

Sustainability in Greek restaurants through authenticity

Gerasimos-Panagiotis Angelopoulos

Dr Jan A. Schulp

This paper is about local food and presents a research on the sustainability level in nine successful restaurants in the region of Greece, in connection with the authenticity of their cuisine. The information was collected through semi-structured interviews on May in 2018, from seven restaurants that were established in Athens and two in Patras. The respondents were restaurant owners and executive chefs; they were interviewed about their current dishes, the perceived importance of the menu, the sourcing of their ingredients and the customer perceptions about local food. In consonance with the interviews, sourcing of local foods was problematic; although transport distances were small, the total cost of local items was such that it was difficult to compete with imported foods. The low cost of imported foods, paradoxically, was partly to blame on European Union (EU) regulations. However, to the customers, the local origin of ingredients was crucial for the perception of foods as local. In this way, the higher cost of local ingredients could be made good. The term local though has a different meaning among different countries. Canadians, for example, perceive products as local if they were sold within 160 kilometres radius from the initial production point; in the same context, most Greek customers consider ingredients as local when they are produced within the boundaries of Greece. It is not necessarily to be grown just around the corner but it has to be authentic. According to the research literature review and the interviews, to be considered local, the dish needs to offer local ingredients and the proper procedures for its preparation. From such tastes, the visitor is able not only to get a glimpse of the culture but also to integrate into the customs and rituals of the place visited. The travellers are interested to gain real experiences through food; according to the interviews, many guests tend to order the most authentic dishes of the restaurant, without the waiter having to persuade them. For an ethnic restaurant owner, to be able to offer such services, he must understand the factors that are important to deliver them. Those factors are preparation, presentation, and consumption. A country that manages these factors efficiently is able to promote to foreign markets not only its popular products but also those that are not widely known even by the locals.