

THESIS BOOK

for the Doctoral Dissertation of

Bence Csapody

Entitled

**„Understanding Locality Through Restaurant and
Food Festival Operations”**

Supervisors:

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Budapest, 2024

Tourism Department

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Table of Contents

***I. Background of Research*..... 4**

I.1. The aim of the dissertation and research questions 5

I.2. Conceptual framework 6

***II. Methodology*..... 7**

***III. Findings and conclusions of the dissertation*..... 9**

**III.1. Aspects influencing the utilization of local ingredients in the
Hungarian rural hospitality 10**

**III.2. Restaurant consumer groups according to their preference for
food based on seasonal and local ingredients 11**

**III.3. Similarities and differences among the consumer preferences in
Greater Budapest and Lake Balaton destinations 12**

**III.4. Role of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture
play in the online communication of food festivals 13**

**III.5. Food festival websites representing commitment towards social
sustainability 13**

III.6. Theoretical and practical implications of research 14

III.7. Limitations and further research..... 18

***References* 19**

***List of publications*..... 21**

I. Background of Research

The concept of locality is often compared to globalism in the hospitality systems (Gonda et al., 2021). The heightened interest in local food arises as a viable alternative to the delocalized or globalized food system, driven by consumers' desires to reestablish connections with farmers ("re-localization"), enhance the presence of natural and healthful foods in their dietary choices, and contribute to the development of their local communities (Zhong, 2023; Duram and Cawley, 2012). The locality incorporated into the restaurant's offerings can not only benefit the environment but also offer customers a sense of place, along with the value of originality and authenticity (Huang and Hall, 2023).

Appadurai (1996) primarily viewed the concept of locality as a relational and contextual element, rather than as a scalar or spatial dimension. However, the definition of locality remains ambiguous, as localities are not strictly bounded areas; they exist in a more fluid sense where boundaries are flexible (Jones and Woods, 2012). Despite the absence of a precise definition, nowadays, locality constitutes a significant trend in the hospitality industry, including cuisines centered on "zero-kilometer" ingredients, the revival of regional food traditions, and emerging local community engagement as well (Alsetoohy et al., 2021; Home et al., 2020). Previous research has labeled restaurants advocating for locality as "terroir restaurants" and acknowledged the correlation between sustainability and locality (Tresidder, 2015; Huang and Hall, 2023).

The utilization of local ingredients in hospitality poses complex interdisciplinary challenges, engaging researchers in geography (Duram and Cawley, 2012), agriculture (Contini et al., 2017; Givens and Dunning, 2019), tourism and hospitality (Sharma et al., 2014), management studies (Salmivaara et al., 2021), and other related fields. However, empirical research within the realm of tourism that includes an examination of restaurants and food festivals is still very limited.

I.1. The aim of the dissertation and research questions

Given the substantial impact of restaurants and food festivals on the culinary industry and the broader food system, this dissertation aims 1) to examine the practical manifestation of locality aspects in restaurant operations; 2) to understand how consumers perceive these locality practices and 3) how locality is conveyed in the online communication of food festivals. Considering these factors, my research question (RQ) can be formulated as follows:

“How does the concept of locality affect the operation of restaurants and food festivals from the perspectives of both the supply and demand sides?”

To address the research question, the aspects of locality need to be analyzed from various perspectives. This dissertation is constructed upon four distinct studies that present aspects of locality with varying geographic focuses and different methodologies. The first article examines rural hospitality in Hungary in general, while the second article focuses on two legally defined destinations, Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest destinations. These two destinations offer similar value propositions and, based on tourism statistics, are among the most popular regions in Hungary. Finally, the third and fourth articles take a broader perspective, investigating festivals in Europe and North America.

Based on previous studies (Trivette, 2015; Bazzani and Canavari, 2017), in my research I consider a local product to be one that is produced in accordance with the local food traditions of a specific geographic region, and characterized by having its production, processing, distribution, and consumption geographically proximate to one another.

