



# Proposing a model on the recognition of indigenous food in tourism attraction and beyond

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## Abstract

Food is always more regarded as a tool to attract tourists. More specifically, local food can serve to build place identity, augment local pride and contribute to tourism development. It can also enhance nutrition, biodiversity and enhance education about local food and traditions. However, local people often have a negative perception of local food and do not perceive it as a potential tourism attraction. While there is a rich literature on food and tourism attraction, this article proposes a model to harness collective efforts to enhance the role of local food in tourism and examines the role of specific stakeholders such as chefs and educational institutions in achieving this objective. The model aim to emphasize the need of collaboration amongst stakeholders to be able to enhance the role of local food as a tourism attraction. The article conclusion indicates that the collaborative effort of various stakeholders can positively influence the role played by local food in tourism and society as a whole. It thus contributes to the literature on the role and relevance of food, specifically indigenous food, in destination marketing and tourism. The paper was based a desktop research using previous literature and internet sources.

**Keywords:** Indigenous food, local food, tourism, chefs, restaurateurs, culinary arts, tourism destination.

## Introduction

Food is gaining increasing recognition as a destination attraction. As noted by Lai, Khoo-Lattimore and Wang (2018:579), "Gastronomic tourism is a growing trend in travel, because food experience is a path to discovering the local culture and traditions of a destination." The product portfolios of a destination "consist of a variety of tangible and intangible goods and services. Food (including beverages) can form one of the most important of these elements. It can act as either a primary or secondary trip motivator" (Okumus, Okumus & McKercher, 2007:253). Additionally, more "people are now traveling for reasons of Gastronomy" (Okumus, Okumus & McKercher, 2007:253). Among other things, local food can build a local brand identity that attracts tourists and, at the same time, enhances local pride and employment opportunities for locals (du Rand, Heath & Alberts, 2003:100). The growing "culinary tourism industry offers both tourist destinations and tourist businesses (industries) the opportunity to create for themselves a unique competitive advantage" (Hornig & Tsai, 2010:74). While food related research did not receive much attention



in the past (Telfer and Wall, 1996:636), its role in attracting tourists to a destination has received increasing attention in the more recent literature (Mak, Lumbers & Eves, 2012:172; Sims, 2009:321; Hall, 2003: XXI).

The tourism potential of indigenous food and local cuisine are often undervalued by locals (du Rand, Heath & Alberts, 2003: 99). Furthermore, “local food in the form of regional cuisine is rarely presented as an important resource in publicity material and promotional messages prepared for mainstream tourism” (du Rand, Heath & Alberts, 2003:101). Collaboration is required among stakeholders in tourism and hospitality to develop and promote local cuisine (see for example Boyne & Hall, 2004:83; and Telfer, 2000 for a Canadian example). du Rand, Heath and Alberts (2003:101) observe that, within the South African context, “it has become essential to explore opportunities to promote food tourism and more specifically its culinary heritage.” The authors add that growth in tourism and a more sensitive clientele have encouraged South African entrepreneurs and more innovative chefs to invest in the development of local cuisine.

The proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Gastronomic Tourism Congress in 2018 (Öztürk, B. & İrigüler, 2018: III) highlighted that “Gastronomy is one of the ways that a society can express itself and its lifestyle. As the study of the relationship between food and culture, gastronomy is the main incentive of travel in today’s world, following ‘sightseeing’”. It is within this context that this article aims to contribute to the food tourism and destination literature. It is based on desk research that gathered and/or synthesized existing research. It considers indigenous food as a potential tourism attraction and proposes a model to enhance its role in a destination. While the model is pretested in the tourism sector, it goes beyond that as it aims to enhance the role and perceptions of indigenous food among the local population, institutions and hospitality companies. More specifically, it considers the role of higher education institutions in enhancing the value of indigenous food as a tourism attraction. Following a brief literature review, the proposed model is presented and conclusions are reached.

