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Street Food Tourism. Current Trends and Envisaged Trajectories

Uliczna turystyka kulinarna. Aktualne trendy i przewidywane trajektorie

Abstract: The aim of this article is to unpack the current trends and trajectories of street food in the tourism sector. It postulates two key trajectories of luxury/gourmet street food tourism versus the traditional form of street food tourism. It is a conceptual paper based largely on previous research and documents found in extant literature. As such, document analysis was used to understand practices and experience of street food tourism that enabled the drawing of new trajectories and conclusions. It posits that street food will become more differentiated by food type given the vast potential to imagine and re-imagine among people. Street food presents a unique experience away from home that is available to both locals and tourists as shown in the street food trajectory framework presented in this paper. Street food tourism has been growing because of increasing demands of the populations for food due to urbanisation, the lack of time to prepare food at home, the accessibility of street food and rising incomes. The street food sector involves many players from ice-cream vendors to pastry makers, from fish sellers to confectioners, from bakers to French fry vendors. It is a sector with vast potential to create jobs and requires basic cooking skills to start a venture. It can be practised anywhere and anytime where there is human traffic. It is a sector that requires care with respect to food hygiene, safety, sanitation, and/or the nutritional value. To a large extent, its prospects rely heavily on urban planning, special and commercial policies, and actions of local governments.

Keywords: street food; tourism; street food tourism; food; culinary tourism

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie aktualnych trendów i trajektorii ulicznej turystyki kulinarnej. Jest to artykuł koncepcyjny, oparty na wcześniejszych badaniach, dokumentach i literaturze. Jedzenie uliczne to wyjątkowe doświadczenie z dala od domu, dostępne zarówno dla mieszkańców, jak i dla turystów. Zapotrzebowanie na jedzenie uliczne jest coraz większe. Wiąże się to z urbanizacją, brakiem czasu na przygotowanie żywności w domu, większą dostępnością ofert czy też rosnącymi dochodami społeczeństwa. Sektor żywności ulicznej obejmuje wiele podmiotów: od sprzedawców lodów, producentów ciastek, sprzedawców ryb, piekarzy, po sprzedawców frytek. To sektor o ogromnym potencjale tworzenia nowych miejsc pracy. Do rozpoczęcia działalności wymagane są czasem jedynie podstawowe umiejętności kulinarne. Uliczne usługi kulinarne można świadczyć w dowolnym miejscu i czasie – wszędzie tam, gdzie występuje ruch ludzi. Jest to równocześnie sektor wymagający dbałości o bezpieczeństwo, higienę i/lub wartość odżywczą żywności. Perspektywy kulinarnej turystyki ulicznej zależą w dużej mierze od planowania urbanistycznego, polityki społecznej i działań podejmowanych przez samorządy.

Słowa kluczowe: gastronomia uliczna; turystyka; uliczna turystyka kulinarna; żywność; turystyka kulinarna

Street food is one of the centerpieces of culinary tourism for people in pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences.
(Kraig & Sen, 2013, p. xvii)

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is tourists and street food tourism (SFT) and to unpack the current trends and trajectories of street food in the tourism sector. Street food presents a unique experience away from home and is available for both local consumption and for tourists. Food is part of the tourist's destination experience, while locals savour street food as a way of life (Sgroi et al., 2022, p. 1; Giampiccoli & Mnguni, 2022). Tourists are after unique food experiences. This phenomenon has been increasing such that many people are traveling to experience "new, different, local, high quality or rare foods" (Genç, 2021, p. 346; see also Awasthi, 2021; Praesri et al., 2022, p. 123; Dłużewska et al., 2022, p. 66). Besides the fact that food is a necessity, interest in food tourism as a specific form of tourism is growing (Privitera & Nesci, 2015, p. 721; Kumar & Rana, 2016). Jeaheng and Han (2020, p. 641) observe that in the last few decades, food tourism has become trendy with increasing interest among global travellers. This shows that there is an inextricable connection between food and tourism; and eating is a physiological necessity for everyone (both for locals and tourists) that simultaneously generates income for local economies while satisfying a human need (Privitera & Nesci, 2015, p. 721). The relevance for food in the tourism sector is therefore well recognised because inevitably all tourists must eat during their visit making food one of the fundamental expenses of tourists when travelling, as food accounts for more than one third of the cost of the total trip (Fusté-Forné, 2016, p. 43). It should be noted that not all tourists are "foodies". Some visitors do plan their travels and what they will eat at their destinations (not necessarily on the streets), and some do their research about the food at their destinations and some plan around it (Genç, 2021, p. 344). Because of the importance of food as a necessity, cuisine has transcended that boundary to become a motive and key cause for the tourist experience transforming it into a "crucial economic factor for many destinations" (Genç, 2021, p. 348). For Gupta and Sajnani (2020), variety in the street foods enhances the authenticity perception of the tourists and that tourists are benign to cultural disparities. Food drives economies and enriches the tourist experience.

