

A Process Map for Creating a 6+ Gastro-cluster Network: Facilitating Sustainable Gastronomic Destination Development in Africa and the World

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Abstract

Gastro-tourism is the pursuit of memorable, authentic food and beverage experiences while traveling globally, regionally, or even locally. This research paper is a synthesis of data and findings of an ongoing study to better define the phenomenon and to identify minimal critical elements that are necessary for sustainable gastro-destination development. Through a mixed-methods grounded-research study qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. Three evidence-based models are explained and an easy-to-follow step-by-step process that grassroots stakeholders can use to create or strengthen existing networks/clusters of food and beverage businesses is introduced. This paper is the first to provide steps that can be followed to establish co-branded 6+ Gastro-Clusters/networks: Findings presented in this paper provide theoretical and operational insights into the prevalent shift from commodity-type product/service dominant tourism, to a unique and differentiated competitive advantage of co-created experiential tourism which is impossible for other destinations to replicate. African sub-regions possess unique, diverse, and dynamic potential for establishing authentic 6+ Gastro-Clusters that attract gastro-tourists who can stimulate sustainable gastro-destination creation/expansion, by stakeholders sharing their local/regional food & beverage customs with international and domestic travelers who infuse their discretionary funds into local communities. The African continent is poised for this systematic and more sustainable gastro-tourism focus.

Keywords: Gastro-tourism; F&B tourism; destination development; Africa tourism; co-branded gastro-clusters; gastronomy

Introduction

Gastro-tourism is one of the most popular and prevalent types of experiential tourism and is perhaps the most adaptable to sustainable destination development. Why? Gastro-tourism requires minimal infrastructure and relies on local resources. All geographic destinations (large urban centers to small rural villages) have unique food and beverage cultures to share (Jenkins, 2004), but sustainability hinges more on what is not required. Successful gastro-tourism is not dependent on extraordinary natural or man-made features like mountains, amusement parks, or 5-star hotels. Instead, this tourism niche revolves totally around local food resources (ingredients) and local food experts willing to share what they already know in genuine ways. Beyond critical minimal infrastructure elements (health & safety, transportation, lodging and communication), gastronomic tourism depends upon authentic genuine host-visitor interactions.

Gastro-tourists travel more often, stay longer, spend more, create more eWOM (word-of-mouth) and post more on social media. Additionally, their high-risk tolerance means they are often the first to discover a new destination and the first to travel after a serious disruption; they are destination influencers (Anderson et al., 2017). Destination developers value that gastro-tourism boosts local economies by introducing new outside-of-the-area monies and facilitates job growth, skilled workforces, and elevates local living standards (Kuang & Bhat, 2017).

The mandate of this paper is to present an empirically based process map that can be followed to create or strengthen existing networks, called 6+ gastro-clusters, that promise the infrastructure and memorability elements that gastro-tourists desire. The 6+ represents the minimum number (six) of experiences that must be present for a location to warrant an overnight visit from a gastro-tourist (Williams et al., 2018). The process helps community leaders and food and beverage entrepreneurs understand and assess the minimum infrastructure and memorability features/attributes and the co-branding promises that must be in place to entice international as well as domestic gastro-tourists to spend their discretionary funds in a distinct geographic region. Additionally, the paper exposes the characteristics of gastro-tourists and why and how they are not merely niche tourism segmentation but are destination influencers. Hence, specialized attention from the African tourism industry is warranted if an area, especially one that is emerging or developing, hopes to eventually become a more prominent tourist destination.

Background and literature review

A common definition for Gastro-tourism is needed before examining Gastro-cluster formation that contributes to destination development. For this paper the following definition inspired by Williams et al. (2014) will be used and built upon: Gastro-tourism is the intentional pursuit of authentic, memorable, culinary experiences of all kinds while traveling globally, regionally, or even locally. Gastro-tourism is more than just eating and drinking during meals when we travel. It considers what we eat, when and where we eat, how we eat and with whom we eat (Long, 2004). Gastro-tourism is a specialized tourism subset that engages travelers who intentionally seek memorable authentic food and or beverage experiences (Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). It is all about experiencing local food and kitchen cultures!

Gastro-destinations can include countries, cities, towns, neighborhoods, or villages comprised of local clusters or gastro-trails that promise and deliver rich sought-after gastronomic activities to a steady number of gastro-tourists (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Karim & Chi, 2010; Richards, 2012). Gastro-tourism destinations provide opportunities for visitors to sample and explore food or beverage products that are differentiated from typical dining experiences (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Gastro-activities are places where local food or drink is prepared, explained, and shared with visitors/tourists, and opportunities to sample and learn about unique gastronomic products through first-hand experiences are presented (Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Hjalanger & Corigliano, 2000). The term local food/drink refers to the products as well as the way the products are prepared (the cuisine) (Jalis, 2006). There is also an emphasis on the use of local experts and guides and their role as cultural brokers in enabling their clients to interact (Morpeh, 2002). Gastro-experiences can include common food and beverage activities such as visiting an orchard or produce farm; walking through a spice market or speciality food shop; visiting wineries, breweries and distilleries; going to food manufacturing factories or chocolate making plantations/facilities; as well as more specialized attractions such as date farms, tea production tours, coffee plantations, guided mushroom foraging excursions, regional cookery classes, chef table dining, and boat/farm-to-table dining experiences. Gastro-

experiences are learning opportunities that require interaction with experienced hosts, chefs/cooks, and guides; tasting of the food or drink; and hands-on participation by the visitors (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Memorable gastronomic experiences highlight local foods and culinary practices that built kitchen cultures that are ripe for discovery by today's curious ever-growing segment of gastro-tourists (Williams, 2014, 2018, 2019).