## **Methodology**

The paper is conceptual in nature. It is a product of an investigation of relevant previous work and the use of internet resources. Extant literature, therefore, was searched through various academic websites such as ScienceDirect and Ingenta Connect. Google Scholar was also used. A number of keywords were used such as ‘tourism and indigenous food’, ‘local tourism attractions’ and ‘local food destination marketing’. Additionally, general internet search via Google using similar keywords but also adding in the keywords field the term ‘filetype:pdf’ allowed the search to pick up sources which were mostly in the PDF format. The article has used literature sources, which allowed for the construction of the proposed model.

The importance of secondary data is that it saves the researcher time as there is no need to collect new empirical data from the field (primary data). However, secondary data has its limitations because not always do the objectives of the original research coincide with one’s own objectives. In order to overcome this, the secondary data was filtered, re-organized and supplemented with data from various relevant secondary sources, where possible, to suit the objectives of this article. The researchers ensured that the secondary data that was used in this article was of good quality in order to achieve the aim and objectives of this article.



## Literature review

Research related to “culinary tourism has received increasing attention” (Hornig & Tsai, 2010:74). The relationship between local food and tourism has been examined from various perspectives, including understanding tourists’ motivation to taste local food and beverages (Kim & Eves, 2012:1459); local food tourism as a component of destination marketing (du Rand & Heath, 2006); the relationship between American travelers and local food in Latin America (Pérez Gálvez, at al., 2017); the interaction between local food and local identity (Everett & Aitchison, 2008); promotion of indigenous food to foreign tourists (Sharma, Jackson & Inbakaran, 2008); the food market as a tourist attraction (Naicker & Rogerson, 2017); and the multiple specific uses, including food and tourism attraction, of a single plant (Vorasiha, 2019:10). The last example (Palmyra Palm) “stressed the multiple uses from the fruit, wooden products, roots and leaves, and as a source of food and tourism value” (Vorasiha, 2019:10).

However, some aspects of food tourism have not received sufficient attention. For instance, in relation to local food, it has been noted that notwithstanding the significance of food consumption within the context of hospitality and tourism, only a few studies have investigated this issue (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Cohen & Avieli, 2004) and described local food experiences in hospitality and tourism environments. These include an examination of tourists’ dining behaviour and food consumption at a tourist destination (Chang et al., 2010, 2011; Quan & Wang, 2004; Mak et al., 2012) and tourists’ wish for experiencing local food and drinks on their travel (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2013:484).

Nonetheless, it has also been noted that the, “tourism literature has broadly documented that local food specialties and cuisine significantly affect holiday destination choice and greatly influence the enjoyment of the stay. The food literature has indeed widely emphasized the importance of local products and gastronomy as a driving force for economic growth” (Alderighi, Bianchi & Lorenzini: 2016:324). It is against this background that this article investigates the role of local food as a tourist attraction.

While not the central focus of this article, it is important to bear in mind that the concept of local food is a complex one. This ambiguous concept (Mynttinen, et al., 2015:457) can be associated with issues of ‘more jobs for local people’, freshness and better taste, and an emphasis on local culinary tradition, and can also be linked to specific areas or interpreted as a specialty food (Mynttinen, et al., 2015:457). The debate on the meaning of local food also encompasses its specific usage and manufacturing “which ranges from the exclusive use of local ingredients to either the local manufacture of imported ingredients or merely the use of local supply firms” (Mynttineet et al., 2015:457). Thus, food and culture are interrelated and can promote the internationalisation of a product. Local culture’s “own unique cuisine embodies and expresses its ‘character’ and may eventually become famous as an international brand, food and cuisine play an ever more important role in the differentiation and promotion of specific tourist destinations” (Hornig & Tsai, 2010:74).

Food can also become “a ‘focal point’ for travel decision-making and the hallmark attraction of a number of destinations around the world [...] It is undeniable that food, as a cultural element, could create and strengthen the destination image” (Zain, Zahari & Hanafia, 2018:24). Zain, Zahari and Hanafia (2018:25) highlight that, “local food products play a pivotal role in the marketing [of] some of the tourist destinations. Some travel organisations regularly offer gourmet or culinary holidays with Italy and France as top destinations. Cooking holidays are offered in destinations like Tuscany or Provence in Europe”. For example, “tourism and holiday operators in Australia, the United States, Europe and Asian countries like China, India, Thailand, Malaysia,



Vietnam and Japan offer foods tour packages which combine shopping with side-trips to sample the local foods that are available” (Zain, Zahari & Hanafia, 2018:25).