Street food is recognised as part and parcel of food tourism (Mitgosoom & Ashton, 2019, p. 70) and contributes economically to the tourism industry of many countries (Praesri et al., 2022, p. 123). The majority of countries now recognise the attractive value of street food as they promote it through various events such

as food conferences and festivals (Chatibura, 2021, p. 411). Street food is now recognised through the Michelin stars. “Michelin, a culinary organization that arbitrates culinary excellence, has also created a special category to recognize iconic street food” (Chatibura, 2021, p. 411; see also Milgram, 2020, p. 4). Relationships between tourism, food tourism, street food, tourists and the local area is rich and variegated and is well encapsulated in the following excerpt:

Food and dining are major elements considered by tourists when traveling and choosing destinations. Tourists eat the local cuisine in a tourism destination to fulfil their travel experiences. Travelers acquire new knowledge and understanding of the traditional local and regional culture of a destination, which are valuable in relation to destination image and future tourist intention. Several tourism destinations have emphasized food activities and created gastronomic/culinary experiences to attract international visitors. Street foods combine the authentic culture of the local people and the traditional values by using local resources, contributing to local economies and maintaining a sustainable tourism system. Moreover, street foods have been used as a tourism tool in many destinations and are even regulated in some Asian countries. (Jeaheng & Han, 2020, p. 641)

Despite the acknowledged importance of street food and its relevance in tourism, specific and sustained SFT research has been neglected (Chatibura, 2021, p. 412) and is, therefore, in its infancy. Very little SFT literature was obtained when the keyword “street food tourism” was used for word search.

While food tourism has been widely researched and is more than a mature field of study, it has branched into many and innovative directions, SFT remains muted and less explored (Fusté-Forné, 2019, p. 17). Literature on street food in city tourism remains under-developed because what is often highlighted about it are issues related to hygiene, nutrition and disease and this can be attributed to its less prominence in many destinations (Chatibura, 2021, p. 411). This makes street food one of the knowledge gaps in the food tourism literature (Okumus, 2021, p. 39). Much needs to be researched, discovered, and analysed with respect to SFT. This paper aims to contribute to filling these information gaps in street food tourism research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article has a large theoretical component based on previous research and documents in extant literature. This article unpacks the current trajectories of SFT and postulates new SFT trajectories. It posits that street food and SFT will become more differentiated by type of food given the vast potential to imagine and re-imagine among people. Document analysis was important for this study because it allowed for information extraction and a deeper understanding of street food. Based on extant documents, it was possible to understand practices and experi-

ence of SFT that enabled the drawing of new trajectories and conclusions based on evidence as articulated in this study.

A search on Google Scholar with the keyword “street food tourism” with “any time” as a time frame for the search, gave a negligible 43 results (as of 22 July 2022) (see Fig. 1).