Gastro-experiences are also a critical component within other types of experiential tourism. Experiential food-related tourism has become an important experiential niche tourism segment (Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Sims, 2009). Niche tourism deals with the study, participation and experiences within a region and generally involves adaptations from more traditional tourism services to experiences (Goeldner & Ritchies, 2000; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The development of niche tourism is a major trajectory in contemporary tourism that has emerged as counterpoint to mass tourism (Everett, 2016; Novelli & Benson, 2005). Niche tourism is seen as a mechanism for attracting high-spending tourists, and is labeled as a more specialized form of tourism than traditional mass packaged tourism (Novelli & Benson, 2005). Food experiences and events of all kinds are becoming an increasingly essential component in tourist destination choice (Hall et al., 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Rao, 2001). The gastro-tourism niche attracts food enthusiasts who want to go behind the scenes to taste and experience the local, region-specific foods or beverages and to learn about unique flavors and ingredients from cultural experts (Everett, 2016; Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Experiential tourism is a “global learning movement” where people seek personalized meaning through their travel experiences. It involves active participation, a sense of immersion and some level of co-creation (Ellis et al., 2018). Rather than passively gazing or merely observing, tourists contribute to and learn from the experiences (Kivela & Crofts, 2005). The desired outcome of experiential tourism is to achieve a complete participatory experience that provides new knowledge and authentic experiences (Ellis et al., 2018). The experience includes the people met, the places visited, the activities participated in, and the memories created (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Quality memorable experiences are a shared outcome between the tourist, other guests and the host and staff (Williams et al., 2018). Experiential tourism merges personal interests into rich immersive moments (Getz et al., 2014). A person's passions, interests, hobbies, and idiosyncrasies draw them to experiences that are individualized, active, offer learning opportunities, and are ultimately memorable. Ideal experiential travel activities are environmentally sensitive and display respect for the culture of the host area (Khanna & Israeli, 2017). Niche tourism sectors have emerged to address these personalized desires such as: adventure tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, agri-tourism, monument tourism, glamping, and many others including food & beverage related-tourism (Gheorghe et al., 2014; Sims, 2009). Authentic memorable food & beverage activities (gastro-experiences) also are often infused within these other popular forms of experiential travel (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000).

Defining Gastro-tourists

Gastro-tourists (sometimes called gastronomic tourists) are described as travelers who plan excursions entirely or partially in order to taste, touch, and learn about region-specific foods or beverages with local authentic kitchen culture experts (Gheorghe et al., 2014; Mazza, 2013; Williams et al., 2018, 2019). These tourists intentionally search for and travel to destinations where they are able to experience local food or drink in intense experiential ways (Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Henderson, 2009). They do not want to just watch, or even just eat good food; they want to be integral to the experience, seeking activities that prove to be memorable to them (Henderson, 2009; Kivela & Crofts 2005; Sharples, 2003).

Experiencing authentic food through interesting, educational, enriching, hands-on culinary experiences is the key focus and motivation for gastro-tourists. To them, food is valued as a cultural experience as well (Long, 2004; Tikkanen, 2007). Gastro-tourists seek excursions that involve immersion in authentic harvest festivals and traditional food rituals and ceremonies (Long, 2004). They enjoy learning about new cultures and understanding “otherness” through food and beverage experiences (Ellis et al., 2018; Long, 2004). Gastro-tourists see food, not borders or geography, as reasons for traveling (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Hillel et al., 2013; Omar et al., 2015).

Gastro-tourists are people of all ages/generations; they are found across economic levels. This research reveals that most have some higher education, but not necessarily degrees. Most work at least part-time either as employees or are self-employed; some are retired or unemployed by choice or circumstance. Regardless of discretionary time or income, they seek travel experiences whenever and wherever they can, choosing destinations that promise to provide multiple opportunities to learn about new cultures by experiencing authentic local foods and drinks with a variety of local hosts within a region (Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Williams et al., 2019).

Gastro-tourists are both deliberate and incidental. According to Williams et al. (2019), Deliberate Gastro-tourists routinely plan holidays, vacations and travel excursions to participate in food or beverage experiences; whereas incidental gastro-tourists visit one or more gastro-tourism destinations while traveling, however, the primary travel motivation is something else such as: visits to friends or family, business trips, medical procedures, sport events, or music/art events. An individual can be, and usually is, both incidental and deliberate depending on the circumstance and goals for each travel activity. Gastro tourists are more than *foodies*. One definition of the term *foodie* used in this research: refers to people who enjoy and appreciate food (a lot) and also enjoy the cooking process, even if they don't cook themselves. To them, eating is more than just nourishment. They appreciate and want to learn and talk about the ingredients and techniques that go into the foods they eat. They eat out, or they cook in, or they do both. They generally enjoy talking about the food they eat or prepare. Some, but not all foodies, also share photographs and write blogs about their food experiences (Gastrogatherings.com, 2022; Williams, 2018).

Using this definition, currently over 50% of all travelers admit to being a foodie. In the younger generations, over 54% of Millennials choose food experiences over music experience (Barcelona, 2018). According to Booking.com, 65% of Gen Z's ranked travel and seeing the world as the most important way to spend their money and over 94% plan the food components of their vacations or holidays before even leaving their home (McCrindle, 2020). Thus, over half the tourist population exhibits one or more of the following foodie traits. A foodie:

- Knows there is more to food than just basic nourishment
- Is passionate about quality ingredients and diverse flavors
- Celebrates the soulful art and finesse of a great meal
- Enjoys the social aspect of good cooking and good eating
- Loves sharing the perfect dish with friends and family
- Researches new techniques
- Influences emerging food trends
- Is an adventurous eater with a constantly evolving palate.

(Gastrogatherings.com, 2022; Williams, 2018).

Conversely, the word gastro-tourist is a new term being used in the tourism industry. It refers to someone who deliberately travels internationally, regionally, or even locally to experience authentic cuisine (food and beverages) in memorable ways (Williams, 2014, 2018).