Four main food tourism segments have been proposed, namely, gourmet cuisine or gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, rural or urban tourism, and an unlabelled segment. Gourmet cuisine or gastronomic tourism followed by culinary tourism are most often associated with food as the main reason for travel to destinations abroad (see Zain, Zahari & Hanafia, 2018:27).

However, while the relevance of food is growing, “not all destinations capitalize on the potential opportunities it provides, and not all that try to use food in their marketing activities do so efficiently” (Okumus, Okumus & McKercher, 2007:253). For example, from a South Africa perspective, the KwaZulu-Natal province “still lacks a website which includes a category which focuses on food tourism in Durban” (Bhoola & Singh, 2018:12). Building regional gastronomy tourism commences with material and other resources that are already available and which follow the growth of tourism (Mynttinen et al., 2015:456). Destinations and food are commonly associated with each other. For example, people usually “associate good food and authentic culinary experiences with well-known gastronomic countries such as Italy, France, Japan and Hong Kong, whose brand images are intrinsically connected with their national identity and intangible cultural heritage” (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore & Wang, 2018:579). Local food dishes “allow tourists to authentically connect with people and places through their senses because they can gain personal and bodily memories of consuming a local brand and product at that destination” (Ndlovu & Ojong, 2018:2). It is for this reason that “many destinations have begun to brand and promote local food as an attraction. It is therefore crucial to define the attributes of local food and cuisine identity in the process of creating a distinctive and attractive food image in destinations” (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore & Wang, 2018:579). Other important issues include integration with local suppliers and recognition of the need to ensure that “gastronomy tourism development focused on the knowledge base and innovative capacities connected to food and tourism in a region are enhanced further, so that tourism professionals in the food and tourism sector also belong to the target group” (Mynttinen et al., 2015:456).

Indigenous food is not uniformly appreciated. In Turkey, an “evaluation of the cultural heritage perception of the regional people who participated in the study shows that 47% evaluated traditional houses and monumental buildings as cultural heritage. On the other hand, 16% saw traditions and customs, 15% local food and cuisine culture and 22% saw handcrafts as cultural heritage concepts” (Yeniasır & Gökbulut, 2018:6). This highlights that food is not always recognised as a primary heritage item. However, the same study (Yeniasır & Gökbulut, 2018:6) concluded that local food is regarded as “sustainable cultural tourism elements adopted and protected by the people and serve as important folkloric products which can be presented to the tourists.” Local people thus seem to have mixed perceptions of indigenous food. Negative perceptions often arise due to the fact that it is commonly considered as food for the poor. A typical example is the wild edible leaves named *Imifino* in South Africa (Dweba & Mearns, 2011, 566, 570; Faber, et al., 2010; Kepe, 2008; Vorster, et al., 2007a and b). However, such perceptions and interpretations can change (Kepe, 2008:544; Bessiere 1998:25), with indigenous food being regarded as something that is eaten for pleasure. Research in South Africa among well-off communities suggests that “wild edible leaves only serve as an occasional treat, rather than as part of a regular meal” (Kepe, 2008:537). Without the support of the local population, it is difficult to advance the role of indigenous food in tourism attraction.

Promoting local food can promote the sustainability and growth of communities. Rinaldi (2017:10) notes that the use of “local food as leverage for tourism appears to contribute to the objectives of sustainability”:



Local people and lifestyles are an essential resource in cultural and heritage tourism products, and their success is usually dependent on their active engagement. Indeed, communities may be empowered by the proper use of local foods as leverage for tourism through job creation, the encouragement of entrepreneurship and enhanced pride through branding of the destination's identity based on local food and food experiences. Accordingly, to ensure the sustainability of the destination, food tourism should not be conceived only as an economic activity but also as a way to enhance culture. The focus should be on coherently promoting both tangible and intangible qualities of food products. Therefore, the relationship between the economic and cultural aspects of food tourism is essential to sustainability (Rinaldi, 2017:12).