<i>Research Objectives</i>	<i>Related Research Question</i>	<i>Related Articles</i>
to examine the role of local ingredients in the Hungarian rural hospitality system and to analyse the benefits and	<i>Q1: What aspects influence the utilization of local ingredients in the Hungarian rural hospitality system through</i>	A1

drawbacks of their utilization in restaurants	<i>collaboration between local producers and restaurants?</i>	
to investigate and compare the restaurant preferences of consumers visiting Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest destinations, with specific emphasis on the role of seasonal and local ingredients	<i>Q2: What are the primary restaurant consumer preference groups among Generation Z visiting Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest, according to their preference for food based on seasonal and local ingredients?</i> <i>Q3: What are the similarities and differences among the preferences of Generation Z consumers for food based on seasonal and local ingredients in Greater Budapest and Lake Balaton?</i>	A2
to explore how European and North American food festival websites promote local ingredients and preserve food culture through communication	<i>Q4: What role does the incorporation of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals?</i>	A3
to identify the themes in organizing food festivals related to social sustainability, and to provide a methodological framework for the textual and visual analysis of food festival websites	<i>Q5: How do food festival websites represent and communicate the event's commitment towards social sustainability?</i>	A4

Table 1: **Research objectives and related questions** (author's own elaboration)

I.2. Conceptual framework

The focus of this dissertation research is on Hungary, with additional insights into European and North American gastronomic festivals. For Article A1, the sample consists of representatives from Hungarian rural restaurants and local producers. In Article A2, the sample includes Generation Z individuals traveling to Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest destinations in Hungary. Articles A3 and A4 concentrate on benchmarks, examining the websites of European and North American gastronomic festivals. These studies offer numerous practical implications for Hungarian and international festival organizers, in addition to theoretical contributions.

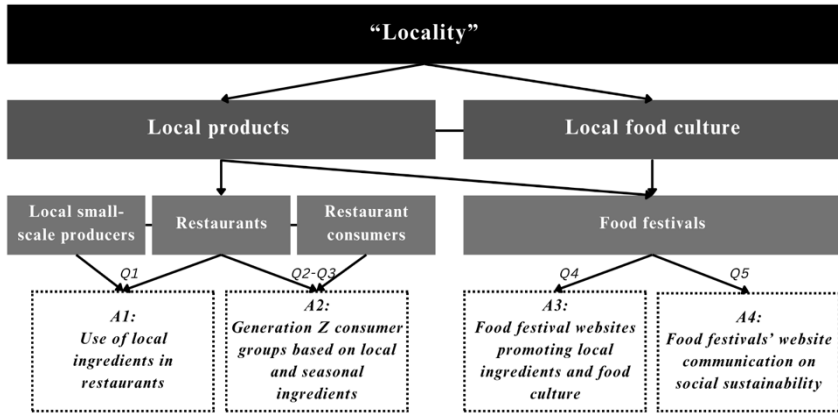


Figure 1: **Conceptual framework** (author's own elaboration)

Given the discussed challenges and emerging patterns concerning the notion of locality in restaurant and food festival operations, it can be inferred that incorporating local products while considering the requirements of local communities could lead to various alterations in supply chains, consequently impacting both the economy and society. Food festivals can further contribute to social sustainability through the presentation and revitalization of local food culture (refer to Figure 1).

II. Methodology

In pursuit of addressing the primary research question (RQ) as well as all subsidiary questions, various research methods were employed, encompassing semi-structured interviews, Q methodology, online content analysis, and multimodal analysis (see Figure 2).