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Scholar search results page. At the top, the Google Scholar logo is on the left, and a search bar contains the text "street food tourism" with a magnifying glass icon on the right. Below the search bar, it says "Articles" and "About 43 results (0,09 sec)". On the left side, there are several filter options: "Any time" (with sub-options: Since 2022, Since 2021, Since 2018, Custom range...), "Sort by relevance" (with "Sort by date" below it), "Any type" (with "Review articles" below it), and checkboxes for "include patents" (unchecked) and "include citations" (checked). At the bottom left, there is a "Create alert" button. The main content area displays three search results. The first result is titled "Thai street food in the fast growing global food tourism industry: Preference and behaviors of food tourists" by Y. Jeaheng, H. Han, published in the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 2020. The second result is titled "Marketing mix factors and a business development model for street food tourism" by S. Praesri, K. Meekun, T.J. Lee, S.S. Hyun, published in the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 2022. The third result is titled "Street food and food safety: a driver for tourism?" by C. Bellia, M. Pilato, H. Seraphin, published in Calitatea, 2016.

Fig. 1. Results for word search “street food tourism” via Google Scholar

Source: Authors’ own study.

Google Scholar was used in this instance because the platform is comprehensive, easy to access, and good for multidisciplinary research and scholarship. It is also a user-friendly interface with clear options to filter data in comparison to other complex databases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street food is not a new (or recent) invention as its concept and practise have a long history. Street food is, for example, part and parcel of the history and culture of Mediterranean cities (Sgroi et al., 2022, p. 1). For example, street foods in Italy have their roots in the history, traditions and geography of the territories from which they are found (Kraig & Sen, 2013, p. 204). From the Greek, Roman, ancient Egypt and the Middle Ages, food was prepared, sold and eaten in the streets (Larcher, 2015, p. 71) including small fried fish which were sold on the streets of ancient Greece (Kumar, 2015). In ancient Rome, street food was widely

consumed by the urban poor, who did not have cooking facilities such as ovens at home (Kumar, 2015; Kraig & Sen, 2013, p. 204). Thus, in Roman times, it was “normal” to see people eating, while standing, quick meals at a *cauponae* and *tabernae* where street vendors also sold sausages and bread (Bellia et al. 2016, p. 20). *Thermopolia*, in the Roman world, were entities where small meals were prepared and sold. During the Roman Empire, kitchens were specialised food merchants such as *insiciarius* the jellyfish seller, the pastry maker, *crustularius*, confectioners and baker or miller (Larcher, 2015, p. 71). Street food involved a multiplicity of players, trades and specialities to satisfy many purposes. Henderson (2019) argues that street food represents the local and counters the homogenisation of cuisine because of globalisation – as tourists are interested in it and, therefore, should be conserved as a dynamic practice that is evolving due to prevailing sociocultural, economic and political trends.

While street food has been consumed since ancient times, its modern meanings have morphed to reflect a desire to keep its traditions (Bellia et al., 2016, p. 20). In a country such as France – where streets do not have a deep-rooted tradition of street food (see Kraig & Sen, 2013, p. 133) – it is now growing in importance. This shift is linked to the evolving urban way of life because working people do not have the time to prepare lunch as in the past and in other countries, students want cheap on the go as renowned chefs have entered the market with healthy food (Kraig & Sen, 2013, p. 133). The role of street food has been evolving over time, because of the influence of urbanisation, and population dynamics. The change is also related to the emergence of “formal” food establishments that have changed the image of street food for the better. İrigüler and Öztürk (2016) observe that:

The industrial revolution in Europe in the 19th century increased the population in big cities where low-paid blue-collar workers had no time and utility to cook at home but feed on street food. Today, the profile of street hawkers and vendors is changing in most developing countries; while they were composed of uneducated, poor people with little money for investment in the past, today’s vendors on the other hand, consist of either qualified new graduates who live in countries with limited job offers or suffer from economic crisis; or unemployed professionals due to a downsizing in their previous jobs. (p. 51)

Thus, this suggests that the street food vendor is now more sophisticated and modernised – the type of foods, clientele and technologies have evolved. It is also an investment option for those looking for entrepreneurship opportunities and the generation of income. Kumar notes that urbanisation and street food, work hand in hand (Kumar, 2015). The increase in populations in urban areas and the fast-paced nature of life in these areas, has given rise to street food and its acceptance as an alternative to cooking at home where time is constrained. Globalisation has

also impacted street food by making some “local” street food, go global such that some street foods are both regional and global in nature through spreading to other regions (Kumar, 2015). In addition, some street food has evolved from typical street food to formal “restaurant” food. For example, the renowned pizza “Napoletana” which dates back to the 16th century and was in the form of a booklet/sandwich bears testimony (Larcher, 2015, p. 71). Today, pizza is found all over the world and is usually sold in formal food establishments and not so much in the streets. Table 1 presents some the status of street food in developing and developed countries.