A study conducted in Spain in 2014 noted “that the potentiation of local gastronomy as a tourist product involves strengthening local economies, a close relationship between local agriculture and tourism, clearly enhances the environment in two different ways: increasing the level of both organic production and local distribution. In the same way, it is necessary to guarantee respect for tradition and the values that make up the authenticity of the host community” (Jiménez-Beltrán, López-Guzmán & González Santa Cruz, 2016:10). In Kenya, it was found that “local foods hold much potential to enhance sustainability in tourism, whereby the tourism planner and the entrepreneur would work hand-in-hand to satisfy the consumer, contribute to the authenticity of the destination, strengthen the economy and to provide the environmentally-friendly infrastructure of the destination” (Okech, 2014:5). Local food can be very important in the context of sustainable tourism development and can enhance food security and sustain the agricultural sector in rural areas as tourist demands for a more ‘authentic tourist experience’ leading to the “establishment of independent and collective culinary initiatives that will eventually lead to the development of rural tourism” (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2015:27; Bessiere, 1998:29).

### **Local food as a tourism attraction and possible contributors**

Local food is strongly correlated to the local context. An important trend “is the connection of local products consumption to their place of origin – the idea that a specific food or wine can be fully enjoyed and ‘understood’ only if it is prepared on the territory of its origin, by people from that community, using local ingredients” (Meladze, 2015:224). Food is the one of the crucial “elements of a nation’s culture and identity, along with its history, symbols, myths and discourses. Enjoying food is an important part of the tourist experience and exploring the local cuisine is the key element for a contemporary tourist” (Ndlovu & Ojong, 2018:2).

Thus, each place can showcase and market its specific food. The “promotion of a destination through its own gastronomy is carried out by presenting a clear differentiation from its culinary resources, which must have a cuisine that is recognizable by travelers and have a varied and large number of establishments where travelers can enjoy this cuisine” (Jiménez-Beltrán et al., 2016::2). A study conducted in Australia noted that:

A significant component of cultural tourism for international visitors is experiencing 'how Australians live', including their cuisine. Conveniently packaged experiences of Aboriginal food-ways — through, for example, 'bush tucker walks' or meals featuring native foods or Aboriginal cooking methods — are marketable to both international and domestic tourists. Spin-offs of tourism include sales of culinary artefacts such as condiments and books about native foods (Bannerman, 2006:30).





As noted earlier, revitalisation of the appreciation of local food can have far-reaching effects on the preservation of local culture. Okech (2014:5) observed that, in Kenya:

The potential of culinary as a theme to sharpen destination images, and ascertain their uniqueness in comparison to other countries is also paramount. Where the food can be presented as an icon to which they can identify as a common cultural unifying trait, it can provide Kenya with a brand, more powerful than a national dress, and more easily identifiable than a Masai moran. This would not only serve as a marketing tool but would help eradicate the notion that local foods are inferior leading to a net export of culinary skills rather than a net import of the same, which has been the case over the years.

Local food can contribute to the establishment of a local brand that promotes tourism development. This linkage between food and place “would not only benefit promotional and marketing efforts but also preserve local food culture and traditions, given that food is a cultural object consumed for its symbolic and aesthetic value” (Rinaldi, 2017:7). Beyond this, the use of food in branding serves to preserve culinary heritage and produce a ‘sense of place’, contributing to the creation of a destination that is distinctive and attractive and offers “unique visitation experiences” (Rinaldi, 2017:7). As noted previously, local food is often not appreciated by local people and it is not often used as marketing tool for mainstream tourism (du Rand, Heath & Alberts., 2003:99, 101). There is thus a need to enhance the local population’s appreciation and acceptance of local cuisine while ensuring that marketing and publicity material present local food as a relevant tourism product.

The contribution of stakeholders is important because although “the authenticity and diversity elements are shaped in a long time span throughout the history which cannot be changed or imitated easily; recognition is mostly related with promotional activities such as creation of an image and the consolidation of this image by the efforts of all related stakeholders” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:108). Such stakeholders include “tourism directorates, tourism industry leaders, chamber members, associations, local artisans, gastronomy scholars, restaurateurs, chefs and so on speaking for the culinary field” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:108). Two issues emerge; firstly, “it is necessary that all stakeholders in tourism industry, inter alia government agencies, institutions, tourism authorities, and industry leaders, should work in close collaboration to develop supporting policies and projects both jointly and individually” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:108). Secondly the totality of “the elements that shape a destination’s gastronomic identity such as geographically indicated products, food itself, culinary diversity; and gastronomy festivals, culinary tours, gastronomy museums, local restaurants and producers’ markets stand as a travel motivation” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:108).