A gastro-tourist:

- Searches for authentic food adventures, near and far
- Knows that flavor-tasting can be better than sight-seeing
- Learns about diverse cultures by experiencing culinary traditions
- Uses culinary moments to create lasting memories
- Never passes up an opportunity to explore the world of food

(Gastrogatherings.com, 2022; Williams, 2018).

Any traveler can be a gastro-tourist once-in-a-while! Few tourists start out being food tourists all the time (Getz et al., 2014). Most foodies (that's 50%+ of the population) have been gastro-tourists, either deliberately or by accident or serendipitously. Their personal travel is deliberately planned to experience local food and drink. When they travel for other reasons like work or visits to family/friends, they also schedule incidental side-trips focused on local food and beverages. Tourists eventually realize that one or more of their gastro-adventures has become their most memorable travel experience, the one they tell their friends about all the time! This trip becomes the trigger. Once travelers recognize their authentic memorable gastro-tourist experiences, the majority of them report seeking more and ever-increasing experiential foodie adventures as their primary leisure travel activities (Anderson et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018, 2019). Allegorical data affirms that once a person begins experiencing authentic food and beverage in intimate ways with local food experts, they long to continue and enrich their journey. An interview respondent describes a most memorable travel experience as: “. . . met real people from other cultures, cooked, ate together, laugh, have fun. This is what I want on all my holidays.”

Why Gastro-tourists are important

Besides being single minded about their travel adventures: planning trips where local food and drink is key; research reveals that gastro-tourists tend to travel more often, stay longer, spend more, create more eWOM (free word of mouth marketing), and post more on social media (Anderson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018). They span economic strata but in each economic category gastro-tourists spend more. On average, their food and beverage expenditures have been reported to be 24% or more above the average and statistically significantly above the median or mode (Barcelona, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). In a study where gastro-tourists were asked to recall the trip that they spent the most, answers ranged from \$600 – \$15,000 (USD) and the amounts that incidental gastro-tourists spent was statistically significantly more than the spending of the deliberate gastro-travelers (Williams, 2018). Hence, specialized attention and focused marketing efforts directed to both incidental and deliberate tourists is crucial and should be examined more fully. Additionally, gastro-tourists are often the first to discover a new destination. Why? Because they seek foodie adventures, not places (Hillel et al., 2013). They bring their friends, engage in extensive eWOM on social media sites, blogs, on-line photographs and videos, and positive and negative comments on tourists' and industry websites. The first food bloggers were GenXer gastro-tourists emulating celebrity chefs such as the late Anthony Bourdain, perhaps the most infamous influential gastro-tourist who visited Kenya in 2010 with his camera crew, making Nairobi a temporarily sought-after gastro-destination.

Gastro-tourists are destination influencers (Anderson et al., 2017). When they learn of a new emerging gastro-destination, they don't hesitate to give it a try. If they like it, or even if they don't, they blog about it, tell their friends, and brag or complain about it to other foodies. Once the foodies discover a place, soon afterwards mainstream tourists follow, confident that

they will dine well on authentic local cuisine. The benefits of the risk-taking nature and initiative of gastro-tourists as well as other important characteristics are revealed in the findings of this paper.

Gastro-tourism stakeholder cooperation and network forming

All those who directly or indirectly affect or are actively or by accident affected by local gastro-tourism initiatives are considered stakeholders and must be acknowledged as part of local gastro-networks (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Successful destination development fueled by gastro-tourism depends upon cooperation amongst these often quite diverse stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2010; Henriksen & Halkier, 2015). Gastronomic experiences, even single ones, are seldom the act of one producer alone and hence cooperation often across sectors becomes necessary. A large variety of stakeholders are required to satisfy the needs of gastro tourists, including food producers, retailers, hotels, restaurants, transportation, and attractions such as farmers' markets, cooking classes and gastronomic festivals, as well as local and regional municipalities and ministries (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Williams et al., 2014). Such cooperation, when not deliberately sought, can be fraught with interests and modes of operation that may not easily go hand in hand for the collective good (Anderson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018).

Although there is no one right way for cooperating and forming mutually beneficial networks, it has been recognized within the tourism industry that clusters that form to promote the uniqueness of a region's agriculture and cuisine do exist and academic research has focused on the associated economics that serve to reinforce the clustering process (Green & Dougherty, 2009). These industry-forward clusters can also be defined as a concentration of businesses in geographic regions that are interconnected by the markets they serve; the products, services, and experiences that they provide; as well as by the suppliers and trade associations with which they interact (Porter, 1990). Consequently, networking groups or clusters must be mutually beneficial across all stakeholder groups. For the purposes of this paper, networking is defined as cooperative behaviors between often originally competing entities (stakeholders) that benefit from economic and social relationships and transactions within newly formed clusters (Green & Dougherty, 2009; Hall, et al. 2003; Sautter & Liesen, 1999). Gastro-clusters are defined as groups or trails of multiple gastro-activities/experiences (supported by additional stakeholders) that form loose or formal networks for their mutual benefit that generally also provide overarching advantages to a community or larger destination. This paper proports that local geographic areas that support a cluster of 6 or more co-branded authentic gastro-experiences will be more effective in attracting domestic and international visitors to their destinations. The processes to establishing gastro-clusters for effective sustainable destination development are also introduced in this paper.

Methods

The findings, discussion and implications of this paper are derived from an ongoing grounded-theory, Mixed Method research project that was initiated in 2016 to examine the entire phenomenon of gastro-tourism in order to identify key infrastructure and memorability elements that are necessary for sustainable gastronomic destination development. Data and analysis from the following methods contributed to the process findings reported in this paper:

- Semi-structured Interviews with hosts of recognized international gastro-experiences (qualitative) (2016-present) N 87.
- Semi-structured Interviews with tourists at international gastro-destination experiences (qualitative) (2016- present) N 238.