Tab. 1. Past and current status of street food in developing and developed countries

In the past/and today in developing countries	Today in developed countries
Cheap food for the poor	Proper meal for busy working people
Class discriminative	No class discrimination
Business opportunity for the uneducated people	Business opportunity for new talent and graduates of culinary programmes
Necessity for blue-collar class who had no time and utility at home	Opportunity for exchange of culinary cultures, food for pleasure
Slipshod carts and unhealthy production	Fancy carts and trucks; creative presentations

Source: (İrigüler & Öztürk, 2016, p. 52).

Table 1 presents the distinction between the past and the present regarding street food in developing and developed countries. It can be noted that in some developing countries, it has taken some characteristics drawn from developed countries today. It is important to note that street food, especially in many developing countries has its own challenges linked to food hygiene, safety, sanitation, and/or the nutritional value. Extant literature shows some positive aspects of street food and also some concerns related to the low educational attainment among street vendors (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022, p. 1086; see also Giampiccoli, 2020) and its safety remains a major issue, particularly in developing countries. Henderson et al. (2012) posit that cooked food hawkers are a neglected component of the tourism and hospitality sector, but are a significant visitor attraction by offering inexpensive food and insights into society and the heritage of the country. Many people have not had the experience with street food, thinking that it is unhealthy and unhygienic, but the reality is that the incidences of contaminated food are miniscule, which can be compared to restaurants (Kumar, 2015). From a tourism perspective, perceptions and stereotypes of street food as bad *must* be considered as unfounded because vendors have improved their offerings. It can be noted that the prospects for street food, rely heavily on urban special and commercial policies, and actions of local governments. Many sellers do not know the regulations governing urban spatial planning although there is a huge need for urban spaces to let street food flourish

(Privitera & Nesci, 2015, p. 721). Urban planning is necessary for enabling the street food industry to flourish because urban planners designate appropriate locations where street food vending is feasible. They can also be a stumbling block if they do not facilitate planning that supports the street food industry. The laws and regulations must recognise and support trading in street food.

While street food can be enjoyment, it can also present problems for local populations. It is true that street food competes with the “order and cleanliness of a city and can become a burden for citizens” necessitating the need for appropriate urban structures, smart networking, organisation and regulation (Larcher & Camerer, 2015, p. 76). Street interplays with various social, economic and cultural factors with profound socio-economic, spatial and cultural implications (Fusté-Forné, 2021, p. 1). Praesri et al. (2022) are of the view that food tourism can be a niche tourist attraction if it focuses on price, people, product, process, and physical evidence. Because it is about gastronomy, it is a tool for communication, and raising awareness about sustainable and responsible consumption, besides being a laboratory or workshop for the development of new products and services (Larcher & Camerer, 2015, p. 76). It also calls for a re-think of the tools and structures of gastronomy (Larcher & Camerer, 2015, p. 76). Most importantly, from a tourist perspective, street food is culturally appealing and a lucrative tourist attraction. Therefore, street food presents opportunities to eat and enjoy the food for both locals and tourists. It provides a source of income for entrepreneurs and jobs for those seeking work. It is a way that can contribute to preserve local gastronomic traditions and practices. In a study in Delhi, Gupta et al. (2020) explored the types of street foods preferred by tourists. They found out that chicken *tikka* was the most favoured and *paddu* was adjudged the least preferred – these foods must be mild in taste, properly and hygienically prepared. On the other hand, Peštek and Cinjarević (2014) observe that the way tourists evaluate a local cuisine reflects rational benefits (cognitive images) of quality, price of food, and emotional benefits (affective images), such as excitement.

