

From place to plate. . . and back again: editorial reflections on the complex entanglements between place and gastronomic development

This flavoursome special issue – From Place to Plate: Gastronomy and rural entrepreneurship – features a range of gastronomic experiences, from beer to cheese, as lenses through which to consider a variety of places, food-place interactions and the politics involved in such interrelations. From Wales to Italy, we consider the multi-layered place entanglements with food, drink and experiences, and the producers, consumers and marketers of such gastronomic encounters. Throughout history, local food practices have been major signifiers of how places are; how they might be understood and remembered. Thus identity, food and place have a long relationship which serve as mental cues to remembered reveries about places. Yorkshire pudding, haggis, Neapolitan pizza, chorizo and even frankfurters and hamburgers are all evocative of powerful place imaginaries. Set within the wider backdrop of global-local tensions (Leitch, 2003), rising concerns around sustainability, growth in vegetarianism and veganism (*The Economist*, 2019) and a blossoming “foodie” culture (Richards, 2015), it is arguably now more important than ever to understand how place and gastronomic development interrelate.

The papers in this special issue, therefore, all explore the intimate links between food and place, and they gather around four interrelated themes. The first relates to the immaterial aspects of gastronomy and places; the narratives, traditions, emotions, memories and multi-sensory experiences intertwined with the trading, growing, harvesting, processing, sharing and consuming of food in place. As Bennett (2010, p. 51) suggests, food is itself “an actant in an agentic assemblage that includes among its members my metabolism, cognition and moral sensibility”. Thus, the symbolic resonance of place resides partly in the foods and edible products originating there, in the form of sensual characteristics such as aroma, texture, taste, appearance and associated sounds (Pink, 2015). As Rodriguez finds in her paper in this special issue – *Shared landscapes: the impact of residents’ visual and sensual perceptions of regional meat production on brand development* – consumers make inferences about the Herdwick lamb brand through sharing the multi-sensory landscape with the sheep on the fells and in the farmyards. Such sensorial “pre-product” experiences, she contends, can lead to consumer perceptions of a higher quality, better flavoured and more “authentic” meat product.

Furthermore, the memories and narratives surrounding food and place help to meld, maintain and effectively market their interconnections. As Palladino reveals in her paper – *Rediscovering people, places and traditions: a story of stories* – to preserve important gastronomic traditions, development policies should consider the people and stories behind the production of foods. The paper, therefore, offers a reflexive and empathetic methodology for capturing the voices of local people involved in maintaining such gastronomic traditions, to foster bottom-up and sustainable strategies around promoting a place’s local food and drink offer, rather than imposing these narratives using a top-down managerial approach.

This alerts us to the second key theme weaving the special issue articles together: that of the importance of people to food-place entanglements. As well as considering the land, via terroir, soils, fields, wild places and other non-human materialities involved in food production and consumption, food is also a core aspect of our human selves. We assimilate food both physiologically and culturally, and it is associated with our identities viscerally, socially, ethically. For cityscapes and landscapes, the farming, finding, buying, gathering



and sharing of food acknowledges the affordances and interactions which inhere in a “heftedness” – a learned belonging (Mitchell and Hamilton, 2018) – to the land. What is novel for Sjölander-Lindqvist, Skoglund and Laven in their paper – *Craft beer: building social terroir through connecting people, place and business* – is the way in which what they term *social terroir* becomes a critical ingredient in the production of craft beer. They illustrate how small-scale food production and gastronomic efforts can (re)connect people, places and businesses in meaningful ways in a globalized societal context. Thus, although some craft beer ingredients come from distant lands, meaning the local is not always ingested into human bodies, these authors find social ties and local communities are integral in the promotion of craft beers, for instance through packaging, naming and other place and food branding strategies. In this sense, food is always a conduit to the outside world, connecting to a larger social, cultural, economic and political context. Instead of globalisation fostering cultural homogenisation and disrupted places, localism, and in this case local food, resolves (Harvey, 1989).