- Surveys of self-identified gastro-tourists (2016, N 116 and 2017, N 133) (primarily quantitative, with qualitative analysis of responses to key open-ended questions).
- Exit surveys at international gastro-experiences (primarily quantitative, with qualitative analysis of responses to key open-ended questions) (2017-18, N 143; 2019-2021, N 18 = 161).
- Third party observations at recognized gastro-sites (quantitative plus additional observer qualitative comments) (2018-present, N59+).
- Formal Focus groups and forums with tourism and hospitality industry experts and academic researchers and applied case study analysis (ongoing).
- Also, informal discussions at conferences with industry and academic peers contributed to refining the models, processes, discussion, and implication points. (ongoing).

Quantitative data were uploaded to SPSS and variables were examined using a variety of statistical analyses. The analysis used to establish minimum critical infrastructure and memorability elements included reliability, ranking, and statistical factoring to determine which elements among hundreds were key in determining destinations that would be selected for gastronomic trips that included at least 2 overnight stays.

The initial constructs used to create the quantitative variables (questions) were formed by early open-ended qualitative questions directed at self-identified gastro-tourists, all later verified via additional tourist and host interviews. Where relevant, statistical findings are in the Results Section of this paper.

Qualitative data [phrases and words] were coded and categorized by two or more researchers and discussed until common acceptable themes emerged. Often, multiple iterations of original transcripts were made until consensus was reached as to meaning or category/theme label. Provalis Miner, Excel, Word and Word Cloud software were all used to capture, sort, and categorize the qualitative data into reliable and verifiable findings. Relevant direct qualitative quotes have been included to illustrate findings and clarify implications in this paper. Note: for any previously published statistical analysis used to support the discussions and implications in this paper, citations where the statistical findings were first presented are included.

Figure 1 serves a dual purpose. It portrays how the input from the data collection methods from this study were used to better understand the two primary stakeholders: gastro-tourists and gastro-hosts. It also illustrates how the dependent relationship between tourists and hosts drives the sustainable development of gastro-clusters and geographic gastro-destinations and highlights the importance of constant input from primary stakeholders.

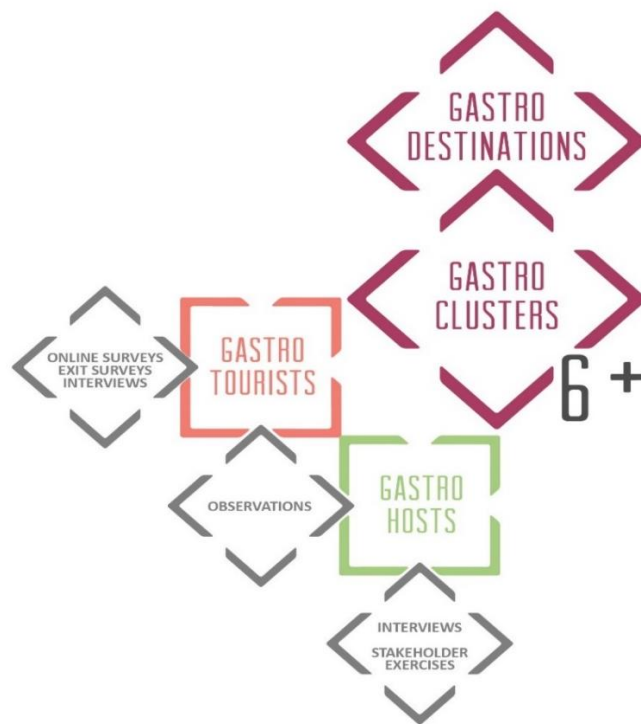


Figure 1 The gastro-destination input process

Results and discussion

The overarching research study uncovered infrastructure, memorability, relational and logistical features that 1) gastro-tourists demand, 2) hosts of gastro-experiences should embrace and implement, and 3) destination development entities need to better comprehend in the context of sustainable new or expanding tourist-focused development. Thus, tourists, hosts of gastronomic experiences, and developers are the 3 main stakeholders that benefit from the findings of this paper. To begin, everything in gastro-tourism revolves around the food! Local food and beverage experiences are increasingly more dominant drivers regarding the selection of tourism destinations and for gastro-tourists they are paramount in destination decision making (Williams, 2018). Logically, what the market (the customer) seeks (memorable authentic experiences) must always remain foremost in any strategic gastro-tourism initiative. For gastro-tourists, selecting new destinations for upcoming travel revolves first and foremost on their knowledge about local Food & Beverage (F&B) resources/ingredients and Local F & B People Experts that are available in a given part of the world.

This study verified that there are well known foods and beverages that easily conjure up perceptions and connections to particular places. Food & drink can be used to symbolize the tradition and culture of a place (Du Rand et al., 2003; Draskovic, 2016). Established gastro-destinations readily paired with foods include destination and food pairings such as: Italy & pasta, Belgium and chocolate and beer; sausage and sauerkraut from Germany; Kimchi and Korea; kielbasa from Poland. France is known for regional cheese and wine from particular terroirs such as Champagne, Bordeaux and Burgundy. In Africa, this too is true, but the rich F & B offerings found across the African Continent are not yet as widely known nor appreciated at the international level. In order for a place to become a gastro-destination, gastro-tourists need to become aware of the authentic dishes, kitchen cultures, unique cooking methods and authentic traditions that they will experience on the continent. The food, not the place will



come first in their destination decision-making process. Representative quotes from survey and interview respondents include:

My friends and I choose places to visit because of food. We are going to Japan next to eat noodles . . .
 Eating food with local people is why we [married couple] travel.
 We came for the brewery experience, not the town.
 Going to visit two more wineries [in California] and tomorrow go to a wine-and-food-pairing tasting.

