



# GLOBALISATION AND FOOD CONSUMPTION IN TOURISM

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the common perception of globalisation as a threat to local gastronomic identities is contrasted by its other facet, as an impetus that opens up new opportunities for reinvention of local gastronomic products and identities. Relevant perspectives and theories of globalisation are reviewed to provide a theoretical framework for the study. Key dimensions underlying food consumption in tourism are elucidated, and the impacts of globalisation on the culinary supply and tourist food consumption are discussed. A conceptual model is developed in an attempt to illustrate the influence of globalisation on food consumption in tourism. This study concludes that from the world culture theory perspective, globalisation can be an impetus to reconstruct or reinvent local gastronomic traditions and particularities. **Keywords:** world culture theory, theory of glocalisation, localisation, local culinary supply, food consumption in tourism, convergence and divergence. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Food consumption in the general context is recognised as a collection of contextual and evolving social practices, where food no longer merely serves as sustenance but also a way to relate to other people in social, cultural and political terms (Oosterveer, 2006). In the context of tourism, food consumption is likewise acknowledged to bear ‘symbolic’ significance; for example, as a marker of social distinction (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009), and a way for encountering and experiencing other foodways and cultures (Chang et al., 2010; Molz, 2007). On the other hand, food provides energy and essential nutrients needed for body functions, and thus, eating is at the same time regarded as an ‘obligatory’ tourist activity (Richards, 2002). Furthermore, eating is an unique form of tourist activity that gratifies all five senses—vision, tactile, auditory, taste, and olfaction (Kivela &

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Crotts, 2006), offering tourists ‘sensory pleasure’ that can fulfil the ‘experiential’ part of the tourist experience (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

The significant implications of tourist food consumption on destinations have received a growing research interest recently. Evidence from a number of studies suggests that tourists’ interests in and preferences for food in a destination can play a significant role in affecting their destination choice (Bessiere, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). Tourists’ spending on food can constitute up to one-third of the total tourist expenditure (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Telfer & Wall, 2000), thus comprising a significant proportion of tourism revenue. Tourists’ food choice and preferences are recognised as important forces driving the tourism demand for food, which have an immediate influence on the offerings of tourist-oriented hospitality businesses and a significant impact on local food supply; for instance, with regard to the amount of food imported for tourists, the linkage between local agriculture production and tourism, and the use of provenance as a distinctive attribute of local food products to attract tourists’ attention (Morgan, Marsden, & Murdoch, 2006; Telfer & Wall, 2000; Torres, 2002; Torres, 2003).

Despite the importance of food consumption in the context of tourism, little is known about the phenomenon in general, and from the sociological perspective in particular (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Whilst the ongoing process of globalisation has brought about profound transformations in food production and consumption (Oosterveer, 2006; Wilhelmina, Joost, George, & Guido, 2010), a number of studies suggest that food consumption in tourism is also subject to the macro influences of globalisation (Hall & Mitchell, 2002a; Richards, 2002; Symons, 1993; Torres, 2002). For instance, there is a concern that cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991) and McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 1995) may lead to homogenisation that can result in a ‘global palate’ as well as a ‘global cuisine’ (Richards, 2002; Ritzer, 1995; Symons, 1993). The homogenising force of globalisation is thus commonly seen as a threat to the close connection between food and place, or as Trubek (2008) puts it, the ‘taste of place’ or ‘*terroir*’. Hence, globalisation can significantly affect local gastronomic identity and image (the holistic impression of the gastronomic landscape of a destination) (Fox, 2007; Harrington, 2005), and can result in the deprivation of a ‘sense of place’ for both locals and tourists (Richards, 2002). Such an outcome would be most threatening to destinations that utilise their local cuisine and gastronomic products as a source of tourist attraction or as a major image differentiator from their competitors.

Whilst it is a common perception that globalisation poses a threat to local gastronomic identity and image, there is preliminary evidence suggesting that it can provide an impetus for reinventing local gastronomic products and identity. Torres (2002) contends that the ‘average world citizen’ now has increased exposure to a wider variety of ethnic dishes and products, thus this trend may stimulate a greater demand for local speciality products and indigenous cuisines. Ram (2004) also

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