Collaboration amongst local cuisine and various other stakeholders should be encouraged (Boyne & Hall, 2004: 83; see also Telfer 2000 for a Canadian example). While the singular efforts of different stakeholders are valuable in attracting tourists, “a more holistic product should be offered by combining it with supporting products and activities for satisfying experiences” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:109). Collaboration promotes “dialogue and negotiation that lead to mutually accorded and innovative proposals about how destinations should be developed. They should focus on the destinations’ interests rather than individual interests and goals. This might require more effort and time but also more profitable results in the long run” (İrigüler & Demir, 2018:109). In this context, the role of chefs cannot be underestimated and should be valued. The relatively large pool of discerning consumers in South Africa has prompted innovative chefs and restaurateurs “to invest in the development of local cuisine” (du Rand et al., 2003:101) and executive chefs have been instrumental in launching various local/indigenous culinary projects



(Telfer & Wall, 1996). However, the relationship between chefs and tourists can be challenging and sensitivities and misunderstandings on both sides can threaten the use of indigenous crop species. Chefs could be unenthusiastic about cooking indigenous food due to their assumption that tourists will not eat such offerings due to a lack of knowledge on their part (Torres, 2002). This calls for awareness campaigns among local chefs that highlight the role of food in tourism (Torres, 2002:303).

In Peru, indigenous food has been revived, acknowledged and valued by chefs, restaurateurs and the government (Jacoby & Murillo, 2012). The advent of the new Andean (Novo-Andean in Spanish) cuisine represents an attempt to move from local to global. However, indigenous food should not be regarded as an elite food:

Novo-Andean [New-Andean] cuisine's main objective was to renew the image of 'traditional' Peruvian cuisine served in restaurants, certainly tasty and varied, but too heavy and too clumsily presented to meet the expectations of local gourmets and international critics [...] Although bringing visibility to foods associated with rurality and poverty, Novo-Andean cuisine never meant to transcend social barriers, since it largely ignored – or even hid – the cultural aspects and values embedded in Andean food and foodways. It was an elite movement of gastronomic exploration, consisting in selecting a set of indigenous food and ingredients to make a new ethnic offering in the global gastronomic market (Matta, 2013).

It was also noted that, "Peruvian fusion developed by young elite chefs took advantage of the Novo-Andean experience. But although they made more use of Peruvian food diversity, their primary goal was to conform to international standards, and not necessarily renew Peruvian cuisine ... Chefs re-appropriated and re-signified food items within global discourses which lent value to marginalized indigenous ingredients – but in doing so they displaced indigenous knowledge" (Matta, 2013). Debate continues on the revival of indigenous food and social class (Matta, 2013) and the need to move beyond an elite context and democratise native food so that disadvantaged groups – arguably the main custodian of local food knowledge – become the primary driver of this revival and revaluation.

The growing relevance of food in the hospitality and tourism sectors (Santich, 2004:20) underlines the need to augment gastronomic/culinary knowledge, especially in relation to local food amongst students pursuing hospitality, tourism and culinary qualifications as they will be involved in hospitality and tourism in the future:

Given that the students of today are the hospitality managers of tomorrow who must face and respond to the challenges of the future, their ability to meet these challenges is largely dependent on their education and the content and quality of the current curriculum [...] in order to respond to current trends in tourism, it is important that hospitality education include a significant and relevant gastronomy component, in addition to practical and business or management courses, so that students develop an understanding of the history and culture of food and drink, and in particular, the history, culture and traditions of the products of their particular region or country (Santich, 2004:22, 23).