As Table 1 below illustrates, foods have considerable gastro-destination branding potential. Findings of this exercise verified that it is possible to identify geographic areas just by looking at food and drink photos. Photos of popular local foods and beverages were shown to students and conference attendees who were then asked to identify the country that they believed the food represented. None of the hundreds of participants had trouble indicating the country that was represented by their own popular foods. However, outside of their own countries or regions the recognition was spotty. Table 1 illustrates the foods and country/regional affiliations identified by participants when the food photos were viewed.

Table 1 Popular foods that symbolize particular destinations

Food or Beverage	Country Association	Regional Association
Nyama Choma, Mutura, Irio, Ugali Urwaga (local beverage)	Kenya	
Injera with multiple side dishes, Doro Wat, Coffee preparation	Ethiopia	
Tajine, Cous Cous, Local pastries, Mint Tea	Morocco	
Tanjia	Morocco	Marrakech, Morocco
Kimchi, Bulgogi, Jap Chai, Soju (beverage)	Korea	
Idli, Sambar, Chana Masala, Curries	India	
Halloumi Cheese, Koupepia Sausage and Commandaria Wine	Cyprus	
Gallo Pinto, Casado, Patacones, Coffee & Guaro (beverage), Chocolate	Costa Rica	
Palmito Cheese	Costa Rica	San Carlos and Zarcero, Costa Rica
Pasta, Biscotti & Pizzelle cookies, Chianti wine	Italy	
Spam, Pineapples, Poke Bowls	USA	Hawaii

Secondly, destination selection hinges on just how easy it is to obtain accurate information about the destination’s F&B experiences. This research project unveiled that the biggest hindrance to planning gastronomic adventures is not time nor money. Self-identified Gastro-tourists tell us that “If the planning was easier, they would do it more often”.

The Top Factors that most frustrate gastro-tourists when planning to visit are listed in Table 2. When emerging gastro-destinations, like Africa, eliminate (or drastically reduce) these frustrations, it becomes easier for tourists to find them and book their travel to the African Continent. Whatever can be done by African gastro-businesses and destination developers to facilitate a tourist’s planning increases the odds of that tourist selecting an African country to visit and experience African F & B offerings. As gastro-tourists begin to visit because of authentic gastronomic promises that are made and delivered, they will not only spend their own discretionary monies, they inevitably will share their memorable experiences, spreading positive comments and word-of-mouth that will bring even more out-of-the-area visitors to African countries.

Table 2: Factors that frustrate Gastro-tourists while they’re planning

1	NO PHONE NUMBER	
2	PROBLEMS BOOKING LODGING	
3	DIFFICULTY PLANNING LOCAL TRANSPORTATION	
4	COULD NOT FIND RELIABLE HOURS OF OPERATION	
5	COULD NOT SPEAK WITH A HUMAN PERSON	
6	LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, OR TRANSLATION PROBLEMS	
7	TRAVEL INDUSTRY DID NOT HAVE INFO ON FOOD AND BEV SITES	
8	LACK OF ONLINE INFO REGARDING FOOD AND BEV EXPERIENCES	
9	DIFFICULTY GETTING PRICE INFO	

Results of Friedman Non-Parametric Test
 1 = Most Important

■ Direct person-to-person communication
■ Indirect communication
■ Transportation related
■ Lodging related

Suggestions for easier planning have been divided into eight categories and are listed in order of mentioned frequency:

1. Planning Assistance from professionals
2. Better Communication with Businesses
3. Use of Technology—info
4. A digital platform (APP) with accurate updated information on certified gastro-destinations within specified geographic areas
5. Accurate Price Information
6. Clear Authenticity Promise
7. Safety Assurances
8. Adequate/Reliable Transportation

(Williams, 2018 - Results from Friedman Non-Parametric Ranking Test).

The next section of the paper explains the three major models that were developed from the synthesis of data collection and analysis of this mixed methods study: 1) Minimum Critical Elements for Sustainable Gastro-Destination Development; 2) Gastro-tourism Stakeholder Network; and 3) 6+ Gastro-Cluster. These Models help local Entrepreneurs/Developers build local stakeholder networks that jumpstart sustainable destination development. Authors then lay-out a working Gastro-destination Process that is an interplay of the three models combined with other critical findings of this research study.

Model 1: Minimum critical elements for sustainable Gastro-tourism destination development

Figure 2 (previously published in Williams, 2018, 2019) depicts the infrastructure and memorability elements that the combined quantitative and qualitative data exposed as being the items that gastro-tourists expect if they are to have a memorable gastro-experience. As the triangle-model illustrates, Memorability is prominently depicted at the tip, symbolically supported by critical infrastructure elements (Health and Safety, Transportation and Lodging and Communication). Resources depicted along the bottom bar represent the time, monetary, capital and people properties that are required to support both the infrastructure and memorability components of micro- and macro-level gastro-destinations as well as new tourist products generated from multiplier effects attributed to initial resource investments. The infrastructure and memorability needs in the hierarchy exist independently at every stage and are modulated by the available resources. The model also depicts the five elements across five stages: 1) create gastro-activities or destinations; 2) plan the gastro-trip; 3) travel to the experience; 4) experience the experience, and 5) reflect upon the gastro-experience or

destination. Using this model to assess these key attributes across each of the stages is an important initial step in the gastro-destination development process.

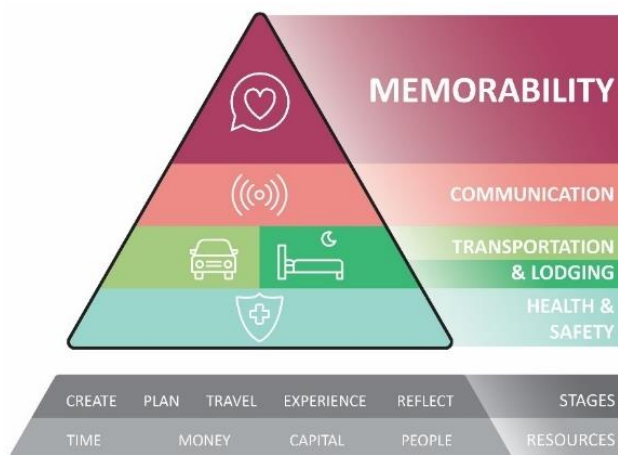


Figure 2: Minimum Critical Elements for Sustainable gastro-tourism destination development (Adapted from Williams et al., 2018, 2019)

Basic health and safety features that include clean potable water, effective waste sanitation processes, and safe food handling practices must be present or developed if international tourists are expected to enjoy a destination for its food and beverages. See Table 3 for more details.