STREET FOOD AND TOURISM

Street food “stands right in the middle of the food, place and tourism triangle” (İrigüler & Öztürk, 2016, p. 52). In such a context, it has been argued that the development of street food tourism can lead to the improvement of the quality of life of people as locals strive to meet international standards of food safety and hygiene to exceed the expectations of tourist in a win-win situation for both locals and tourists (Bellia et al., 2016, p. 20). In Southeast Asia, street food is part and parcel of the tourism and hospitality package (Jeaheng & Han, 2020, p. 641). For instance, in

Phuket (Thailand), Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn (2017) observe that street food is an important attraction for the country. They also point out that hygiene, food quality, affection, satisfaction, service quality, and value are the key predictors of tourist's behavioural intentions towards street food. Street food provides food to workers, students, artisans, city dwellers and acts as an effective tool for food tourism (İrigüler & Öztürk, 2016, p. 52). Street food is about heritage and experiences – these are two attractive factors for tourists. As an experience, it provides a sense of place (Sgroi et al., 2022, p. 3). It protects the local food heritages and landscapes, that support urban life where street vendors are the purveyors of the street food experience (Sgroi et al., 2022, p. 6). Street food provides insights into contemporary society as well as the heritage of a destination. Therefore, street food vendor centres can be used as community spaces, where visitors can see the lives of locals and presents the opportunity to satisfy novelty needs (Chatibura, 2021, p. 412). Many people benefit from street food through participation and indulgence. In a study in Bangkok, Cifci et al. (2021) identify five key components of the street food experience as local guide's attributes, local culture, perceived food authenticity, novelty and perceived hygiene or cleanliness. The next section looks at possible trajectories for street food.

STREET FOOD TOURISM POSSIBLE TRAJECTORIES

The possible trajectories are obtained through the differentiation of street food for tourists in two forms, namely luxury and traditional; and being practised indoors or outdoors (see Fig. 2). Luxury street food tends to be more expensive and perhaps is meant for the high-end market. It is possible that contact with local culture is not very intimate. Luxury street food can happen indoors. A case from Warsaw explains this argument:

Within the specifically organized indoor “street food” space street food is offered by a number of small food stalls in a particular design environment where food is produced and consumers move around – such as between streets. It resembles the food stalls found in streets. Thus, while a “formalized/luxury” version of street food has emerged, such as in the Norblin Factory in Warsaw or in Browary Warszawskie (Warsaw's Brewery) in the revitalized business area of the capital, the entire gastronomic concept is based on the street food style. However, the nature of the meals, and, especially, the nature of the stands and the style of consumption, the exclusive design of the space, and the high prices of meals, are far from what is traditionally understood by street food, where dishes were eaten standing up and walking. Here, the dishes are eaten at restaurant tables, dishes and drinks are served in proper tableware and glassware, and so on. Moreover, the offer includes dishes from all over the world, not only dishes considered street food in the country of origin. The prices are many times the amount we would pay for a meal, e.g. in McDonalds, and even more so in the vicinity of the railway station, or in other locations with street food. (Giampiccoli et al., 2023, p. 11)

In addition, luxury/gourmet street food is possible on trucks. However, this type of street food also stands the risk of being influenced and taken over by “big companies” and thereby lose its individuality and uniqueness while risking standardization. In such instances, big companies tend to benefit from the economies of scale as they can purchase supplies in bulk and take advantage of bulk discounts and usually tend to have a good reputation with suppliers. They can easily ward off competition which small players cannot do. Street food in indoor settings does not have to necessarily be expensive as a “luxury” item. It can also take a traditional character. The same is also valid for mobile truck food which can boost both luxury and traditional types of street food for tourists and locals alike.