In a previous article, it has been proposed the establishment of a *Teaching and learning centre for indigenous food and cultural tourism* (hereinafter 'The Centre') within the Hospitality and Tourism Department of a tertiary education institution as a "strategy to enhance the role and value of indigenous foods" (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2015:29). The Centre would serve the role of



providing comprehensive education on and promote indigenous food as a tourism attraction, for its nutritional value as well as its role in biodiversity (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2015:29).

### **A model to promote food as a tourist attraction**

Figure 1 presents the proposed model to enhance the role of indigenous food as a tourist attraction. While the model focuses on tourism, it could also promote the image and role of indigenous food in society. It includes various stakeholders, namely, education institutions, the tourism and hospitality industries, government, and other organisations interested in indigenous food and tourism.

Chefs are also accorded a specific role. These various stakeholders could contribute to the different specialist entities that are proposed. For example, it is proposed that the 'indigenous food group' will lead, supervise and enhance the relationship between local foods as a tourist attraction. This group would be assisted by chefs and the *Teaching and learning centre for indigenous food and cultural tourism* (or a similar entity).

The model in Figure 1 shows that the potential of indigenous food goes beyond food itself and the image of a destination to include various other aspects related to development. Indigenous "food and drinks for tourism can be linked to local heritage and contribute to sustainability by, for example, keeping traditional agricultural products and favoring local distribution" (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2019:1152). Education (of both local people and tourists) promoted by stakeholders such as educational institutions and government by for example, food expo, advertising campaign, workshop and educational courses, the maintenance of biodiversity, and improving nutrition in disadvantaged contexts are examples of the potential role of indigenous food. The revitalisation of local pride starting from the appreciation and value attributed to local food could augment the destination's image and encourage outside tourist operators to bring tourists to the area.

Educational projects such as local food courses and workshop, food expos and fairs, inclusion of local food as a school subject, university qualification/courses on local food can play a pivotal role in creating awareness of the value of local food amongst the local population. While food education projects should be specifically related to the work done by educational institutions (possibly together with chefs and restaurateurs), other stakeholders should also be encouraged to participate.



