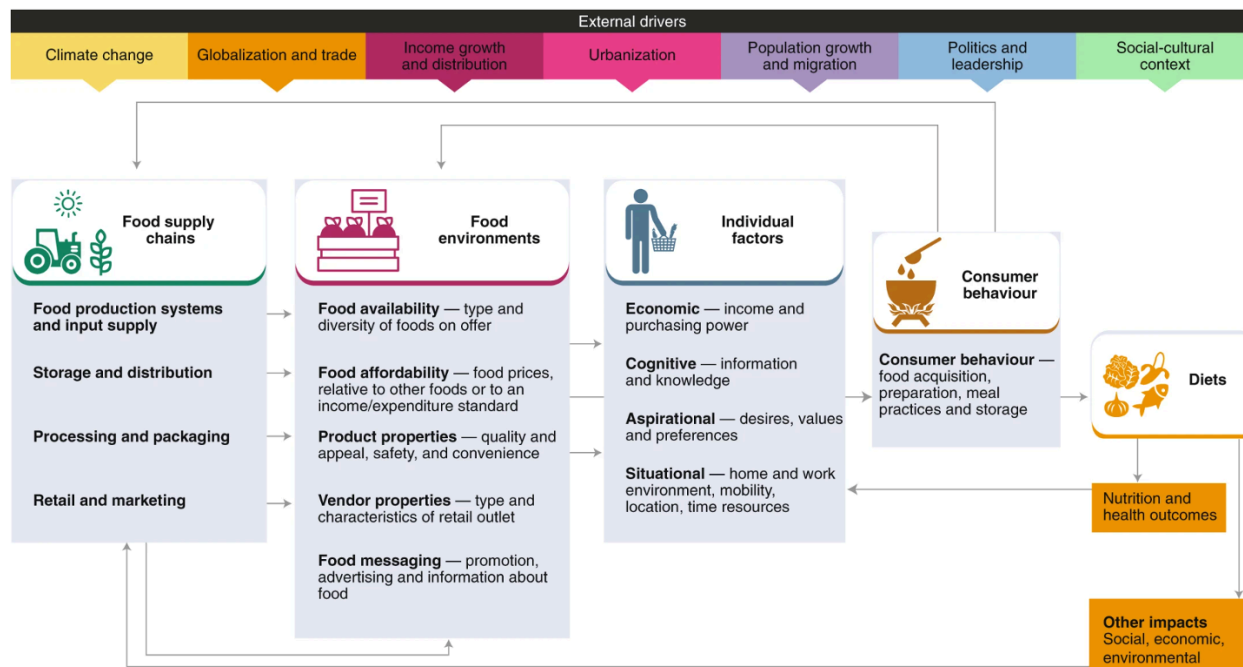
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Appendix I. Food Systems Diagram



II. Aspects of Food Systems Transformation

Aspect of Food Systems Transformation	Definition in terms of food systems
Sustainability	Sustainability is achieved through environmental, economic, and social dimensions to achieve food and nutrition security today as well as for future generations. ⁴⁰
Resilience	Resilience refers to a food systems ability to adapt to and recover from unforeseen stressors while continuing to provide enough food to meet demands. ⁴¹
Economic circularity	Economic circularity within a socio-cultural context refers to keeping money in a given community; once food tourism brings money in, that money can be used by the people, for the people. ⁴²
Food sovereignty	Food sovereignty is the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods, as well as the right for people to define their own food and agricultural systems. ^{43,44}

III. Message to potential interviewees

Hello!

My name is Lauren and I am a master's student at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA, USA. I am conducting my thesis looking at the gastronomy/food tourism industry. Based on the work of your company, it would be great to involve someone from your group in this research through a short interview.

There is a short summary of the project *below* with more information on the topic and focus of the interview.

If this is something you'd have the capacity for, please feel free to book a time that works with your schedule [here](#) [hyperlinked to booking page] for a 30-45 minute interview. Either way, if you know anyone else who may provide insight into this topic, that would be appreciated.

Thank you,
Lauren

The central goal of this thesis is to better understand the motivations and impact of gastronomy tourism on consumers.

Questions asked will aim to:

- *Understand your connection to your organization/company/group*
- *Gain deeper understanding of organizational mission*
- *Understand growth within the field of food tourism*
- *Understand consumer impact*
- *Explore the relationship with host communities in the industry*
- *Explore food tourism's relationship with food systems*

IV. Interview Questions

Research Focus	Interview Question
How have key stakeholders involved in food tourism in the US and Europe experienced recent changes in public interest in food tourism?	How does your work influence food tourism and what is the relevance?
	Food Tourism has been gaining popularity over the past years and is projected to grow exponentially. Overall, why do you think this is? What do you think is drawing people to food tourism? At your organization or similar experiences?
How do key stakeholders perceive the potential	What type of impact would you say your programming has on visitors?

connections between food tourism and food systems transformation?	How does your organization/company engage in relationship building with respect to aspects of authenticity and equity?
	How does food tourism fit into the local food system?

V. Code Book

Parent Code	Child code (Grandchild code)
Authenticity	-
Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting value chain Economic development GDP/Food ROI on trainings As a government strategy Consumer spending habits Funding Promoting circularity Revenue diversification Spillover effect
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stereotypes (Culinary vs gastronomy vs food; Local ≠ \$\$ (always)) Integration Local capacity Local knows best Community based approaches Supporting rural Traditional foodways (promotion; pride in place; education; recovery; support) Vision of collaboration
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food literacy Food system resilience Food security On host communities (career outlook) On tourists (going deeper) Biodiversity Driver of sustainability Food provenance Food sovereignty Investment Protecting food culture

	<p>Reconciliation through food Socio-economic development</p>
Obstacles	<p>Greenwashing Measurement (disaggregation; lack of impact data; lack of tools) Broken links Environmental concerns Expensive to engage False claims Food colonialism Leakage/seepage (food cultures; industry) Lack of infrastructure Overtourism Slow to change Supply/demand mismatch Talent pool Western lens</p>
Potential	<p>Need for guidelines Differentiation Expansion Increased interest in experiential travel Innovation Training (continuing education) Policy (strengthening) Reconciliation Systems approach (bridging multiple systems) Visibility</p>
Understanding/Position	<p>Resources Food systems dissonance In media/marketing In the food system Intersectionality (holistic tourism; other industries) Consumer demands (desire; motivation) Stakeholder motivation Stakeholders-who Evolution Mission Perception</p>