Thus, these food trucks and traditional food facilities remain outdoors. These usually cater for all groups of people – locals and tourists. These outdoors settings provide greater opportunities to learn the local traditions and heritage related to food and local customs. The only impediment or barrier to entry for food trucks is the cost of acquiring the truck. Traditional – not mobile – outdoor street food must also be recognised and maintained as relevant and as a true custodian of traditional street food, therefore, as a fundamental category for the (street food) tourism sector. It is a fundamental tourist attraction and somehow represents the original form of street food. Street food tours are also a popular feature in Asia and in some European cities. This represents a bridge between the adventurous and the less adventurous tourists. It should be admitted that studies on street food tours are rare. Figure 2 shows the street food trajectory framework and its configuration of street food.

From these various trajectories, two strands may emerge – formalised/regulated (gourmet and luxury) and informal/unregulated (traditional, cheap and affordable). This insinuates the important role of government. Therefore, government has a significant role to play as a town planner, for trading licences and ensuring health and safety in the sector.

The typical tourist typology to embark on street tourism is someone who is adventurous, loves his/her food, is curious about other cultures, is open-minded, likes the outdoors and is willing to learn other cultures, languages and customs. However, basic hygiene and safety conditions must be promulgated in law. Thus, more adventurous tourists are open to eat in outdoor locations as they try more traditional types of street food; while less adventurous tourists will prefer more indoor and formal settings where street food can become more a luxury types of street food due to the indoor formal setting. This framework applies to most street food destinations, in Asia, America and Europe and Africa where the practice of street food is typical and established. The traditional mobile/“cart” street food formats may applying in destinations found in developing economies because of ease of entry into this business. Ease of entry is facilitated by low start-up costs, minimal physi-

cal infrastructure required, greater flexibility to meet market requirements, minimal skills required, a personal touch, minimal certification and permits required, low risk of unsold goods, as well as low inventory and storage costs. Bigger firms are potential drivers of the “luxury”/“gourmet” SFT which is formalised and regulated driven by their financial muscle and market expertise and knowhow. The factors driving these formats are variegated.