Table 3. Tourists’ Most Important Health & Safety Considerations

MOST IMPORTANT HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

1	DRINKING WATER	
2	SAFE FOOD HANDLING	
3	CRIME & SECURITY	
4	SAFE LODGING	
5	CLEAN BATHROOMS	
6	SAFE TRANSPORTATION	
7	CLEAN LODGING	

Results of Friedman Non-Parametric Test
 1 = Most Important

Next, clean, safe, reliable and convenient transportation and lodging is required (Tables 4 and 5). Note, that gastro-tourists do not demand or even expect first class or 4 or 5 star offerings. A reliable clean bed in a safe environment and a trustworthy driver generally meets the basic criteria; anything above that is appreciated, but not mandatory.

Table 4 Tourists’ Most Important Transportation Considerations

MOST IMPORTANT TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR GASTRO TOURISTS

1	SAFE	
2	RELIABLE	
3	CLEAN	
4	FRIENDLY	
5	EASY/CONVENIENT	
6	QUICK	
7	ECONOMICAL	
8	LEISURELY	
9	AUTHENTIC COMPONENT	

Results of Friedman Non-Parametric Test
 1 = Most Important

- Transportation related
- Health & Safety related
- Memorability related
- Direct person-to-person communication

Table 5: Tourists’ Most Important Lodging Considerations

MOST IMPORTANT LODGING CONSIDERATIONS FOR GASTRO TOURISTS

1	CLEAN	
2	RELIABLE	
3	SAFE	
4	FRIENDLY STAFF	
5	COMFORTABLE BEDS	
6	ECONOMICAL	
7	EASY TO GET TO / CONVENIENT LOCATION	
8	HAS WIFI	
9	HAS POOL, HOT TUB, EXERCISE FACILITIES	

Results of Friedman Non-Parametric Test
 1 = Most Important

- Lodging related
- Transportation related
- Health & Safety related
- Direct person-to-person communication
- Indirect communication

Once a gastro-tourist determines that a destination meets their basic infrastructure requirements, which may vary by individual, the next level in the triangle – communication – becomes the critical dimension. Table 6 shows the rank-ordered list of communication factors that gastro-tourists identified as being most important to them.

Table 6. Tourists’ Most Important Communication Considerations

MOST IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION FACTORS FOR GASTRO TOURISTS

1	WIFI ON SITE	
2	MY NATIVE LANGUAGE	
3	INTERNET COMMUNICATION WHILE PLANNING	
4	CELL PHONE COVERAGE AT THE DESTINATION	
5/6	PHONE ACCESS WHILE PLANNING	
5/6	ACCURATE COMMUNICATION / NO MISCOMMUNICATIONS	
7	AUDIO TRANSLATIONS OR INTERPRETERS	
8	WRITTEN SIGNS OR HANDOUTS	
9	INTERACTIVE MOBILE APP	

Results of Friedman Non-Parametric Test
 1 = Most Important

- Direct person-to-person communication
- Indirect communication

After communication objectives have been adequately addressed, the destination must focus on fostering memorability (the tip of the model). Research indicates that it is memorability that is the real driving force to destination selection. The five attributes of memorability depicted

in figure 3 below are: foodie risk taking, co-created relationships, authenticity, sociability and emotions (Williams et al., 2019). These attributes are found in memorable experiences of both deliberate and incidental tourists, and they appear across all tourist travel stages (planning, traveling, experiencing, and reflecting).



Figure 3: Gastro-tourism Memorability Attributes (Williams et al, 2019)

The base elements of the minimum critical elements for sustainable Gastro-tourism destination development model (from Figure 2) of health, safety, transportation and lodging are to a large extent in place in some urban places in Africa. A key to attracting more gastro-tourists to Africa will increasingly depend on building-upon and refining the base elements of safety and transportation. As these fundamentals become more robust and widespread and are enhanced to best meet international standards which tourists from outside the continent expect, communicating assurances, descriptions, and memory-making gastronomic promises to attract tourists becomes key.

Model 2: Gastro-tourism stakeholder network

The Gastro-tourism stakeholder network model is a representation of an individual, operationalized version of one possible stakeholder model where primary and secondary stakeholders converge, depicting the stakeholder reality for one gastro-business (Figure 4).