Indeed, several of the papers associate with the themes of food-based tourism. People have long travelled to “taste” places and to remember their experiences from their gastronomic journeys, bringing back accounts of what was eaten. Now, such experiences are made public more instantaneously than ever before as part of consumers’ online identity projects, sharing their “taste” in the widest sense of the word. These gastronomic accounts take both immaterial and material shape; when the food eaten becomes part of the stories told to families, colleagues and acquaintances back home, they “materialize” intangibly but their experiences may also come in the form of food as souvenirs and gifts. The choice to buy a particular food item and bring back home not only helps to convey particular identity positions, but these consumption activities can also be ethically embedded, as neatly illustrated by Pizzichini, Temperini and Gregori in their paper – *Place branding and local food souvenirs: the ethical attributes of national parks’ brands*. Thus, in addition to food souvenirs having an economic value for the destination, these authors demonstrate that they also function as “containers” of perceptions, ethos and experiences of place.

As Fusté-Forné’s study – *Savouring Place: cheese as a food tourism destination landmark* – further demonstrates, foods (in this case cheese) from a place is thus *of* the place, where the milk tastes of the grass, the grass is flavoured by the earth and the rain and so forth. The notion of *terroir* thus clearly emerges in this paper, which reminds us of how the “earthiness” of food and drink ascribed by territory and origin, affects and effects the sensual character, social resonance and identity of many foods and drinks, and the places to which they are associated. However, Cafiero, Palladino, Marciano and Romeo’s article – *Traditional agri-food products as a leverage to motivate tourists* – reminds us of the often unrecognised potential of such “placeful” products for fostering and promoting place identity and place attractiveness. Specifically, they find local gastronomic products are not yet fully leveraged to promote tourism in their case study area of Reggio Calabria in Southern Italy.

What must not be lost when considering food-based tourism, however, is the understanding that such places also importantly inculcate pride amongst their residents – pride of place, pride in-place, and pride in food – where identities, traditions and memories are confirmed and solidified over against the melting-into-air processes of fluid capitalism. To “eat local” is not just a badge of touristic identity to be savoured and shared, but one of belonging in-place for local residents. Bowen and Bennet in their paper – *Selling places: a community-based model for promoting local food* – explore the challenges involved in drawing on local food products and processes in the branding of places which lack a strong sense of identity or are tarnished with negative perceptions and associations. Their study on

local food branding in a formerly industrialised, and now economically challenged area of South Wales (Rhondda Cynon Taf), is thus critical of the reifying dreams of a perfectly imagined rurality co-existing with a productive local food economy constitutive of proud regional culture and identity. Instead, this “metropolitanisation” tactic means that, although there is a high quality range of foodstuffs coming from this place, with some of it closely tied to place-based memories and meanings, the arbitrariness of the label and the place name is a tough sell. This is despite some successful examples of so-called industrial foods gaining tremendous recognition in the 21st century as nostalgic icons. In the UK, we might think of the Kernow tin miners’ Cornish Pasties, Northern mill workers’ meat and potato pies, Lancashire black puddings and later “curries” – the everyday food of Southern Asian immigrant factory workers in the post-war years, now co-opted as the pride of Bradford. The UK is not an exception; wherever we go in the world, we find these emblematic foods. In some places these foods seem very “local”, tied to their place but can also be “glocal” items, which tell of either the role of innovation or the entrepreneurial (re)creation of locality in a globalising world.

Practices of producing, preparing, trading, sharing, marketing and consuming food and drink can ascribe class positions and create social, national and ethnic boundaries. The contributions, therefore, also have in common a critical concern with the power dynamics invested in the food politics of place, as well as the branding of places depending upon place stakeholders’ divergent interests and worldviews. Tensions around the local–global, authentic–manufactured and insider–outsider are thus addressed by the papers in the special issue. Fusté-Forné, for example, draws our attention to how European cities today offer food tourists a melting pot of cuisines from local, national and international origins, whereas Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al.* discuss challenges around “reclaiming the local” through craft produce within an increasingly globalised (gastronomic) environment. Meanwhile, Bowen and Bennet advocate for community involvement in food and place branding strategies; similarly, Palladino calls for the foregrounding of local voices, memories and narratives in promoting bottom-up and sustainable place development.

To conclude, the above papers reveal the importance of not only attending to the materiality of food and place but also being aware of the immaterial stories, memories and multi-sensory elements entwined in their interrelations. Furthermore, the central role people play in not only producing and consuming the foods emerging from places but also promoting a place’s gastronomic offer should not be underplayed. Finally, the complex tensions between the local and global, and the authentic and the manufactured, should be carefully navigated by producers and consumers of food, drink and places. Hopefully, therefore, this curated collection of studies goes some way to provide a critical consideration of ideas which might assist in conceptualising a so-called “progressive”, “organic” and “bottom-up” sense of place from both theoretical and practitioner perspectives.

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