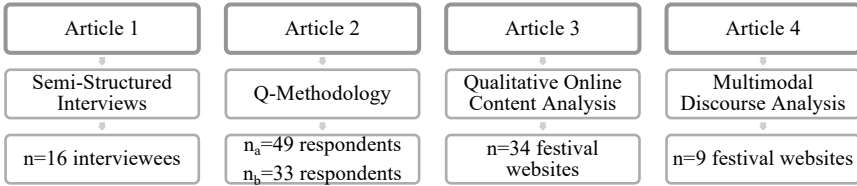


Figure 2: **Methodologies and samples** (*author's own elaboration*)

Semi-Structured Interview Methodology

To answer the research question, using qualitative research was essential, as it aims to reveal deeper causes and explanations that may not emerge, for instance, in a questionnaire-based study (Mitev, 2019). Consequently, to understand the perspectives of local producers and representatives of hospitality establishments (chefs, restaurant managers, owners), semi-structured interview research methodology was applied.

Q Methodology

In our study investigating consumer preferences in restaurants concerning the use of local and seasonal ingredients, we employed Q methodology. This methodology is increasingly employed in tourism research (Stergiou and Airey, 2011; Nikraftar and Jafarpour, 2021; Ásványi et al., 2022) and within the food science and technology domain (van Dijk et al., 2022). The ultimate number of factors was determined based on methodological literature and our research decisions, considering the following criteria: relevant correlation coefficients (with a maximum value of 0.5 between individual factors), Eigenvalue (with a minimum value of 1), and variance level (with a minimum of 60%). Additionally, each factor needed to include responses from a minimum of 2 participants.

Qualitative Content Analysis

In this dissertation, to examine communication patterns of food festivals on local ingredients and food culture, qualitative content analysis (QICA) has been applied. This methodology centers on examining the features of language as a form of communication, emphasizing the content or contextual significance of the text (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The primary attribute lies in its capacity for reduction, wherein content analysis enables researchers to extract more precise meanings from extensive datasets. In this research, deductive coding was employed, where codes were predefined using existing literature as a foundation.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

A multimodal analysis was applied in our examination of food festival websites, aiming to examine their contribution to diverse aspects of social sustainability. This approach equips researchers with the means to comprehensively grasp and depict how various modes within online communication, such as body language through photographs and videos, background colors and fonts, contribute to achieving the research goals (Rachul and Varpio, 2020).

III. Findings and conclusions of the dissertation

Main research question (RQ): “How does the concept of locality affect the operation of restaurants and food festivals from the perspectives of both the supply and demand sides?”

Response to the research question (RQ): Defining “local products” in a generally acknowledged manner is difficult, which in turn creates obstacles for promoting the concept of “locality”. Restaurant representatives demonstrate an inclination for utilizing local ingredients, though their implementation to restaurant operations varies significantly. Stakeholders frequently hold divergent views not just on the meaning of “local”, but also on how local items might be

distributed in the market. Initiatives are essential for facilitating relationships between the demand and supply sides of locally sourced products.

Nevertheless, restaurant consumers have a strong inclination to sample local gastronomy and value dishes that are made with locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. While consumers' interest in local food culture plays a significant role in their dining decisions, there are also noticeable differences in consumption based on the destinations being studied. The differences in preferences indicate that consumer behavior is also influenced by the specific characteristics – such as local food and beverage offering – of the destination.

Meanwhile, food festival websites can serve as promotional tools, presenting aspects related to local food culture and showcasing local food products and farmers. Spotlighting interactions between chefs and festivalgoers co-creating dishes and beverages can stimulate knowledge creation of local food traditions, while sharing content of local ingredients, and traditional local food linked to festivities reinforces place attachment and a sense of community.

III.1. Aspects influencing the utilization of local ingredients in the Hungarian rural hospitality

Q1: “What aspects influence the utilization of local ingredients in the Hungarian rural hospitality system through collaboration between local producers and restaurants?”

Response to Q1: Based on the interviews, there is no consensus on the definition of local products. Some stakeholders limit it to ingredients from the immediate settlement, while others extend the range to 15-20 kilometers, or even to 30-50 kilometers.

While producers identified farmers' markets and mass caterers as their primary consumer base, the restaurant industry was not a primary target for direct sales. Interviews with producers revealed that restaurants generally procure small quantities directly from them, preferring wholesale channels.