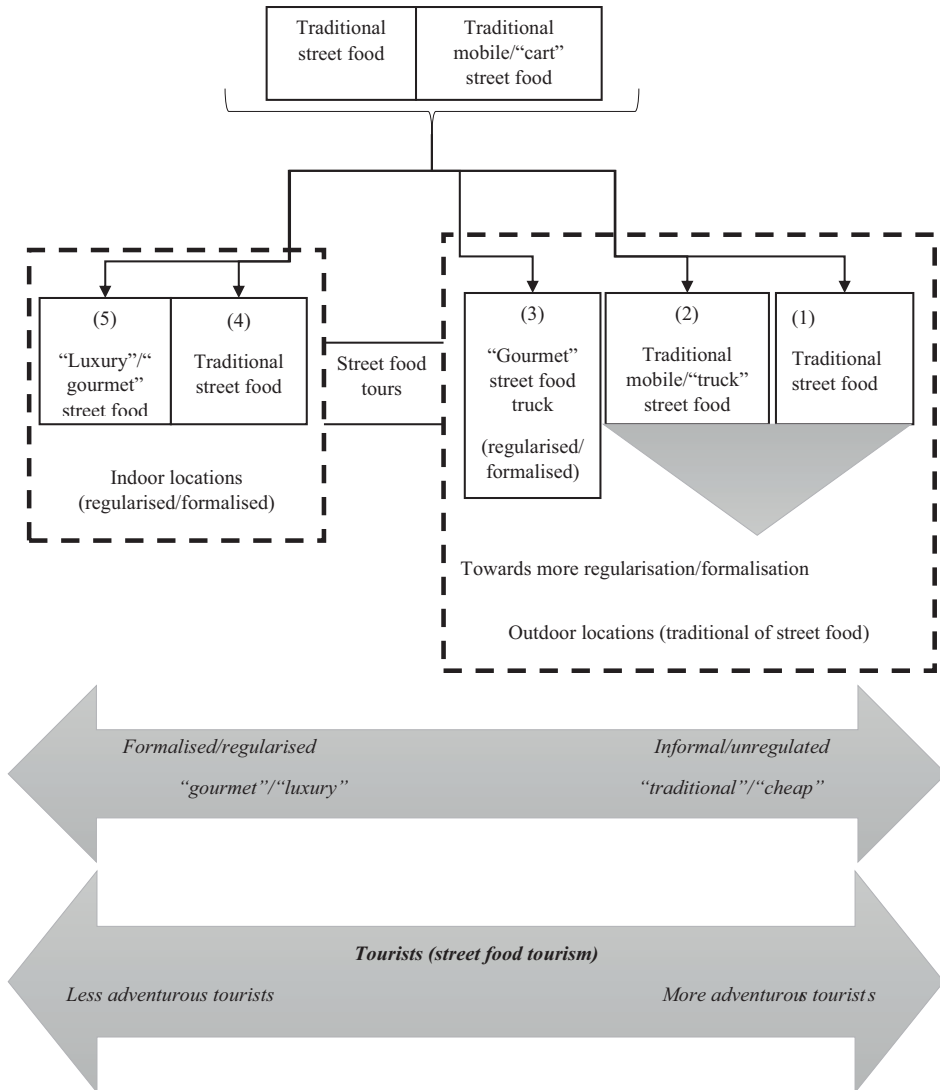


Fig. 2. Street food trajectory framework

Source: Authors' own study.

DISCUSSION

This section addresses the issue of regularisation and formalisation, the importance of the sub-sector for job creation and poverty alleviation; as well as the role of government in ensuring safety and hygiene in the sector and the significance of the street food trajectory framework. It is evident from the foregoing that regularisation and formalisation of traditional street food will follow different approaches and speed based on each country and local circumstances and political will. Mitgosoom and Ashton (2019, p. 70) observed that street food offers a genuine experience of the consumption of traditional foods and provides a platform to communicate culture and identity. There are some ingredients that we believe can enhance this sector in terms of job creation and poverty alleviation. The sector has to be more inclusive of disadvantaged community members to counteract capitalist globalisation and institutionalization/standardization of street food. Deliberate actions have to be taken by governments to make this happen. The sector should be legally supported and formalised, but it should maintain its traditional “informal” character for it to remain as a tourist attraction. Food cannot be ignored in the tourism discourse as it connects the destination (space), the people and time by making the destination attractive and memorable as food is much a culture as it is a lifestyle. For others, food is the soul and spirit of a people because in many ways, it gives some semblance of their identity. For other people, it represents their tradition, legacy and heritage.

This also resonates with the need to counteract the influence of capitalist globalisation and institutionalization/standardization of street food. It behoves upon governments to develop specific SFT areas (which should still be able to maintain its “informal” character) that comply with the health and hygiene requirements of the local municipality and government. As such government support structures and recognition are necessary for this industry to be accepted as an economic sector for both traditional street food and the evolution of different types of street food. Safety and hygiene are very important components. Overall, for the good of the economy, there is a need to promote street food as a tourism attraction linked to local contexts (traditional food, ingredients, and so on). Thus, government and institutional support to street food that embraces local contexts to maintain local food traditions is necessary principally because that is what new tourist are searching for. This can be expanded to linking street food to agriculture including agri-business, as sources of the food.

The framework presented in this paper applies to most street food destinations giving it an element of universal application. However, the traditional mobile/“cart” street food formats may be more prominent in destinations found in developing economies because of ease of entry while bigger firms may drive the establishment of formalised “luxury”/“gourmet” formats against a backdrop of their financial resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Street food sector is here to stay given the growing demands of growing populations due to urbanisation, the lack of time to prepare food at home, the accessibility of street food and rising incomes that will influence the trajectories of street food going forward. What is clear is that the sector involves many players from ice-cream vendors to pastry makers, from jellyfish sellers to confectioners, from bakers to French fry and hotdog vendors, etc. It is a sector that has the potential to create jobs and requires basic cooking skills to start a venture. Street food trading can be practised anywhere and anytime where there is human traffic.

Based on the current evolution of street food, this paper proposed various trajectories that can influence SFT. These connect street food to those tourists who are more to adventurous on a spectrum of the various types of street food as an attraction. To that end, government should be involved in regulating the street food sector to maintain its traditional appeal and consequently enhance street food as a tourism attraction.

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