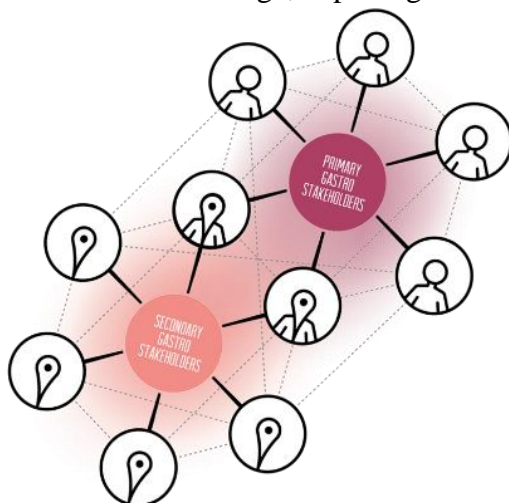


Figure 4: Gastro-tourism stakeholder network template

The circles towards the center of the visual represent how particular stakeholders in particular businesses may have both secondary and primary features based upon situational, seasonal, or event-related roles/functions. It also shows the fluidity and personalization that represents stakeholder configuration. This depiction should help researchers and gastro-practitioners better understand a primary tenet of stakeholder theory, that each business creates a personalized map of their current stakeholders to identify strengths, address gaps, and create and nurture strategic partnerships. Specifically, primary gastro-stakeholder categories identified in this study include: visitors and tourists, local customers, employee experts, customer service employees, vendors and distributors, gastro-competitors, other tourism attractions, local citizens and friends and family, plus any unique local stakeholders specific to the situation. Identified secondary gastro-stakeholder categories include: restaurants, hotels and lodging, food and beverage trade groups, professional service firms, media reviewers and critics, transportation services, banks and investors, local and regional government, special interest groups, local businesses, religious institutions, community groups, travel agencies, DMOs and convention bureaus, national and international government, plus any unique local stakeholders specific to the situation.

These generic primary and secondary stakeholder lists should be considered benchmarks for the creation of individual, working gastro-business stakeholder models, and not final lists/models in themselves. It is recommended that each business use the existing categories to seek actual the possible stakeholders that already affect their businesses or have the potential to affect or be affected by enhanced gastro-tourism initiatives. Creating personalized stakeholder models/lists require actual names of people associated with a given business or organization. Stakeholders are always people, not categories. Fully understanding what each person values and how he or she can be included in the gastro-business is critical.

Model 3: 6+ Gastro-cluster model

The study examined the number of separate activities gastro-tourists ideally want to experience during a trip with two overnights. Descriptive statistics first published in Williams et al. (2018) revealed the following: survey 1: N=113, M=5.224, SD=2.786 and survey 2: N=133, M=4.737, SD=2.209. These quantitative findings suggest that six gastro-activities is an important numerical variable to consider within sustainable gastro-tourism development. Additionally, analysis of variables surrounding the median length of time tourists traveled between activities indicated that “deliberate tourists will travel 2.5 hr. while incidental tourists indicated 1.5 as a preferred travel time...hence a 2-hr. radii seems most ideal” (Williams et al., 2018: 186). When transportation infrastructure is still being developed, as in many areas within Africa, particularly rural parts of the continent, a one-hour travel time or less between gastro-activities seems more realistic and is being proposed as more ideal within the African continent and other developing/emerging parts of the world. Where transportation infrastructure is more advanced, the travel time can be extended up to the 2-hour time frame between activities or back and forth to lodging.

The 6+ Gastro-cluster model (Figure 5) provides a visual that depicts six distinct gastro-sites represented by small, multi-colored storefronts. The 6+ sites become part of a cluster or trail where the individual businesses intentionally link together around a co-branded local gastro-image. White open space on all sides represents communication and networking potential between hosts as well as tourists who enter the cluster then move from one experience to the next within the one- or two-hour radius (Williams et al., 2018). The 6+ sites become part of a cluster or trail that links them together around a cobranded vision, mission, and set of co-branded infrastructure and memorability promises.

Strong and united branding, proper descriptions, appropriate signage and convenient wayfaring, are essential if deliberate and incidental tourists are to visit multiple sites during their sometimes extremely limited available time.



Figure 5: 6+ Gastro-Cluster
Adapted from Williams et al 2018

The multi-colored small boxes in the outer layer of the model forecast a potential multiplier effect inherent in successful 6+ clusters. The small boxes illustrate the potential unique new businesses that are likely to develop around the original six gastro-activities (Williams et al., 2018). This study affirms that expansion is likely once a cluster is purposely formed and adequately marketed. Each small square represents a unique new entrepreneurial venture with the potential for expanding the original number of activities within the primary cluster or even beginning a new additional overlapping 6+ gastro-cluster. Although networking cluster-to-cluster seems inherently critical for broader national gastro-destination distinction, the specifics for doing this require more examination and cannot be expounded upon in this paper. The findings of this study do support that if six or more gastro-activities within an hour travel time co-market their distinct experiences under a co-branded gastronomic brand-image, the greater the likelihood that tourists will notice the individual gastro-activities and deem each one worthy of a visit. The act of linking with six or more businesses creates a larger localized destination identity brand that fosters a stronger brand-image, that in turn strengthens each individual business brand within the cluster (Green & Dougherty, 2009; O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2010; Williams et al., 2018).

The three bars at the base of the model in Figure 5 represent the three entities that this research identified as the essential stakeholders for gastronomic cluster formation and destination expansion: 1) professional and civic groups, 2) community members, and 3) governments and municipalities. Without the support of these essential stakeholders, the clusters of businesses may not have the resources or community credibility to garner the needed support to attract and maintain a steady flow of out-of-the-area visitors. Successful gastro-clusters/destinations report and demonstrate active support of all three of these stakeholders.

Sometimes support is in the form of real capital or significant infrastructure improvements, and other times it is just in the form of good will or ease of navigating within local bureaucracies. Nonetheless, when other powerful groups, government entities, and significant individuals within the community or region do not see themselves as part of the gastro-cluster's mission, sustainability falters. Most recent qualitative analyses (of beverage-focused clusters) suggests that cluster formation is easier with an anchor business that fosters *communitas* (represented in Figure 5 by the center building). *Communitas* refers to a spirit of shared common experiences that foster individual memorability. Welcoming, inclusive clusters that operate within a spirit of *communitas* can strengthen and reinforce an entire destination's unique gastronomic story (Williams et al., 2021).

The 6+ Gastro-cluster process

The 6+ Gastro-Cluster Process combines the three models previously described with additional key findings of this study to propose practical steps for beginning local Gastro-destination development.

Step 1: Resource and expert identification



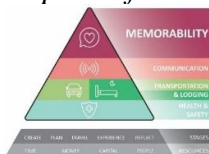
Identifying F&B resources and experts that can share local kitchen cultures is the critical first step. As the bars in the icon (from Figure 2) depict, additional resource potential in the form of time, money, and capital goods from local area stakeholders must also be identified. This Step 1 is also considered part of the create stage of the travel process.