However, restaurants exhibit a shared practice of featuring seasonal cuisine prominently, disparities were observed in the quality and integration of locally sourced ingredients. Certain establishments relied heavily on local ingredients, aligning with their concept that prioritizes sourcing from short food supply chains. Conversely, concerns were articulated regarding the constrained availability of locally sourced goods.

The majority of representatives from both restaurants and producers underscored the significant role played by state measures and governmental bodies. Some participants advocated for the necessity of additional development programs and tenders specifically tailored to small-scale producers. Legislative revisions were seen necessary, to facilitate the implementation of the farm-to-table concept within the Hungarian context.

III.2. Restaurant consumer groups according to their preference for food based on seasonal and local ingredients

Q2: “What are the primary restaurant consumer preference groups among Generation Z visiting Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest, according to their preference for food based on seasonal and local ingredients?”

Response to Q2: Five factors have been identified among travelers to the Lake Balaton destination, alongside four consumer groups in Greater Budapest. In Lake Balaton region, "immersed localists" place a significant emphasis on immersing themselves in the local food culture of the location. They show a strong interest in consuming seasonal and local food and beverages. "Culinary enthusiasts" also show some interest in the food culture of the destination, however, they prefer familiar food items, regardless of the place and season. "Price-sensitive localists" are highly sensitive to prices but, at the same time, are eager to enjoy local cuisine while traveling. "Conscious localists" demonstrate their environmental awareness by actively choosing to buy local items and

searching out meals made from local raw resources. Lastly, "price-sensitive comfort-seekers" demonstrate a strong sensitivity to pricing, while the quality of food and beverages is of lesser significance to them.

"Social localists" actively seek out food that is sourced from local sources while traveling, as they consider it is of superior quality and fresher. They believe that purchasing local products generates employment, thereby contributing to the well-being of local communities. "Comfort-seeker sceptics" are particularly intrigued by the utilization of local products, their objective is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the local cuisine culture by eating out. For "price-sensitive globalists", both comfort and cost considerations have significant importance. Finally, "special-dietary localists" stand out for their particular demand for offerings that cater to special dietary requirements, while also preferring seasonal and local ingredients.

III.3. Similarities and differences among the consumer preferences in Greater Budapest and Lake Balaton destinations

Q3: "What are the similarities and differences among the preferences of Generation Z consumers for food based on seasonal and local ingredients in Greater Budapest and Lake Balaton?"

Response to Q3: Comparing the two locations, restaurant patrons in both Lake Balaton and Greater Budapest generally had similar opinions on their approach to exploring culinary culture. They expressed a desire to experience local cuisine, appreciate dishes prepared with local products, and avoid seeking familiar flavors while traveling. Nevertheless, certain disparities were also noted. Customers dining at Lake Balaton restaurants expressed a greater appreciation for the selection of local wines but found the food to be more average in quality. On the other hand, consumers in Greater Budapest considered restaurant options

to be more distinctive, with a particular emphasis on foods that cater to special dietary needs.

III.4. Role of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals

Q4: “What role does the incorporation of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals?”

Response to Q4: Food festival websites are placing a growing emphasis on sustainability by showcasing elements connected to regional traditions, presenting local farmers, and addressing various dietary needs. Their websites can function as teaching tools year-round, fostering sustainable habits and facilitating connections between local communities and food producers, so enhancing environmental circumstances, too.

Food festivals act as channels for the dissemination of local food heritage to festival attendees, so the study also concentrated on the portrayal of aspects linked to local food culture. The investigation identified behaviors that contribute to the preservation of local food culture and heritage. These practices include showcasing traditional cuisine, demonstrating the traditional grape pressing method, training youngsters on the production of local dishes, and holding seminars on local culinary specialties. However, in contrast to the use of local foods, a relatively smaller number of events expressly emphasized their relationship with local cuisine traditions.

