

Sarah Seidel (NHL Stenden) Zooming out: local food at the border

It has been argued that local food products can contribute significantly to the value chain of a region if they are well integrated into its tourism product. For tourists, local food can enhance the experience and for the destination it can boost the economic multiplier effect. But what do tourists perceive as local and what is the impact of knowledge and awareness of local food on their motivation and consumption experience?

The research focusses on two regions in Germany and the Netherlands with a rather small scale tourism development and specifically the attribute that food tourism is not a main driver for tourism development. Crossing the German/Dutch border, the Emsland and Veenland is geographically and partially historical the same region but has undergone a different kind of tourism development where the German area Emsland welcomes significantly more tourists than the Dutch region Veenland. The research project was dedicated to compare the added value of local food products to the two regions' tourism product in the perception of the tourists. Therefore, knowledge, motivation and consumption experience of local food products was researched. The research was done by means of a questionnaire among tourists (including day-trippers) and completed with semi-structured interviews with locals, local food providers and tourists.

Despite the fact that the regions have similar geographical characteristics and partially shared a common history, the knowledge of local food products and therewith the perceived experience of local food differed significantly. The tourist's awareness of local food products being typical for the region is a huge influencing factor on the perception of their quality and their contribution to the experienced value. Where knowledge and awareness is high, products are perceived to have a better quality and are purposefully bought. Accordingly, the tourist experience is enhanced. When knowledge and awareness is missing, local food cannot be identified as such and accordingly, no added value is perceived. In addition, when awareness and knowledge is missing, tourists identify food products as local that they can identify in their surroundings.

A comparison shows that in the Emsland, tourists are easier to identify local food products, including special dishes and specialties, resulting in an increased travel motivation and consumption of the products. The perceived added value of the local food is therefore significantly higher than in the Veenland where tourists have less knowledge of local foods and often identify rather general items such as raw crops as local food.

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