Step 2: Initial stakeholders identified



Everyone benefits, everyone can be hurt. What one member does effects all other cluster members, all other customers (local locals and tourists) and quite conceivably all other stakeholders. Therefore, identifying everyone that affects, or is affected (positively or negatively), by a gastro-tourism initiative needs to be identified. Involving them all, and understanding what they value, is critical to the success of the entire cluster formation process.

Step 3: Infrastructure and memorability assessments conducted



Proper assessments of infrastructure (health & safety, transportation, lodging, and communication) must be conducted using the minimal criteria presented in the previous tables 3-6. Once minimal infrastructure elements are validated, unique memorability attributes (foodie risk taking, co-creating relationships, authenticity, sociability and emotions) that can be fostered by local destination and the individual businesses should be explored and reinforced.

Step 4: Identify and strengthen stakeholder network



Each business creates a personalized map of their current stakeholders to identify strengths, address gaps, and create and nurture strategic partnerships. The individual business’ stakeholder maps are then compared and combined to create a comprehensive yet dynamic 6+ Cluster stakeholder network.

Step 5: Economic and quality of life indicators established & baselines determined

Table 7 was created based on the findings of this study and secondary research regarding multiplier effects and economic benefits inherent in new or expanded tourism initiatives. It is recommended as a tool for local destination development planners interested in measuring minimum indicators that have been used to track employment effects of a new initiative on a local community. The last item in the table is a prompt for developers and funding agents to identify and track other indicators that demonstrate positive economic and financial growth for citizens within the area affected by the new or expanded gastro-initiative.

Table 7 Local economic indicators – Template

JOB TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT	Year Before the Initiative (BASELINE)	Year 2	Year 4	Year 6	Year 10
Number of new jobs					
Days of job training: Days till employed					
Minimum Local Wage					
Average Local Wage					
% employed at living wage					
% females employed at living wage					
Other Local Indicator(s) TBD					

Table 8 below was generated using secondary research combined with the infrastructure findings of this study.

It is presented as a template to be used in measuring the most basic quality of living standards before and after gastro-tourism initiatives are implemented in developing areas. The last item in the table serves as a reminder for local communities, applied researcher, and economic development funding agencies to identify and track other indicators that demonstrate positive economic and financial growth or other impact factors that improve life quality for citizens within each unique local community.

Table 8 Measuring basic health & safety standards - Template

WATER & SANITATION	Year Before the Initiative (BASELINE)	Year 2	Year 4	Year 6	Year 10
% of local households with year-round access to clean water					
% of local households with year-round access to clean sanitation facilities					
# of official water supply services provided by the local community					
% of local children < 36 months treated for diarrhea					
Additional Local Indicator(s) TBD					

Step 6: Coaching and/or training around the benefits of cooperation vs. competition between cluster members

What needs to be communicated in the form of written or verbal material before primary stakeholders understand the benefits inherent in cooperating with current or former competitors is critical. This ideally should include experts from within the cluster as trainers, co-trainers and mentors. If this step is omitted or not handled in a spirit of *communitas*, the gastro-cluster may never become operationalized. Understanding that working with seemingly former competitors may seem risky but is essential to build a larger network of gastro-activities, will make it easier for tourists to find any and ideally all of the 6 businesses, both on-line and on-the-ground.

Step 7: Formal cluster formations (co-creation)



Gastro-cluster formation begins with three major activities:

1. Vision and Mission of the cluster is established
2. Soft and hard skills-based training/coaching/mentoring needs (individual or group) must be identified. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - Health and Safety guidelines
 - Safe water and food handling practices
 - Waste-disposal, sanitation/cleaning
 - Recycling and eco-friendly practices
 - Food-waste management

- Business management topics: accounting, cost control, finance, human resources, etc.
 - Rule of law, corruption, and other legal issues faced by small business owners
 - Grant/proposal writing
 - Languages
 - What tourists seek
 - Why gastro-tourists are important to the business, the cluster, the destination
 - What makes an experience memorable?
 - How tourists define authenticity, sociability, co-creating & what they expect
 - Custom needs of each cluster or each entrepreneur
3. Co-branding, co-marketing, and co-advertising that includes the minimum information around infrastructure and memorability to be included in the promises communicated and eventually delivered to customers.

Implications & conclusions

All geographic destinations in Africa have unique food & beverage cultures to share. This paper is the first to provide a step-by-step process that can be used to establish co-branded 6+ Gastro-clusters/networks by grassroots stakeholders interested in sharing their local/regional food & beverage customs with international and domestic travelers. The findings presented in this paper provide theoretical and operational insights into the prevalent shift from commodity-type product/service dominant tourism, to a unique and differentiated competitive advantage of co-created experiential tourism which is impossible for other destinations to replicate. The key to establishing sustainable gastro-destination development in Africa is to remember that local food is the paramount consideration, infrastructure matters, and real-time genuine interactive communication with tourists across all stages of travel (planning, traveling, experiencing, and reflecting) is critical.

The 6+ Gastro-cluster process presented in this paper lays out a roadmap for gastro-tourism success. The African Continent, its collective sub-regions and individual countries, and smaller areas within each country possess unique, diverse, and dynamic possibilities for establishing gastro-clusters that would attract gastro-tourists who in-turn will stimulate sustainable gastro-destination creation/expansion. Forming clusters within small communities and then loosely linking the networks regionally, nationally, and intercontinentally will bring a pivoted focus on African cuisines as the newest exciting gastronomic destinations to explore. Highlighting the food, not the location, is the powerful driver for attracting Gastro-tourists with their discretionary money and genuine eWOM social media marketing. The African Continent is poised for this more systematic and more sustainable gastro-tourism focus.

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