III.5. Food festival websites representing commitment towards social sustainability

Q5: “How do food festival websites represent and communicate the event’s commitment towards social sustainability?”

Response to Q5: Based on the study, human relations within a community network can be strengthened through place-based narratives and visual representations. Visuals and texts depicting intergenerational ties and human interactions can be seen as symbols of social cohesion. The concept of inclusive conviviality became a prominent topic of discussion on food festival websites. The festival websites' compositional aspects depict the power dynamics of multigenerational families, portraying them as equally significant members of the community. Another contribution is the recognition of the importance of physical and mental health in the hospitality sector. Some food festivals have taken on the social responsibility of eliminating the negative perception surrounding mental health issues and incorporating it as a significant aspect of their website communication. Moreover, the findings indicate that the local cuisine culture and tradition contribute to the social and symbolic assets of communities and are mentioned on the homepages. Every festival presents traditional food and culinary techniques in a distinct way, providing attendees with a diverse range of cultural experiences.

III.6. Theoretical and practical implications of research

Theoretical Implications

The empirical research has revealed that operationalizing the concept of “locality” through the delineation of terms such as “local product” and “local culture” presents a challenge. This challenge is shaped by multifaceted factors, including geographical, political, and economic considerations. A disparity has emerged between the findings drawn from previous research and the outcomes of the present papers, notably regarding the stipulation for local products to originate from significantly shorter distances.

The exploration of restaurant preferences among Generation Z consumers sheds light on crucial theoretical implications within the hospitality domain. Utilizing Q-methodology, a distinctive approach in tourism research, this investigation

underscores the significance of localism in shaping food preferences. The identification of distinct customer segments highlights the pivotal role of localism and gastronomic inclinations in consumer decision-making processes, emphasizing the substantial impact of local food culture on dining choices. Transparent communication regarding the sourcing of food and beverages is noted to positively influence consumer perceptions, indicating a growing interest in understanding the origins of ingredients among diners. Moreover, the selection of restaurants utilizing locally sourced ingredients may be driven by a desire to contribute to the socioeconomic development of local communities, suggesting a shift towards more ethically conscious consumption patterns.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of local food consumption patterns across different destinations reveals the influence of contextual aspects inherent to each region on consumer behavior. The observed variations between regions underscore the importance of considering local context in understanding consumer preferences, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches in hospitality management.

In addition, the study highlights the role of food festivals as platforms for promoting local food culture and stimulating interest among both locals and tourists. Effective online presentation of local food experiences, sustained provision of dynamic content, and alignment with actual food offerings of the destination are identified as key strategies for enhancing the impact of food festival websites. Furthermore, the centrality of inclusive conviviality in festival discourse underscores the importance of fostering community engagement and social cohesion through culinary events.

Practical Implications

The integration of local products into hospitality operations presents both challenges and opportunities from the perspectives of restaurant representatives and local producers. To foster collaboration between these parties, effective

communication channels are crucial. Digital solutions and strategic marketing efforts can facilitate this collaboration, thereby streamlining daily tasks such as menu compilation and production planning. Additionally, greater collaboration with professional organizations and governmental bodies is essential for promoting these initiatives.

Restaurants should reassess their business models and marketing strategies to accommodate diverse consumer segments, especially Generation Z, who have distinct preferences and inclinations. Incorporating locally produced food and elements of local food heritage into restaurant concepts can significantly impact consumer perceptions. Additionally, consumers are increasingly concerned about the social impacts of their consumption, such as employment generation and support for local communities. Aligning with these values can enhance a restaurant's appeal to consumers. Hospitality professionals need to actively integrate local cuisine into the experience management to meet the strong consumer interest in exploring food cultures.

Professional bodies can facilitate collaboration between restaurants, food festival organizers, local producers, and other stakeholders in the hospitality sector. By providing platforms for communication and networking, professional bodies can help streamline efforts to integrate local products into hospitality operations and promote local cuisine.