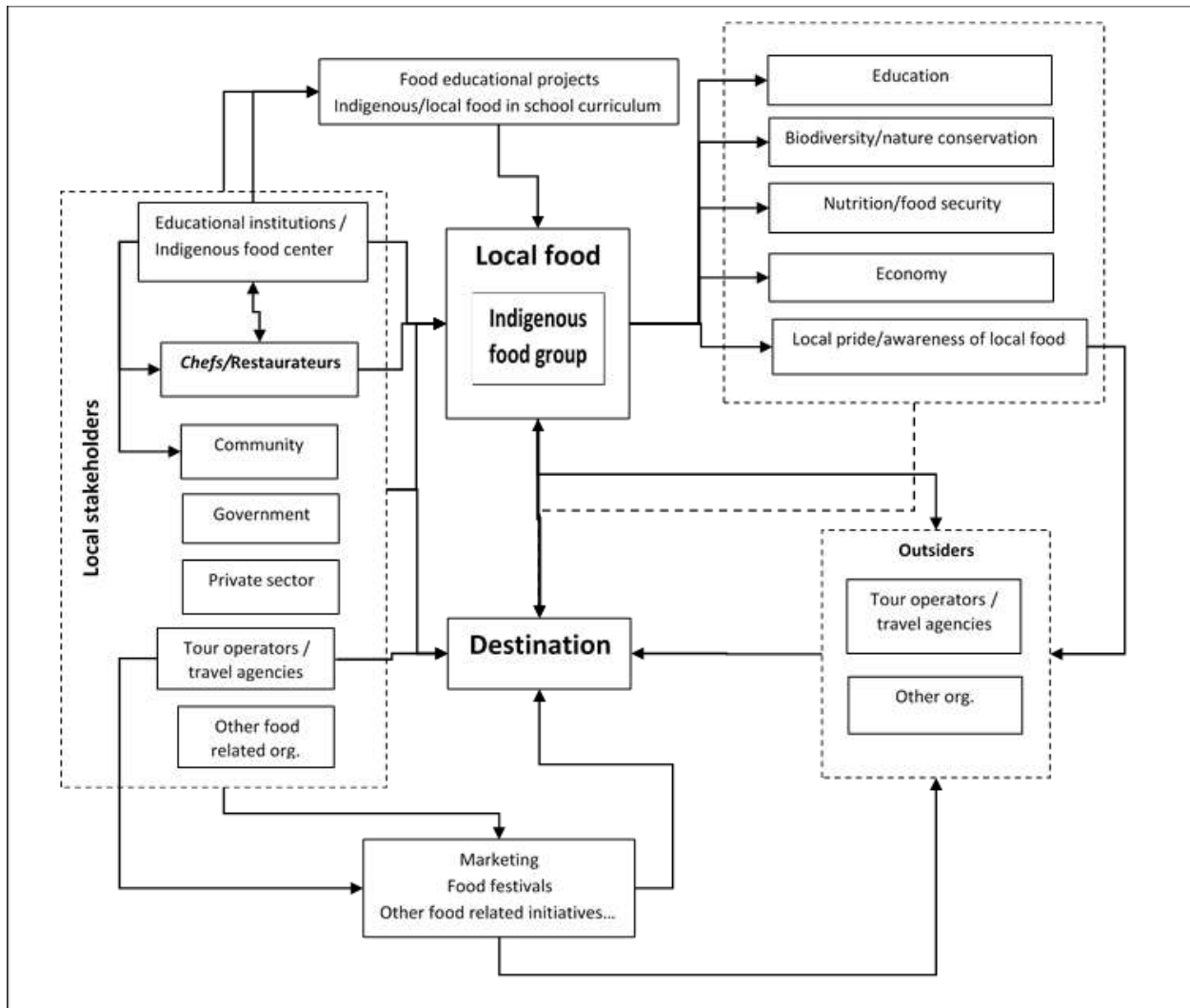


Figure 1. Proposed model to enhance indigenous food as a tourist attraction. Source: Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2019a (Partly transformed).

Chefs would also assist the Indigenous Food Centre to develop new recipes based on indigenous foods and ingredients. The Centre will work to improve indigenous food recipes to make it more acceptable and tourism attractive while keeping its indigenous flair. Recognition of changes and possible shift from authenticity (for taste and tourism reasons) will have to be acknowledged, to culturally preserve/ distinguish the 'authentic' and 'non authentic' recipes. The new recipes together with the fostering of the value and recognition of indigenous food as a 'pride' element of the culture will work to make indigenous food more accepted in society and a contributing element to cultural tourism. As a positive 'side-effect' the new recipes will contribute to other community development and well-being factors such as biodiversity, nutrition and food security (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2015:29).

While education institutions and chefs should be the major stakeholders in the Centre, other stakeholders (see the dotted line) could also contribute based on their specific knowledge and the tasks required. Finally, the role of the indigenous food group will be to educate, disseminate, promote and market indigenous food among various hospitality and tourism entities such as restaurants and tour operators as well as the broader society. The group could also launch initiatives such a local food festival, food markets, a magazine and websites. Food markets are a



new phenomenon in food tourism. Naicker and Rogerson (2017:14) note the “growth of food markets as a new tourism and recreational product in urban areas of South Africa such as in Gauteng province”. All stakeholders should be involved in finding new ways to promote local food. For example, a study in Turkey proposes that “people who want to open boutique hotels or restaurants where traditional food will be sold could be supported with low-interest loans...” (Yeniasır & Gökbulut, 2018). Collaboration among chefs, restaurant owners, government institutions and specific entities such as banks is paramount.

## Conclusion

Local food is regarded as a valuable tool in destination marketing and can serve to enhance a location’s attractiveness. It can also make a significant contribution to building local identity. Local food can also promote sustainability and it should thus be linked to issues such as agriculture, job creation and community empowerment. This article proposed a model to enhance the role of indigenous food and cuisine in promoting tourism. The model is based on the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders and the establishment of an ‘indigenous food group’. The specific role of chefs and educational institutions with an associated indigenous food centre was also set out. The indigenous food group’s role will be to promote indigenous food to various tourism and hospitality stakeholders and launch new initiatives related to indigenous food. The collaborative effort of various stakeholders can positively impact the role played by local food in tourism and society as a whole. The article contributes to the literature on the growing relevance of food’s role in destination marketing and tourism.

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