Tourist boards should prioritize promoting the region's culinary heritage as part of its tourism marketing strategy. Highlighting local food traditions, festivals, and culinary experiences can attract tourists interested in exploring the authentic flavors of the destination. Moreover, they can offer resources, guidance, and incentives to support initiatives aimed at incorporating local ingredients into restaurant menus and food festival offerings. This support can range from funding opportunities to educational workshops on sustainable sourcing practices.

Food festival organizers should prioritize locality in their planning and implementation processes to maximize their impact on local communities. This involves prioritizing local participation, supporting regional businesses, and preserving food cultural heritage. Effective communication and educational campaigns are essential for increasing awareness among festival-goers and encouraging active engagement in promoting local cuisine culture.

Theoretical and practical implication	Methodology	Related Q	Article
Operationalizing the concept of local product	Semi-Structured Interviews	Q1	A1
Highlighting the role of cooperation to foster integration of local products into hospitality operations	Semi-Structured Interviews	Q1	A1
Identifying consumer preference groups considering seasonal and local food	Q methodology	Q2	A2
Integration of local cuisine into the restaurant experience management to meet consumer interest	Q methodology	Q2	A2
Highlighting the significance of localism in shaping food preferences	Q methodology	Q2; Q3	A2
Revealing the influence of destination-specific aspects on consumer behavior	Q methodology	Q3	A2
Highlighting the role of food festivals as platforms for promoting local food culture	Qualitative Online Content Analysis; Multimodal Discourse Analysis	Q4; Q5	A3; A4
Focusing on the importance of fostering community engagement and social cohesion through culinary events	Multimodal Discourse Analysis	Q5	A4
Emphasize value of communities and intergenerational relationships through online communication	Multimodal Discourse Analysis	Q5	A4

Table 2: **Theoretical and practical contribution of research** (author's own elaboration)

Content creators for food festivals should emphasize the symbolic value of communities and the importance of intergenerational relationships through a balanced mix of imagery representing different age groups. Festival websites designed to cater to diverse demographic cohorts can promote intergenerational connections through visual communication. Inclusive communication methods and positive language can enhance participation in festivals, contributing to community development. Regularly updating festival websites with news, seasonal menus, and traditional dishes fosters a sense of belonging and sustains interest in local cuisine throughout the year.

III.7. Limitations and further research

It is important to recognize the limitations of the current research and to address them in future studies in order to enhance our overall understanding of the subject. One limitation of this dissertation is the restricted scope imposed by the samples utilized in the research. This constrained the examination to certain aspects of restaurant and food festival operations concerning locality.

The selected methodologies may have inadvertently overlooked other relevant factors within these contexts, thus the findings may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the relationship between locality and restaurant or food festival operations. It is also crucial to acknowledge that the findings of the present study cannot be generalized due to the specificities of the methods used.

Focusing exclusively on certified rural restaurants and ranked farmers, perhaps restricting the acquired insights. Expanding the research to encompass additional categories of catering establishments would yield a more comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and possibilities associated with sourcing local ingredients. Incorporating a broader range of suppliers into the study would provide a deeper exploration of their motivations, practices, and the daily obstacles they encounter in providing local ingredients.

Additionally, the dataset may have overlooked festivals without an online presence, and the data collection process excluded festivals lacking official websites or English-language content. A primary limitation identified during the analysis of web content is the disparity between the information presented on the festival's websites and the actual initiatives or actions undertaken by the festival. Furthermore, I stay engaged in investigating the subsequent research subjects that are pertinent to my doctoral research:

- Extending the scope of the research to include other types of catering establishments, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to local ingredient procurement across the broader hospitality sector.
- Future research could focus on obtaining information directly from festival organizers by in-depth interviews, delving into the motivations behind showcasing local ingredients and food heritage.
- Future research could involve festival goers to explore their sense of community and place attachment. Future research on the strict collaboration between community members of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and festival organizers could bring new insights on how social sustainability is created, strengthened and communicated to locals and tourists alike.

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